

Food and Family - Commentary

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Both food and family are intrinsic elements of our daily lives – we grow up and learn values and morals from our family, and we share those values with family through food. It can include religious meals such as the Jewish Seder – a meal that celebrates or remembers a religious moment in history. It can include a particular diet - a Buddhist may have a vegetarian diet or a Muslim may eat only halal meat. In these ways, we particularize our religious values that begin in childhood and live them on a daily basis, often sharing them with family members.

From childhood, we are given food by our parents, yet we do not realize the meaning behind the food. In many instances, breakfast, lunch and dinner are considered necessary meals to maintain a healthy body. But food can also aid in a healthy mind or soul: when one becomes old enough to realize what they are eating and why they are eating it, it becomes important to understand the rules behind the food one eats (and doesn't eat). Many Muslims don't eat pork or drink alcohol. Many Hindus don't eat beef. Many Jains and Buddhists are vegetarian. These food regulations are taught to children by their families and then they are expected to continue the food practices as adults, for religious reasons.

Whether it's the Qur'an that outlines halal rules, the Torah that explains kosher food, the law of karma that explains vegetarianism, it is in one's daily life of eating and sharing food with family that allows religious people to maintain the dietary regulations of their faith. In this way, food is extremely important in religion and in family.

Mothers and fathers pass on religious traditions to children through rules, and these also include food regulations. Religion is not just found in religious institutions (such as the Sikh langar or the Christian Eucharist), but on the kitchen table. Food allows people to practice their faith daily, whether it's to spiritually cleanse oneself, to avoid foods that affect our spiritual life, and to eat those foods prescribed by God – and family.