

RATRI BHOJAN: EATING AFTER SUNSET - What Other Religions Say

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While other faiths may seem to lack the precision and exactitude that Jainism has, but they too accept that eating after sunset causes harm to innumerable living beings. They too call eating after sunset a great sin. Not only that, they consider eating after sunset to be the fastest and most certain highway to hell. They opine that saying the rosary, penance and going on a pilgrimage are all good deeds by themselves, but pointless for a person who eats after sunset.

Perhaps some modern religious gurus do not reveal the truths of the scriptures to their disciples. Or maybe they choose to keep their disciples in the dark. But that does not change the fact that eating after sunset results in great inflow of sins. Eating after dark is certainly not correct.

Philosophies that have faith in the existence of god, as well as the yoga philosophy consider eating after sunset to be sinful and encourage their acolytes to give up eating after sunset. They state that giving up eating after sunset for one month shall result in the inflow of merits (punya) equivalent to complete fasting for 15 days. They further state that eating after sunset even once, generates sins which cannot be wiped out even by hundreds of Candrayana tapas.

चत्वारो नरकद्वारा प्रथमं रात्रिभोजनम्
परस्त्रीगमनं चैव सन्धानानन्तकायिके
~ पद्म पुराण (प्रभास खण्ड)

catvāro narakadvārā prathamam rātribhojanam
parastrīgamanaṃ caiva sandhānānantakāyike
~ Padma Purāṇa (prabhāsa khaṇḍa)

There are four doors that lead to hell:

1. Ratri bhojana - eating after sunset
2. Para stri gamana - committing adultery
3. Sandhana - eating pickles
4. Ananta kaya - eating tuber (root) vegetables which are ananta kaya (onions, potatoes, garlic, beetroot, carrot, radish, etc.)

Hence, he who continues to indulge in the four activities mentioned above has a high probability of taking birth in hell, where sorrow is unending. The shortest period of time one could possibly spend in hell is 10000 years and the longest period one could spend in hell is 33 Sagaropama {a length of time too vast to be counted}. Each moment one spends in hell is imbued with extreme grief and indescribable agony.

Citations from Hindu scriptures:

मद्यमांसाशनं रात्रौभोजनं कन्दभक्षणम्
ये कुर्वन्ति वृथास्तेषां तीर्थयात्रा जपस्तपः
~ महाभारत (भरत ऋषि)

madyamāṃsāśanaṃ rātraubhojanaṃ kandabhakṣaṇam
ye kurvanti vṛthāsteṣāṃ tīrthayātrā japastapaḥ
~ Mahābhārata (Bharata ṛṣi)

The pilgrimage, rosary and penance of those who consume alcohol, eat meat, eat after sunset and eat tubers, are fruitless.

Reflection:

Like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata too preaches against the consumption of alcohol, non-vegetarian food, eating after sunset and eating tubers.

अस्तङ्गते दिवानाथे आपो रुधिरमुच्यते
अन्नं मांससमं प्रोक्तं मार्कण्डेयमहर्षिणा
~ मार्कण्डेय पुराण

astaṅgate divānāthe āpo rudhiramucyate
annaṃ māṃsasamaṃ proktaṃ mārkāṇḍeyamaharṣiṇā
~ Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa

The great sage Markandeya states that drinking water after sunset is like drinking blood. And eating food after sunset is like eating meat.

मृते स्वजनमात्रेऽपि सूतङ्क जायते किल
अस्तङ्गते दिवानाथे भोजनं किं क्रियते

mṛte svajanamātre'pi sūtaṅka jāyate kila

astaṅgate divānāthe bhojanam kiṃ kriyate

There is a sutaka (specified period of impurity caused by the event) if a family member dies. Why do people eat after the sun has set (died)?

Reflection:

When there is a death in the family, no one in the family eats till the dead body has been cremated. How then, can one eat when the sun god has died? Hence, one should not eat after sunset.

मद्यमांसाशनं रात्रौभोजनं कन्दभक्षणम्
भक्षणात् नरकं याति वर्जनात् स्वर्गमाप्नुयात्

madyamāṃsāśanam rātraubhojanam kandabhakṣaṇam
bhakṣaṇāt narakaṃ yāti varjanāt svargamāṃpyunāt

One, who indulges in the consumption of alcohol and meat, eats after sunset, and eats tubers shall be reborn in hell. He who gives up alcohol, meat, eating after sunset and eating tubers shall be reborn in heaven.

ये रात्रौ सर्वदाऽऽहारं वर्जयन्ति सुमेधसः
तेषां पक्षोपवासस्य फलं मासेन जायते

ye rātrau sarvadāḥāraṃ varjayanti sumedhasaḥ
teṣāṃ pakṣopavāsasya phalaṃ māseṇa jāyate

The wise one, who does not consume any kind of food or water after sunset for a month, achieves the merits of fasting for 15 days.

Reflection:

Like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Markandeya Purana enjoins its readers to give up alcohol, meat, eating after sunset and eating tubers. Further, it says that not eating after sunset and not eating tubers, etc. results in the inflow of merits equivalent to 15 days of complete fasting. In fact, it can result in rebirth in heaven.

नोदकमपि पातव्यं रात्रावत्र युधिष्ठिर
तपस्विना विशेषेण गृहिणा च विवेकिना

~ मार्कण्डेय पुराण, श्लोक ३.२२

nodakamapi pātavyaṃ rātrāvatra yudhiṣṭhira
tapasvinā viśeṣeṇa grhiṇā ca vivekinā
~ Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, verse 3.22

O Yudhishtira, renunciants must especially not consume even water after sunset. Also, laypersons with discriminative knowledge should not even drink water after sunset.

Reflection:

After renouncing eating after sunset, everyone, especially renunciants must give up even drinking water after sunset.

त्वया सवमिदं व्याहतं ध्येयोऽसि जगतां रवे
त्वयि चास्तमिते देव! आपो रुधिरमुच्यते
~ स्कन्द पुराण, कपोल स्तोत्र श्लोक २४

tvayā savamidaṃ vyāhataṃ dhyeyo'si jagatāṃ rave
tvayi cāstamite deva! āpo rudhiramucyate
~ Skanda Purāṇa, Kapola Stotra, verse 24

Lord Surya, the entire world is touched by you. In this world, only the Sun is worthy of being meditated upon. Hence, drinking water after you have set is like drinking blood!

Reflection:

After renouncing eating after sunset, everyone should renounce drinking water after sunset. It is imperative if one wishes to save oneself from sin.

नक्तं न भोजयेद्यस्तु चातुर्मास्ये विशेषतः
सर्वकामानवाप्नोति इहलोके परत्र च
~ योगवाशिष्ठ, श्लोक १.१०८

naktaṃ na bhojayedyaṣtu cāturmāsye viśeṣataḥ
sarvakāmānavāpnoti ihaloke paratra ca
~ Yogavāśiṣṭha, verse 1.108

All the worldly and spiritual desires of those who do not eat after sunset, especially during the four month long rainy season, are fulfilled.

एकभक्तशान्नित्यमग्निहौत्रफलं लभेत्
अनस्तभोजनो नित्यं तीर्थयात्रफलं भवेत्
~ स्कन्द पुराण, श्लोक ७.११.२३५

ekabhaktaśanānityamagnihautraphalaṃ labhet
anastabhojano nityaṃ tīrthayātraphalaṃ bhavet
~ Skanda Purāṇa, verse 7.11.235

Those who only eat once a day on a regular basis, earn the merits of carrying out a havana.
And those who regularly eat before sunset earn the merits of going on a pilgrimage.

चातुर्मास्ये तु सम्प्राप्ते रात्रिभोज्यं करोति यः
तस्य शुद्धिनं विद्येत चान्द्रायणशतैरपि
~ भरत ऋषि, वैदिक दर्शन

cāturmāsye tu samprāpte rātribhojyaṃ karoti yaḥ
tasya śuddhinaṃ vidyeta cāndrāyaṇaśatairapi
~ Bharata ṛṣi, Vaidika Darśana

He, who eats after sunset even during the four month rainy season, commits so many sins that they cannot be purified even after carrying out hundreds of candrayana tapa.

Reflection:

All the scriptures that we have cited are unequivocal in prohibiting the consumption of alcohol, meat, eating after sunset and eating tubers. And state that one who follows these teachings has all his desires fulfilled. Also, one who follows these teachings is earning merit equivalent to going on a pilgrimage.

The consumption of alcohol, meat, eating after dark and eating tubers leads to the killing of many living beings. As a consequence, one who commits these sins suffers the agonies of hell for a very long time. Hence, the seeker is advised to give up alcohol, meat, eating after dark and eating tubers.

Now let us understand the fruits of nonviolence:

यो दद्यात् काञ्चनं मेरुं कृत्स्नां चैव वसुन्धराम्
एकस्य जीवितं दद्यात् न च तुल्यं युधिष्ठिर

~ महाभारत

yo dadyāt kāñcanam merum kṛtsnām caiva vasundharām
ekasya jīvitam dadyāt na ca tulyam yudhiṣṭhira
~ Mahābhārata

O Yudhishtira, if one person donates an entire Mount Meru made of gold, or donates the entire earth. And the other person spares one life. Both acts of donation cannot be compared, so far ahead is the one who has spared another person's life.

Reflection:

The gift of life is far greater than the gift of any material wealth, however fantastic it may be.

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न भू प्रदानं न स्वर्ण दानं न गो प्रदानं न तथान्न दानम्
यथा वदान्तीह महा प्रदानं सर्वेषु दानेषु अभय प्रदानम्

na bhū pradānam na svarṇa dānam na go pradānam na tathānna dānam
yathā vadāntīha mahā pradānam sarveṣu dāneṣu abhaya pradānam

The gift of life is said to be the greatest gift of all. It is greater than the gift of land, the gift of gold, the gift of a cow, and the gift of grains.

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दीर्घमायुः परं रूपमारोग्यं श्लाघनीयता
अहिंसायाः फलं सर्वं किमन्यत् कामदैव सा
~ योगशास्त्र

dīrghamāyuh param rūpamārogyam ślāghanīyatā
ahimsāyāḥ phalam sarvam kimanyat kāmadaiva sā
~ Yogaśāstra

Long life, great looks, excellent healths, praiseworthiness, are all consequences of non violent conduct. What more can be said? Ahimsa is as bounteous as Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow.

Reflection:

The vow of ahimsa can only be observed by one who has renounced the consumption of alcohol and meat, does not eat after sunset and does not eat tubers. Ahimsa is the highest

principle and the gift of life is the greatest gift of all. It is as bounteous and beneficial as Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow.

In the Buddhist text Majjhima Nikaya, the Kitagiri Sutra states that:

Once upon a time, the Buddha was staying in Varanasi, along with a huge sangha. He called his monks and said that, "O bhikkhus, I do not eat after sunset. By doing so, I enjoy good health and possess enthusiasm and strength. My travel on foot is pleasant. So, my bhikkhus, you too give up eating after sunset. Upon giving up eating after sunset, you too will enjoy the benefits of nonviolent conduct.

Reflection:

The Buddha too prescribed not eating after sunset.

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