

## Animals Are Friends, Not Food

There is an old Cree teaching: the people do not hunt the moose casually. The moose gives itself to the people only in times of real need. This story is more than legend - it is instruction. It tells us that animals are not ours to take at will. They are kin. When they give their lives, it is a gift. And gifts demand gratitude, humility, and restraint.

Human history once understood this. For centuries, meat was not a daily entitlement. After people settled into agrarian life, animals were companions in survival: they gave milk, eggs, and labor. Their lives were spared except in the deepest winters, or for rare celebrations when community demanded a feast. Meat was scarce, and therefore sacred. Eating it meant honoring the weight of the sacrifice.

But we drifted. As wealth grew, meat changed. It became a marker of status, a commodity, a way to display power. No longer rare, it became routine. Yet dissent has always been with us. Even at the height of Europe's Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci declared that he would not make his body "a tomb for the corpses of animals." His refusal was more than eccentricity; it was a moral stand. He saw what others ignored: that life taken lightly is a life disrespected.

Other traditions carried this truth as well. Buddhism placed compassion at the center of human conduct - not just for people, but for all sentient beings. To eat an animal is to extend suffering, to bind oneself deeper to harm. To refrain is to practice *ahimsa*, nonviolence in action. This teaching resonates with the Cree story: life must never be taken thoughtlessly.

The modern world has largely abandoned this wisdom. During the Great Depression and the Second World War, people once again treated meat as precious, rationed, never wasted. But after war ended, hunger was replaced by abundance, and restraint gave way to indulgence. Meat consumption surged. Cuisines grew heavy, economies industrialized, and animals lost the last shred of dignity. They no longer "gave themselves." They were manufactured, multiplied, and slaughtered on a scale beyond imagination.

The covenant was broken. Respect dissolved. The bond between humans and animals collapsed into exploitation.

This is why I am vegetarian. It is not about fad or fashion. It is about ethics. It is about listening to the voices that remind us - the Cree elder, the Renaissance artist, the Buddhist monk - that animals are not commodities but companions. If I do not need to take a life, then I refuse to. My body will not be a tomb.

Animals are friends, not food. To live by that truth is to restore respect where it has been lost. It is to honor the wisdom of those who came before. It is to reject an industry built on

suffering. And it is to stand for a future where the moose still walks freely, where its gift is rare and sacred, not routine and abused.