

# How Fasting and Vegetarianism is Perceived to Support Psi among Adepts<sup>1</sup>

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*ABSTRACT:* Many spiritual traditions include accounts of miraculous events and supernormal powers ('psi', Parapsychological Association, 2015) and are associated with fasting and vegetarianism. Some authors have related these practices to spirituality and psi. However, there has so far been little empirical research into this potential relationship. We present a thematic analysis of interviews with seven 'adepts' (those who practise psi in a professional capacity and who self-report regular and controllable manifestations of psi) to examine their understanding of how fasting and vegetarianism are perceived to affect sensitivity to psi. Results demonstrate that participants regard fasting as facilitating psi through purification and effects on the digestive system; and vegetarianism as facilitating psi through enhanced mental clarity, health benefits, and purported subtle energies within food that either hinder or support psi. If supported by subsequent empirical research, findings may lead to improved performance in psi tasks; guidance for the health of adepts and others; and insights into proposed theories of psi.

*Keywords:* spirituality, psi, fasting, vegetarian, vegan, diet

Fasting can be defined as intentional time-limited abstention from all or some food. A vegetarian diet involves abstaining from eating meat, fish, and poultry. Vegetarianism can involve differing extents of abstention from eggs and dairy, and includes veganism, which is strict abstention from all animal

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based in part on an earlier academic conference presentation (Daw et al., 2021).

products.<sup>2</sup> Such dietary practices are common within religious traditions and those seeking spiritual development, and are sometimes associated with the manifestation of so-called supernormal powers, abilities that appear to be beyond what are usually thought of as natural or scientific laws (Broad, 1949) and which are known collectively as psi (Irwin & Watt, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The term psi is neutral with regard to the ultimate ontology of reported experiences and, in order to avoid repetition of words such as ‘claimed’ and ‘apparent’ in relation to psi, such terms are implied throughout this text.

The use of fasting and vegetarianism is widespread in Shamanism, perhaps humankind’s earliest and most sustained spiritual tradition. Fasting in particular appears almost ubiquitous (Winkelman, 1990) and is used both during a shaman’s initiation and in the application of shamanic powers. For example, Walsh (1994, p. 10) describes a ‘vision quest’ in which the would-be shaman spends time “in solitude and fasting devoted to receiving a guiding vision for one’s life”. Trance states induced by fasting, and sometimes supported through avoiding meat, are used to cultivate psi abilities (Hugh-Jones, 1996), including those described by Wright (2013) who reports that Amazonian shamans contact spirits through trance to heal illness, control the weather, and even kill enemies at a distance when the tribe is under attack.

Fasting and vegetarianism are also commonplace within Indian religious traditions (Carrithers, 1989; Davidson, 2003). For example, in Pearson’s (1992) in-depth study of fasting by women in India, she notes that the practice is suggested by some to lead to psi and describes how one participant reported instances of precognition resulting from fasting (p. 432). As to vegetarianism, Lamb (2011) describes one Hindu ascetic order that eschews meat to underpin its quest for spiritual liberation and the attainment of supernormal powers, which are known in the yogic tradition as *siddhis* and which some have suggested are almost indistinguishable from psi (Radin, 2013), although it is the case that certain traditions view such powers as a distraction from the goal of spiritual liberation (Singh, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> This is in keeping with the definition of vegetarian found in many formal sources, for example the online Merriam-Webster dictionary, which defines a vegetarian as “someone whose diet consists wholly of vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, and sometimes eggs or dairy products” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) .

<sup>3</sup> Irwin and Watt (2014) suggest that psi is defined as two ostensible extra-normal groups of phenomena: extrasensory perception (including telepathy and precognition), and psychokinesis (direct mental influence on matter). However, they also note phenomena often studied alongside psi including those related to communication with discarnate entities, survival after death, and out-of-body experiences. For reasons of brevity, our use of the term psi in this paper is employed inclusively as shorthand to encompass any of these phenomena.

Arbesmann (1949) relates that fasting and vegetarianism were important elements in the display of prophecy and other supernormal powers in the ancient Greek religion. For example, the Greek mystic Apollonius of Tyana (15-100 CE) was adept at psi, demonstrating powers of levitation, prescience, and healing (Elsner, 1997), which were in part due to his diet consisting solely of bread, dried fruits, and vegetables, the ‘lightness’ of which Apollonius suggests, “keeps his senses in a kind of indescribable celestial clearness ... [allowing him to discern] everything that is going on, and will happen in the future” (Arbesmann, 1949, pp. 26-27).

Fasting is also associated with each of the foundational figures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Moses and Jesus each fasted for forty days and forty nights to reveal spiritual truths (King James Bible, 1769, Ex. 34:28-29; Luke 4, Matt. 4), and the Prophet Muhammad fasted on Mondays and Thursdays as part of his devotional practice (At-Tirmidhi, 2007, pp. 184-185). Fasting continues to be practised in each of these religions. In Islam it constitutes one of the five central pillars; in Judaism fasting is an integral part of the Day of Atonement, considered by some the holiest date in the Jewish calendar (Grimm, 2002); and in Christianity fasting is practised at various times, such as during the season of Lent. Whilst vegetarianism is practised and espoused by some belonging to these religions, an omnivorous diet may be more usual. A more extended discussion of this point is not possible due to space constraints.

The beneficial effects of fasting and vegetarianism to spirituality and psi have continued to be expounded by more recent authors. For example, Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), co-founder of the Theosophical Society, which was established in the 19th century to provide a philosophical context for the burgeoning spiritualist movement, maintained that those eating meat stand to assimilate negative animal characteristics, which should therefore be avoided by “really earnest students [of the occult] ... [because it will impair] their intuition, their inner faculties and powers” (Blavatsky, 1889, p. 155).

The psi researcher and author Hereward Carrington (1880-1958) proposed a comprehensive theory of optimal nutrition based on fasting and vegetarianism (Carrington, 1908, 1912). He extolled the purifying benefits of fasting and suggested that the less that is eaten (within limits), the more energy there is available to body, mind, and spirit (Carrington, 1908, p. 114). He maintained that fasting helps develop psi (Carrington, 1920, pp. 13-14), as does avoiding meat, “since this is acknowledged by all to retard psychic development” (p. 66) and instead one should focus on fruit, “particularly acid fruits ... These precautions are only for those who are serious in their study, and who are determined to obtain the best possible phenomena” (p. 2).

The Bulgarian mystic Omraam Mikhael Aivanhov (1900-1986) began his spiritual journey with a number of early-life experiences of psi, including telepathy with friends, accurately foretelling future events, and extended periods of meditation and out-of-body experiences (OBEs) during which he

claimed to have unlocked many of the mysteries of the universe (Frenette, 2009). He posited a close relationship between spiritual development and psi, and fasting and vegetarianism (Aivanhov, 1982, 2005). He maintained that these practices work on both physical and spiritual levels: fasting through purification, and vegetarianism because plants contain fewer of the impurities and toxic substances found in meat, including purported subtle vibrations emanating from fear felt by the animal during its lifetime and when slaughtered.

Among other authors who have suggested similar relationships between diet, and spirituality and psi are Rudolf Steiner, Edgar Cayce, Gabriel Cousens, and 'New Age' author Doreen Virtue (Cousens, 2009; Edgar Cayce Foundation, 1971; McGarey, 1968; Steiner, 1905; Virtue & Black, 2013).

There has so far been limited empirical research into the purported relationship between these practices and psi. One exception is Amlani's (1995) doctoral research examining the perceived psychospiritual effects of transitioning progressively from meat-eating to vegetarian to vegan to a raw food diet. His participants noted significant improvements from their diet in physical and mental health, psi experiences, an enhanced capacity for spirituality, as well as transformative experiences through fasting.

Given this omission, we conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews with a purposive sample of experienced practitioners of psi who incorporate fasting and vegetarianism into their praxis. Our motivation is to further an understanding of how diet might influence the manifestation of spirituality and psi, and thereby present an insiders' account of their lived experiences (Conrad, 1988), as well as to provide a basis for further empirical work.

## **Research Questions**

Our study considers the following research questions:

1. Do participants perceive a role for fasting and vegetarianism in the occurrence of psi?
2. If so, how do fasting and vegetarianism reflect such a putative association with the practice of psi?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Our study involves a purposive sample of seven participants (see Table 1) who claim proficiency (i.e., are adept) with psi and practise either fasting and/or vegetarianism in support of their abilities. Their apparent psi abilities include mediumship (communication with deceased discarnate entities), channelling (communication with discarnate entities who have never lived), OBEs, psychokinesis, telepathy, and medical intuition (diagnosis of medical conditions without physical examination).

While surveys consistently indicate that psi experiences are relatively common (Castro et al., 2014), and researchers who work with psi experiences report that such effects can be demonstrated in experiments with unselected participant groups (Cardeña, 2018), working with adepts provides an opportunity to uncover insights into underlying mechanisms associated with diet that would be much more difficult to reveal with more general populations whose manifestation of psi might typically be less pronounced and/or more spontaneous in nature. In this respect, this study is similar to qualitative research conducted by Heath (2000) involving those who are adept at manifesting psychokinesis in order to uncover the ‘essential features’ or ‘themes’ underpinning this form of psi (p. 53). However, it is important to note that, just as with Heath’s research and work by Roxburgh and Roe (2013a, 2013b, 2014) with Spiritualist mediums, this study is not concerned with the validity of participants’ claimed abilities but rather with their subjective insights into how dietary practices may support their own subjective experiences of psi manifestation.

Four participants were known to the authors through previous research activities and another three were introduced to us by Dr Helané Wahbeh, Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences. Qualification for inclusion in the study was that each participant should be an established psi practitioner with some level of public profile as having expertise in relation to these abilities as well as having publicly asserted that they practise fasting and/or vegetarianism in support of this work.

Three participants live and practise mostly in the UK, three in the US, and one in Israel. Three participants are female and four male; all are white; other demographics are unknown. Whilst, somewhat unusually, this study waives anonymity for participants due to their pre-existing public profile (with their permission, see section on ethical considerations), their names have been altered for the purposes of this publication.

## **Procedure**

The study was designed to help elucidate practitioners’ explanations and meanings regarding the perceived relationship between dietary practices and psi. A qualitative, non-experimental approach can provide good ecological validity (Heath, 2011) to address the research questions and help to establish an empirical basis and more robust findings for any subsequent quantitative research.

We used semi-structured interviews, which employ a predetermined question guide or framework rather than a fixed sequence of pre-specified questions, and provide scope for deviation depending on the course of interaction between researcher and participant (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 78). As the topic of this study is almost entirely novel, it is worth noting Adams’s (2015) contention that semi-structured interviews are particularly valuable if one is “examining uncharted territory with unknown but potential momentous issues and ... need maximum latitude to spot useful leads and pursue them” (p. 494).

The interviews were conducted by the first author using videoconferencing technology (Zoom and WhatsApp). The use of such technology was a necessity because the interviews took place during a time of international restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact related to the coronavirus pandemic. However, this means of conducting the interviews was also convenient and inexpensive, particularly for participants who live abroad; it removed the necessity for safeguarding; and it also enabled the interviews to take place over a relatively short time period.

The interviews were scheduled at times of the participants' convenience between 15th October 2020 and 29th March 2021. The duration was open-ended to ensure that interviewees did not feel rushed. Most interviews lasted around an hour but ranged from 23 minutes (Chris) to 83 minutes (John). Interviews were recorded and the resultant data stored on University of Northampton servers in line with our data management plan (agreed in advance as part of our ethical approval, discussed in the next section). Participants were each sent a debrief form, with the exception of Chris, who was instead sent follow-up messages via WhatsApp to thank him for his participation.

The interview framework consisted of 11 questions in three sections (see Appendix). The first section (questions 1-4) focused on ascertaining the exact nature of participants' dietary practices of fasting and vegetarianism. The second section (questions 5-9) related to the effects that such dietary practices might have had on participants' lives, in particular, their psi abilities. Question 10 provided an opportunity for participants to comment on some of the reasons and mechanisms suggested by others for the effect of dietary practices on psi and spirituality beyond those that they may have already volunteered during the first part of the interview. These were deliberately presented towards the end, after participants had already discussed their own experiences and attributions, in order to avoid pre-empting responses and allow participants to provide their own views untarnished. A final question allowed the participant to volunteer any information that they may not already have covered during the rest of the interview.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Full ethical approval for the study was provided by the University of Northampton's Research Ethics Committee on 13th October 2020 (reference: ETH2021-0016).

Most research studies in psychology with human subjects provide anonymity for participants because of concerns about the reaction of others that may result from disclosing beliefs and experiences and to maximise the potential for openness and honesty. However, no anonymity was offered for participants in this study because we purposely recruited individuals who are publicly associated with psi and their dietary practices and as such blinding of identity might be considered difficult. Nevertheless, participants' names have been changed for the purposes of this publication at the request of the editors. Other ethical considerations concerned the recording of interviews, the storage of interview data, and the future use of research outputs for further research and/or teaching purposes. Participants

were made aware that they could decline to answer any question and could withdraw their consent for up to seven days following the interview. Participants provided explicit consent to participate on all of these terms. No participant declined permission.

### **Data Analysis**

For our analysis of interview data, we used Thematic Analysis (TA), which is a method for identifying common themes that occur across a given dataset (Terry et al., 2017). This method was chosen because of its high degree of flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and well-established guidelines that can be used as a basis for analysis and support an open-minded approach to the emergence of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA has also been used for a number of previous qualitative studies on dietary practices (e.g. Donnelly et al., 2018; Fox & Ward, 2008). We adopted an ‘experiential orientation’ to the analysis; that is, an assumption that language used by our participants essentially reflects rather than creates their reality; and a ‘Big Q’ approach, where themes are developed through a close and iterative interaction with the data in question, especially given the novelty of our research questions and openness to new insights from participants (Terry et al., 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six broad phases for TA: familiarisation with the data; initial code generation; theme construction; review of themes; definition and naming themes; and producing the report. Our application of TA closely followed these phases.

Full interview transcripts are available upon request to the corresponding author.

### **Reflexivity**

In order to support a transparently reflexive approach, the purpose of this section is to disclose our dietary practices relevant to the subject matter of this paper. The primary data collection, analysis, and initial drafting of the paper were performed by the first author, who since 2013 has been fasting for two 24-hour periods per week, primarily for health reasons; and has been following a vegan diet since approximately 2015, initially for environmental reasons but latterly also for reasons of animal ethics and personal health. The second and third authors provided critical input and feedback for the data collection and thematic analysis, and contributed to the submitted manuscript. Neither the second nor third author practise fasting. The second author eats dairy, fish, and poultry, but no other meat, because of the perceived sentience of mammals. The third author follows no particular dietary restrictions and eats meat and dairy.

## **Results**

We present three themes and seven subthemes emerging from our analysis (see Table 2). These themes are:

1. Fasting is perceived as a mechanism to facilitate psi.
2. Fasting is perceived to benefit psi because of purification and the gut.

3. Vegetarianism is perceived to benefit psi because it is experienced as improving mental clarity, as healthier, and because of purported subtle energies within food.

### **Theme 1: Fasting is Perceived as a Mechanism to Facilitate Psi**

Participants described how they make use of fasting in the periods leading up to and during a professional psi session, and of extended fasts as a means to build a foundation for the more effective manifestation of psi beyond the period of the actual fast itself.

#### ***Subtheme 1.1: Using Fasting for the Preparation and Practice of Psi***

Four participants routinely fast in the period up to and during a specific session with psi. They suggest either that this enables them to go more deeply into psi (Fiona, Tina) because it allows them to access a more conducive state of mind for psi (Steve), or because their experience shows that eating normally when using psi does not work for them (Adam). Whilst a fifth participant (Bonnie) does not fast routinely before or during channelling sessions, she nevertheless reports more effective experiences with psi when fasting.

Fiona says that she uses fasting to help her manifest psi more deeply for her clients. Here she describes how she uses fasting before and during channelling sessions:

My fasting comes when I need to trance channel for a group and hold space for many people's energies. Then I'll take that day and I'll begin fasting the night before. ... It helps me go deeper into the trance.

Tina compares the use of extended fasting in the period leading up to an important psi session to preparation for a sporting event. She says of these fasts, which may last up to three weeks:

My body feels phenomenal, like incredible. My eyes go incredibly white. ... It's like when I was doing running training or athletics. Before a race, you'd have this really tight period where you drill down and we call it sharpening. It's like you push yourself right to this peak edge. And that's sort of fasting for me.

She says that fasting "allows me to travel to deeper, more exotic bandwidths. It allows me to access other dimensions more deeply, more purely, for a longer period of time".

Adam fasts to support demonstrations of spiritualist mediumship. He says that he discovered when he began to perform such demonstrations that fasting was more conducive. He says, "I learnt quite quickly, quite early on, that it [eating normally before and during psi] just didn't sit right within myself".

Bonnie practises intermittent fasting in that she abstains from food for around sixteen hours every day through missing breakfast. She reports that psi is more effective in the morning: "when I'm fasting, I channel way clearer than when I eat".

### ***Subtheme 1.2: Extended Fasting Builds the Foundations for Psi***

As well as improving psi during the fast itself, two participants report that extended fasts help build their general capacity for psi. Fiona says that such extended fasts, when used in combination with meditation, ‘definitely’ strengthens her psi abilities. She occasionally engages in three-week fasts, which she says “have built my foundation a little bit higher and a little bit stronger when it comes to my own personal psychic ability”.

Adam engages in extended fasting which, he says, “teaches you a lot about yourself, it teaches you a lot about ego” and provides him with a “will and a strength where you’re not distracted, which I also feel is very important for psychic and mediumistic practices”. These fasts can sometimes involve four days and nights without food or water and take place in complete darkness, during which he uses meditation and what he calls ‘focused intention’ to access particular deep mind states.

### **Theme 2: Fasting is Perceived to Benefit Psi Because of Purification and the Gut**

Participants suggest that fasting benefits psi because it appears to have a purification effect that provides them with an increased mental clarity and energy for psi. Two participants suggest that fasting results in improvements to psi because of mechanisms specifically related to the gut.

#### ***Subtheme 2.1: “There’s Less Fog in my Head”: Fasting Provides Clarity Through Purification and Cleansing***

Participants who fast ascribe its benefits as related to mechanisms they variously describe as ‘purification’, ‘cleansing’, ‘clearing’, and ‘shedding’ that all but one suggest offers them greater mental clarity that supports psi. Three (Fiona, John, Tina) describe fasting as a ‘reset’.

Fiona uses fasting as a cleansing process when her diet has been less than optimal, which leaves her feeling:

Holed. I don’t know how to explain it other than that. It’s not like a gaining weight feeling, it’s a *slowness*, and I can’t process things easily. And so, when I go to work and I’m doing a reading with somebody, I don’t feel like I’m in it. My head is foggy. It’s like this extra work that I have to do to push through that to then communicate to subtle light energy – it’s tough. So then I’ll take on a three day fast – it’s a reset. And then, the longer ones [fasts], if I just really need to, to clear it all out.

Adam suggests that fasting supports his mental focusing abilities through purification. He says that fasting “seems to create a space that lends, not just to some sort of natural energetic difference ... but also a space of slightly clearer cognition”. This is achieved through creating a “purified space energetically but also mentally – and I think that those two are very much interrelated, connected”.

Steve engages in two-day fasts every two to three weeks during which he eats almost nothing. He says, “by clearing my system, it also, in a sense, clears my mind” and that after fasting “I know that my senses are heightened”.

John sometimes engages in fasts for several days at a time, consuming only plant-based juices or smoothies and that this fast is a “kind of reset. As a way to kind of clear my mind and things like that”.

For Tina, fasting provides purification for her whole body. She says that extended fasts offer her a “deep organ cleanse”. This process also includes the removal of what she terms ‘karmic toxins’ that she believes are detrimental to her work with psi. She says:

When I’m fasting, some of that cellular residue – those cells that are shedding – they’re carrying imprints. So, I’ll be fasting and a memory will come up of when I was nineteen and I had that argument with someone. It’s like the body sheds those memories too and that makes me a better psychic ’cos when I’m in that situation with someone in the field and that comes up and I’m like, yeah, I worked through that stuff.

### ***Subtheme 2.2: “The Psychic Mechanism Works in the Gut”: An Empty Digestive System Facilitates Psi***

Two participants suggest that the reason fasting is effective in facilitating psi is because it clears the digestive system. Tina says that the “psychic mechanism, I think, works in the gut”, and so she uses practices that accentuate the effects of fasting. These take the form of what she calls ‘medical grade colonics’, enemas involving Epsom salts or simply water. Her theory is that an empty gut benefits psi in a similar way to how alcohol affects a person’s physiology more quickly on an empty stomach:

A clean colon, it facilitates a very slick transition into ... psychic frequencies. So when I’m working ... and I need it to work at the click of the fingers, I purposely use fasting as a way to ... allow those chemicals – the neurochemicals, which I think are being made in the gut – to slip into the bloodstream really quickly.

Tina notes that she has in the past attempted to pursue research into these theories but was unable to identify suitable laboratories.

Fiona speculates that fasting quietens the organisms in the gut’s microbiome, which in turn quietens the mind, enabling more energy to be available for psi. She says:

I think when we quiet down all those voices in the gut and we calm the digestive [*sic*] that there’s so much energy left over to use towards whatever you want to power. And, in my case, I want to power my paranormal, my psychic abilities. ... It works really well.

### **Theme 3: Vegetarianism is Perceived to Benefit Psi Because it is Experienced as Improving Mental Clarity, as Healthier, and because of Purported Subtle Energies within Food**

Whilst the first two themes concerned participants’ use of fasting, our third theme focuses on how vegetarianism might support psi. Participants noted that they maintain that vegetarianism benefits psi through increased mental clarity; improvements to health; and purported subtle qualities within food that either work to hinder psi (in the case of meat and dairy) or to help psi (in the case of plant-based foods).

### ***Subtheme 3.1: “The Information Came Crisper, Clearer, Easier”: Vegetarianism Provides Mental Clarity to Support Better Psi***

Five participants suggest that vegetarianism, and veganism in particular, supports psi through enhancing mental clarity. Adam noticed such an effect when he gave up meat but suggests that it became more pronounced when he subsequently went vegan, at which point, he says, the “[psi] information came crisper, clearer, easier”. In his contemporaneous journal, he noted, “I felt quite an interesting increase in psychic functioning. I would say probably about a 30%, 35% even maybe, psychic functioning capacity”. He suggests that whilst he experienced these improvements over the first three weeks of this diet, this subsequently stabilised to a baseline increase of “maybe, 10 to 15%” from going vegan.

John believes that veganism offers clear benefits to his achieving OBEs. He says that his vegan diet means he has more frequent, longer, and clearer OBEs. He suggests that an important element in OBEs is attainment of the ‘vibrational state’, which is often reported prior to the OBE itself and which can be defined as “a sensation of energy experienced during the process of exiting the physical body” (Nicholls, 2012, p. 224). He suggests that diet influences his experience of this state: “the more plant-based and the more wholefood I go, often the cleaner, smoother, and more abundant that energetic state seems to be to me. There’s less resistance to it”.

Tina suggests that her vegan diet means her thoughts become

Very very steady. ... very little thought activity. ... For me, when I’m reading another dimension, when I’m reading a psychic interface, when I’m reading someone else’s body ... I need zero-point awareness. ... What I eat determines the quality of my thoughts.

Steve believes what he eats has an impact on his mental capacities. He says, “if we’ve overladen our bodies with the wrong food, the wrong intake, then it can affect us psychologically. The way we think about things. ... We’re not of a clear enough mind”. He maintains that his diet has supported his work as a medium and, whilst Steve is currently not vegan, he has been considering excluding dairy products in addition to excluding meat because milk makes him feel sluggish and affects his ability to think clearly and connect effectively with clients.

Bonnie also suggests that she has experienced improvements to her psi work because of her mostly vegan diet. She says: “when I stopped eating that [meat] my channelling became extra clear and the guidance of what I’m supposed to do became extra clear”.

### ***Subtheme 3.2: A Healthy Vegetarian Diet Helps Psychic Functioning***

All seven participants maintain that vegetarianism is healthier and as a consequence supports their psi work. Two go further and report that to eat meat and dairy would cause them actual physical harm.

Chris is typical of participants in suggesting that a vegan diet results in greater health. He maintains that this ‘absolutely’ helps with his psychic connection: “having a clean mind, body and soul, I do believe that it affects everything that you do, even your pattern of thinking”.

Adam and John also point to a relationship between their diet, physical health, and psi. Adam says, “I think it’s all connected. ... if someone’s living a healthier lifestyle, I think that again only really helps them connect and increase their psychic functioning capacity”. John suggests that being vegan has meant that he has had only one cold in over a decade, that there has been no need for him to visit a doctor other than for a physical injury, and that being vegan increases his physical energy. When asked how health might relate to psi, he says, “Whole plant foods are better for you. So, there’s a benefit to your mental abilities, your physical abilities, etc. ... And maybe that’s why the psi things are benefitted as well”.

Bonnie reports that her adoption of a vegan diet has led to improvements to her physical health, for example, her skin, weight loss, increased energy levels, and a cure for her arthritis. In terms of her experience of psi, she says, “my health helping with channelling? Yes. For sure. Clarity. ... More clear messages”.

Fiona and Tina each follow a vegan diet out of necessity because to eat meat and dairy would make them ill. For Fiona, this is purely physiological in that she has had an intolerance since childhood caused by the absence of a certain enzyme needed to digest animal protein. For Tina, however, her potential for illness through diet is directly related to psi. She suggests that the purpose of a vegan diet is to “keep psychics healthy” since accessing psi causes harmful inflammation related to glycogen. She says,

I’m starting to channel. I have a guide here. And she’s saying, remind him about inflammation. So when ... I work in bandwidth and I flick in and out ... it’s like I have a foot in both worlds. ... And that other bandwidth moves faster than Earth. It’s like my thought-form has to catch up. And I can feel it ... the closest feeling would be like anxiety – it feels like there’s this revving up when I’m reading the other interfaces. And a lot of what I eat has to negate that.

When you’re in that bandwidth, anything stuck in my body or resonating at a lower frequency, there’ll be a block. And that will lead to inflammation.

Tina notes that this appears to support research conducted at the Windbridge Research Center showing that mediums suffer a higher incidence of autoimmune diseases than the general population (Beischel et al., 2019), due, Tina suggests, to inflammation through accessing psi.

### ***Subtheme 3.3: “Meat Has a Really Intense Vibration”: Food may have Subtle Energies that Hinder or Help Psi***

Participants suggest that meat and animal products may have subtle properties that work to negate psi because of energies emanating from the suffering of the animal from which they came. Whilst participants were in general also open to plant-based foods having positive subtle qualities that may

support psi, this was less prominent than perceived negative effects of meat. For example, Bonnie says that since animals are “being slaughtered and killed, when we eat them, we also carry on their emotions, their suffering, their pain, their energy”. She says that when she stopped eating the ‘suffering’ within meat her “channelling became extra clear”.

Similar to Bonnie, Adam suggests by way of ‘speculation’ that there may exist subtle energies that permeate all aspects of reality and which are also strongly associated with psi. In this context, meat might contain negative energies, ‘a residual energy’ that could impact his abilities with psi that is “not so useful in terms of whatever a medium is doing, or what a psychic is doing, in trying to achieve and connecting to other energies”.

Fiona also suggests that eating meat from animals that have not been treated well can be detrimental because of the energies it contains. She says that:

Animal meat has a really intense vibration, especially if it wasn’t killed lovingly and it was highly processed. ... All of it goes into every bite that you’re putting in your body. And your body is processing the nutrition, yes, but it’s also processing all the energy.

After Tina experienced profound awakening experiences that led her to manifest psi, she says that she became unable to tolerate eating meat because she could directly sense the animal’s pain. She says “it made me feel physically sick, like nauseous. ... I could taste the suffering of the animal. ... It was the bizarrist thing”. In terms of positive subtle energies, she suggests that she can also sense what she calls the ‘intelligence’ within plants that can support her work with psi. She says:

I look at what I eat and I think, how is that going to help me become a better psychic? Like, how is that going to enhance my psychic abilities? ... Any sprouted foods are phenomenal. ... Mushrooms, like with all those fibres – that’s got an incredible intelligence.

## **Discussion**

In this study we sought to investigate whether participants perceive a role for fasting and vegetarianism in their work with psi and, if so, how these practices may engender this association. Our participants reported a noticeable enhancement of psi when they fasted or adopted a vegetarian diet and suggested a number of possible, potentially complementary, underlying mechanisms.

It is well-established in the literature that fasting can induce hallucinations in non-psychiatric individuals (e.g., Mahowald et al., 1998). However, our participants’ use of fasting to support what they regard as psi phenomena echoes reports from sources such as Kaldera (2017) who uses fasting to provide a focus for her neo-shamanic work. In accordance with various accounts including Cousens’s (2009) description of a deep spiritual experience during a 40-day fast, two participants reported profound experiences during extended fasts and also suggested that such practices help to provide a foundation from which to practise enhanced psi abilities. This has similarities with practices in spiritual traditions, such as shamans fasting to “strengthen warrior qualities” (Walsh, 1994) and the Hindu author Tripathi who suggests that fasting fosters spiritual and mental strength (cited in Pearson,

1992). However, participants employ a variety of fasting patterns and durations, and also engage with associated practices during a fast such as meditation, suggesting that further research is needed to investigate the aspects of fasting that may be most efficacious in eliciting psi experiences, if indeed this practice can be shown to have any objectively-measurable effect in this context.

In terms of an underlying mechanism, participants cite fasting as a means of physiological, mental, and spiritual purification. The concept of fasting for purification is widespread across spiritual and religious traditions and among secular authors. Examples include the Hindi women in Pearson's (1992) study who fast to purify body, mind, and soul; the Sufi poet Rumi, who speaks of "the brain and the belly ... burning clean with fasting" (Rumi, 2015); Carrington's (1908) suggestion that fasting allows for the removal of toxins; and Aivanhov's (1982) contention that purification from fasting includes the clearing of sins from previous lives. Recent research published in the medical literature suggests that fasting yields significant benefits for physical and mental health. In their review article, De Cabo and Mattson (2019) found 'robust' health benefits for fasting, including against the conditions of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, and neurodegenerative brain diseases. This is likely due to physiological responses across the whole body that are triggered during fasting including increased stress resistance, inflammation suppression, DNA repair, and autophagy, which is "recycling and cleaning at the same time, just like hitting a reset button to your body" (Dr Petre, quoted in Lindberg & Murrell, 2018). Other research has found that fasting can be beneficial across a range of conditions (Wilhelmi de Toledo et al., 2019). However, fasting has also been found in some cases to be associated with disordered eating (Cuccolo et al., 2022).

The suggestion from two of our participants that the gut may be a principal factor in psi has intriguing parallels with recent research in life sciences and biomedicine that appears to show that the digestive system is an important component in cognition. For example, Boem et al. (2021) propose an 'extended cognition thesis' that acknowledges the vital role of a microbiota-gut-brain axis in mental processes and suggest, therefore, that explanations for cognition need to reach beyond the skull to include the gut.

Whilst there has been little previous research into the relationship of vegetarianism and psi, reports from adepts of a palpable and almost immediate improvement in psi suggest that quantitative research into these effects might be worthwhile. For example, Adam's assertion that his 'psychic functioning' improved by up to 35% within three weeks of adopting a vegan diet suggests that this effect may offer the prospect of statistically-significant results within a manageable experimental timeframe.

There are three main underpinning mechanisms proposed for how vegetarianism may improve psi. Firstly, participants suggest that enhanced mental clarity from avoiding meat and dairy is an important factor in psi. The experiences reported by our participants in relation to mental clarity echo reports from, for example, ancient Greek mystics credited with psi-like powers who followed a 'clear' and

‘light’ diet without animal products (Arbesmann, 1949), Carrington (1920), who suggested that eating meat ‘retards’ psi and recommended particular acidic fruits instead because of their ‘cleansing’ properties, and reports from Amlani’s (1995) participants whose transition from meat-eating to a raw food vegan diet resulted in self-reported cumulative improvements to both their mental functioning and spirituality.

However, a recent review and meta-analysis of nutritional research examining the impact of vegetarian diets on cognition show either no significant effects from diet or conflicting findings with some studies showing a positive and others a negative association of such diets and cognitive outcomes (Iguacel et al., 2021). The authors hypothesise that these contradictory results may be due to either an abundance or a deficiency of certain nutrients associated with vegetarian diets that are also associated with cognition, for example, phytoestrogens in soy, a product typically consumed by vegetarians to a greater extent than by omnivores, and vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, which can be lacking in vegetarian diets.

Secondly, improved health from a vegetarian diet was posited as a factor supportive of psi. The relationship between spirituality and health has precedents from authors writing in the 20th century. For example, Carrington (1920) suggests that a vegetarian diet enables certain energies to flow through the body more smoothly. Amlani’s (1995) participants also associate better health with their psychospiritual journey from meat-eating to veganism. The contention that vegetarianism has positive health outcomes is widely supported in the medical and nutritional literature. In their review, Marsh et al. (2012) found that vegetarian diets appear to result in a wide range of health benefits compared to eating meat, including significantly reduced risks of type 2 diabetes; heart disease; obesity; gallstones; kidney disease; and possibly cancer, although here the evidence is less robust. Glick-Bauer and Yeh’s (2014) review of studies looking at vegan diets in particular suggests that omitting dairy products as well as meat appears to offer additional health benefits arising from a ‘unique’ gut profile that shows a “reduced abundance of pathobionts [harmful organisms] and a greater abundance of protective species ... [in addition to] reduced levels of inflammation.” A large international panel of leading food and health experts commissioned by *The Lancet* (Willett et al., 2019) concluded that “unhealthy diets pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than does unsafe sex, and alcohol, drug, and tobacco use combined” (p. 447) and recommend instead the widespread global adoption of a mostly vegetarian diet which includes zero, or only small, quantities of meat. However, it is important to note that vegetarian diets may require supplementation to ensure an adequate intake of certain nutrients that are vital to optimum health (Craig, 2009) and that some authors have suggested that particular groups of people, such as children, young women and the elderly, may benefit from the targeted consumption of red meat as a protein and iron source (Giromini & Givens, 2022).

Thirdly, food may contain within it purported subtle qualities that impact on psi. Similar suggestions feature in writings from the mid-19th century onwards. For example, one of the leading figures in Theosophy, Annie Besant, suggested that those eating meat risked taking on negative subtle aspects associated with animals' 'horror and terror' (Besant, 1913). Similar ideas may be found in writings by Cayce, Aivanhiov, and Cousens (Aivanhiov, 1982; Cousens, 2009; Edgar Cayce Foundation, 1971). As with participants in this study, the suggestion of positive subtle energies within plants receives less attention than the idea of negative energies within meat. Examples of those who suggest that plants, and in particular, raw or 'live' plant foods, may contain such positive subtle qualities include Carrington (1912) who maintained that a raw fruitarian diet supplies 'vital life and energy' and Cousens's (2009) concept of Subtle Organising Energy Fields, which, he suggests, are more abundant in raw, live foods. One potential physical explanation – and means of measurement – for such subtle qualities may be the concept of biophotons, which is an ultra-weak light source spontaneously emitted by all living systems (Popp, 2003), although many theories associated with biophotons, including Popp's, remain speculative and controversial (Cifra et al., 2015).

It may also be the case that effects on psi reported by participants and attributed to vegetarianism, rather than having a basis in any physiological changes resulting from the diet itself, may instead be due to false attribution, placebo effects, changes in psychological perspective, or other non-directly causal factors.

Whilst the emphasis in this current study has been on participants who wish to increase their propensity for psi and spirituality through dietary practices, we should note that there might be occasions when a reduction in such a propensity is seen as beneficial. Many of those who work to support the process of spiritual development, for example, psychiatrist Stanislav Grof and psychologist Christina Grof, recommend that those undergoing traumatic 'spiritual emergencies' should eat meat and dairy as a way of 'grounding' themselves to help manage and slow down the process of accelerated spiritual awakening (Grof & Grof, 1989).

### **Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research**

Whilst the importance of diet and dietary practices to health and the environment is subject to increasing amounts of research, their potential effect on spiritual practices and psi has so far been almost entirely neglected, despite their widespread use in a spiritual context. This study represents a first step towards investigating how these practices are used by those apparently adept at psi. We found that participants report that fasting and vegetarianism can have a significant effect on psi that they perceive to be mediated by bodily purification and effects related to the gut (for fasting), and increased mental clarity, better health, and purported subtle energies inherent within food (for vegetarianism).

Reports of a significant and palpable effect on psi from these dietary practices suggest that further empirical research is justified to assess whether they might extend to non-adepts, and are measurable in quantitative terms, using methods that control for confounds such as a placebo effect. Whilst our approach has enabled insights into the phenomenology of participants' work with psi and diet, our purposive sample is not representative in terms of many demographic dimensions and we are aware of adepts who do not engage in fasting and vegetarianism. As Braun and Clarke (2021) state, a qualitative paradigm, such as is the basis for this paper, allows "an only-ever partially knowable world, where meaning and interpretation are always situated practices" (p. 6). Hence, we intend to follow this study with both survey and experimental work to assess whether findings presented here may be extended to non-adepts who fast and/or engage in vegetarianism, and whether there might be any measurable relationship between these dietary practices and manifestations of psi.

If such studies demonstrate an association between fasting and vegetarianism with spirituality and psi, then these results may have implications in improving performance and consistency in psi tasks; for nutritional guidance to support the health of adepts; and to offer insight into proposed theories of psi. Our work may also provide a starting point in providing an empirical basis for claims that changes in diet may be beneficial for those undergoing a 'spiritual emergency'. Further work may also be useful in investigating purported mechanisms suggested by participants that result from fasting and vegetarianism, such as those related to the gut, health, mental clarity, and purported subtle energies that may be present in food.

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## **Appendix – Interview Framework**

The following interview framework was used during our semi-structured interviews with adepts as a guide for questioning. It is not intended as a rigid set of questions but rather allows for deviation depending on the course of interaction during the interview.

### *Section 1*

1. What is the nature of your diet? For example, are you vegan or vegetarian?
2. If so, have you always been a vegan/vegetarian?
  - a. If so, why was that (family tradition, religious beliefs etc.)?
  - b. If not, then what prompted the change?
3. Do you follow a mainly wholefood diet, and/or any other adaptations, such as raw/live foods?
4. Do you fast?
  - a. If so, what patterns of fasting do you follow?
  - b. What are your reasons for fasting?

### *Section 2*

5. Did you notice any changes in yourself after you followed these dietary practices (health, cognition, connection with others, etc.)?
6. What is it about veganism / vegetarianism / fasting that you think might have led to these changes?
7. Have these changes affected the nature or frequency or intensity of your psychic abilities?
  - a. (If applicable) Could you tell me a bit more about any changes on the part of your students who have gone vegan?
8. If there have been changes, has this changed the way you think about your psychic abilities and how they manifest (i.e. causes and mechanisms or processes)?
9. (If applicable) Did you notice any difference whilst you were vegetarian and before you became vegan – in other words, did giving up dairy have any effect?

### *Section 3*

10. From the literature, there appear to be a number of potential reasons for why people fast and/or are vegetarian in relation to spiritual practice and the manifestation of psychic abilities.

I would welcome your views on these in relation to your practice:

- a. For fasting and/or vegetarianism:
  - Purification
  - Eradication and/or avoidance of karma
  - Connection with psychic plane/spiritual plane/astral body
  - Health and/or other physiological changes
  - Strengthening exercise
- b. For vegetarianism and/or other particular food choices:
  - Subtle qualities of the food, e.g., differing levels of a 'life force'/chi/prana
  - Interconnectedness of all life and/or taking on the suffering of livestock
  - Reincarnation between animals and humans
- c. Do you think this set of reasons is incomplete from what you've found in relation to your own practice? Would you add any additional reasons?

11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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<sup>4</sup> <http://theeprc.org>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.vegansociety.com/get-involved/research/researcher-network>

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## Tables

**Table 1**

*Summary of Participants*

Pseudonym (gender)	Area(s) of Apparent Psi Ability	Form of Practice	Dietary Practice(s)
Adam (m)	Mediumship	Public and private readings Published author	Fasting Vegan
Fiona (f)	Mediumship Channelling	Private consultations Public videos and podcasts Published author	Fasting Vegan
Chris (m)	Psychokinesis (metal- bending) Telepathy	Entertainer Private consultancy Published author and subject of biographies	Vegan
Bonnie (f)	Channelling	Private consultations Public videos	Fasting Vegetarian
John (m)	Out-of-body experiences	Private and workshop coaching Published author Public speaker	Fasting Vegan
Steve (m)	Mediumship	Private readings Commercial artist Former participant in UK paranormal television show	Fasting Vegetarian
Tina (f)	Channelling Psychokinesis (metal- bending) Telepathy Medical intuitive	Bespoke services Private coaching Published author	Fasting Vegan

**Table 2***Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
1 Fasting is perceived as a mechanism to facilitate psi	1.1 Using fasting for the preparation and practice of psi 1.2 Extended fasting builds the foundations for psi
2 Fasting is perceived to benefit psi because of purification and the gut	2.1 “There’s less fog in my head”: Fasting provides clarity through purification and cleansing 2.2 “The psychic mechanism works in the gut”: An empty digestive system facilitates psi
3 Vegetarianism is perceived to benefit psi because it is experienced as improving mental clarity, as healthier, and because of purported subtle energies within food	3.1 “The information came crisper, clearer, easier”: Vegetarianism provides mental clarity to support better psi 3.2 A healthy vegetarian diet helps psychic functioning 3.3 “Meat has a really intense vibration”: Food may have subtle energies that hinder or help psi