



Food Cultures to Improve

Divrak DD*

Medical Doctor, Acupuncturist, Nutritionist, Italy.

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***Corresponding Author:** Divrak DD, Medical Doctor, Acupuncturist, Nutritionist, Italy. Email: doradragonidivrak@virgilio.it

I am writing this article inspired by three books i read:

1. Food and health, by Vandana Shiva et al
2. Diet myth, by Tim Spector
3. Zen and eating well art, by Seigaku

All these books express food culture, that is basis to eat better, live better and perceive better eating habits, eating philosophy, relationship with food and the link between food and environment, between food and us or our wellbeing.

“Food and health”

Vandana Shiva is an Indian activist for health, environment, human rights. She is a physic but her engagement goes over her specifically studies since she fights for a better World.

In this book she focuses on the links among human health and food health: nowadays there are lots of diseases since we actually don't eat well at all. We don't only eat in the right way from a nutritional point of view, but food is refined more and more, worked in not natural ways, and treated with chemicals. We should on the contrary respect Earth and soils, and use resources in the better ways, pursuing biodiversity.

In her opinion and in mine too, we should pass to an agro ecological model of living food and earth, being this based on a global mature vision of health and life. We should live thinking that every human being on the Earth could be happy, since respected in functions and features.

In fact even ayurveda means “knowledge of life”, so from this word describing and including a whole health system, we get that even agriculture is part of such ideal and practical philosophical vision. The countryman follows the “coming back law”: we get what we give.

This is part of indian culture but should be respected also by all modern occidental agriculture and food cultures. In this consideration food is basis for life since life comes from food: food is creator of life. And good food has therapeutical properties.

On the contrary if we don't follow these ideas we go of course in opposite direction: industrialization and globalization are at the origins of negativities. Not respecting localities is spring of worsen qualities of seeds and food. Mono seed cultures are in this sense to avoid.

Chemicals created deserts, by reducing not only “negative” natural productions but also more cultures. This

newest but not really modern directions lead also to climate change: 50% of gas serra is produced by industrial agriculture. Even eating negative habits are related to such systems: there is a boom of diseases due to negative lifestyle, as obesity and diabetes, cancer, sterility, ibd and gastro enterical problems... This reflects also my previous ideas: it is a paradox that so many and more and more people need dietetic centers to loose weight while parallely children and lots of persons live in malnutrition. We should put a target of 2000 kCal for everyone, and eating too much is a waste of food being there people in need. Vandana focuses on the fact that eating less is also key to better heath. In this way we see that food culture is the culture going from the production of a food until the whole eating habits, it is a correct lifestyle we should follow, even from an agricultural point of view.

In the main chapter Shiva repeats that only biological food can be linked to health, since venoms and chemicals lead to diseases. Only a bio ecological system can be followed and pursued, and this as I told means a global approach to food we all should know and follow. If soil is in health we human and animal species too can be healthy since food will be at its best. Soil is life, humus has same word radix as human. Biological soils have the better rate of quantity and quality production at the same time. In fact studies demonstrated that 60% of better nutrients are in food got from bio ecological systems.

Even Franco Berrino, an italian food expert, wrote in this book some great ideas about the relationships between food and health, confirming what Shiva is telling.

“Diet myth”

Tim Spector is a british epidemiologist studying the differences amongst twins due to lifestyle. In this book he underlines the importance not only of the diet, but of lifestyle if we want to live better, longer and in good quality.

He bases his ideas on lots of studies done retrospectively or even prospectively observing how a certain life behavior can be impacting on life expectancy for

example, or on life quality: being related to the presence or of the lack of common diseases.

He also bases his considerations on personal private experiences.

It is true that every diet element has been negatively judged during the last thirty years, but it is also true.

What he can summarize is that sport is even more important than a good diet. If we even overcome the 25 of BMI but we are physically active, we could live longer than a person of correct BMI 18-25 but inactive. Sedentariety is the worst habit and so it is to avoid.

It is also important to be empowered and aware about food cultures. It is important to socially reduce overweight: in 20-30 years obesity passed from 7% to 24% percentage in the UK. Also microbiome is important: when we are in health it is able to establish better body conditions preventing lots of inflammatory diseases.

One of the problems to elaborate is food flavour: there are people happy with basic flavours and genetically mutated people in need of super flavour to be satisfied.

We can conclude this dissertation by saying that a diet good in quality and quantity is fundamental but that only the association with physical exercise can save us helping reaching a longer better life.

“Zen and eating-well art”

This book is quite impressive since it is the summa of the suggestions given by a zen monk from his experience to useful ideas good to apply every day.

Like for Vandana Shiva ayurveda and the bio ecological model was for India (and for every one of us), zen is for oriental world a way of living, thinking, approaching to each others and to food.

Zen related to food can be poetical: people before starting eating thank to get that (food) gift, thanking in this way the countryman the fisherman but also sun, earth, water and so on. It is a way of respect. Seigaku travelled a lot as monk transmitting his cultures to younger monks and to

people. He is sure that following food rituals we can live better.

Even correct gestures and poses can be the good way to eat and live. He says that he feels purified after every correct approach to food.

In the monastery where he lives meals are eaten all together in the same big room where all can relax. The monks sit at the end of the tatami where they sleep and do the zazen meditation. They have spherical plates, like bowls, bigger and smaller easy to keep in order, they have wooden spoons and sticks, and towels. They eat in sit position.

They get the good quantity of white rice and salsas or broth, each in every plate and say the thanking sutra. They don't look at the neighbor plates but eat focusing on their own foods. They eat in silence. They respect others rhythm.

When the meal is finished they wash the rice plate with water and drink it, doing this until the plate is clean.

Like in mediterranean culture, the social element is an happy time we spend together eating good food.

In this descriptions the monk refers also to the elegance of the gestures and to the sit right position. They use only the first three fingers to eat with the sticks.

Being in silence is another feature to follow: it is a way of respect.

Then there is a chapter where Seigaku describes the preparation of food. Even in this phase respect is important, and order too is key element. A kitchen should always be tidy since we work in a better way only if order is real.

He also says that we should follow the three minds (to prepare food): 1. the happy mind, when we are happy and satisfied of what we do 2. The parents mind, when we should before prioritize others to us like parents with their children 3. Magnanimous mind, we should be caring and loving as well.

Even out of monastery we should not waste the rest of foods: we could wash

the plate and drink the foods, or use that for plants as fertilizers.

Another tip he gives is to put in high position what is stable and in inferior shelters what is instable and in risk.

Even the trash is written with two ideograms: respect and beauty.

Dry dishes in the proper way is also important.

Being always in harmony with others and environment is an habit to pursue.

He concludes by saying that food is basis for our lifestyle.

Conclusion

I can say that we learnt a lot from these authors: we should know more about food features, about how we live food in our daily routine, we could try eating better in quality. We can be more respect us toward ourselves, toward others particularly when we eat, and toward the environment by wasting less and preferring bio ecological habits and products.

I can say that perceiving food as a reward is my personal suggestion: if we understand that a food is something special that we get from nature and it brings energy to us we will for sure eat less and better. It is a reward that we should regulate: with every reward we dose the quantity and wisely choose the kind and the quality. But it is a reward also being food and nutrition part of our reward system: the brain body-mind paths of the needs and the human rights. In this sense we should all be more aware and empowered about food: learning for example other countries and cultures ideas about nutrition and nutrients.

We could in this way for sure be more expert and by diffusing cultures help living in a better World.

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