

# Winston J. Craig



**S** *habbat Shalom*\*: Would you tell us a little about why you agreed to be interviewed for our issue on Food and Drink?

**Craig:** In the American Dietetic Association we have about 70,000 members, and there are about 25 different practice groups, one of which is on vegetarian nutrition. The people who started those practice groups are all Jewish, and come from the Boston and Maryland ar-

reas. I've been involved in the executive committee now for about 4 or 5 years, and it's interesting to see and hear their views on vegetarian nutrition.

I don't know what brand of Judaism I'm dealing with. There are some groups that are very religious and strict, who write to companies to find out whether their ingredients have any animal origin. Even like if it's vitamin D, they want to know if it's from an animal or from

a plant source. But I think we share mostly common ground.

***Shabbat Shalom: Eating and drinking plays an important role in Adventism. Why?***

**Craig:** I think there are really two reasons it is so important for Adventists. First, Paul puts emphasis in First Corinthians, chapter 10, on present lifestyle as a preparation for the hereafter. It is also necessary for work on this earth, to reflect the image of God to others

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around us. Lifestyle must be connected to that, because you can't witness to God very effectively if you've got a migraine or a stomachache or a disk out of joint. Eating and drinking should make our mental and physical health somewhat stable, providing a strong undergirding for spiritual health and development.

Second, Ellen G. White wrote so much about tea and coffee and alcohol and a simple, balanced vegetarian diet. Her writings provided a great deal of cohesiveness for thinking about the unique lifestyle characteristics of Seventh-day Adventists.

***Shabbat Shalom:* How would you describe or define the Adventist philosophy of eating and drinking?**

**Craig:** Whenever you talk about Adventist philosophy, the general word that pops up is temperance. In the early days of Adventism temperance was the banner under which the movement rallied. Of course in those days it had specific connotations with alcohol, but I think in the modern thinking it means abstaining from those things which are detrimental to the spiritual life and physical health and being judicious about those things which are good: water, exercise, sexuality—everything in life which is important is done on a regular basis, but should be done with moderation. I wrote up this statement for one of my classes—"God wants us to be healthy and whole"—something I created for a class that gives some idea of what I think the unique Adventist perspective is on lifestyle.

***Shabbat Shalom:* So temperance isn't just about avoiding the bad things, but also includes mod-**

**eration in all of the good things?**

**Craig:** Yes. I grew up in an era when the current thinking in the church was "don't do this, don't eat this, don't go there." But today's emphasis on "wellness" as the buzzword has made a lot of younger health educators and health directors to emphasize the positive aspects of our lifestyle program—regular exercise, plant-based diet, moderation—instead of "don't do this, don't do that." The "don't do's" really run against the mentality of basic human existence. We like to be told "if you do this (instead), look how much more a successful, healthy life you can have. You can be rid of all the

. . . We're pushing more selecting a good diet and regular exercise—all the positive aspects of the health message.

We've really kind of dropped the word "temperance" from our vocabulary. What used to be known as the "Department of Health and Temperance" we now call "Adventist Health Ministries." The name seems to convey more of an attitude that health can be a ministry to our souls, our communities, and the world at large.

In my new book, *Nutrition and Wellness: A vegetarian way to better health*, the first chapter starts off with the acronym WELLNESS, basically covering the 8 natural remedies, done in such a way as to promote the positive aspects of health: Water—used internally and externally; Exercise

*When you speak about health, you can't really separate physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions.*

regularly; Life in proper balance; Loving relationships; Nutrition of good quality and proper quantity; Enjoy adequate rest; Sunlight and fresh air; Stress management. That's part of the approach I think a lot of us are taking today to present that we have a happy lifestyle—that God wants us to be happy. And all of the restrictions—alcohol, smoking, premarital sex, and all of that—are detrimental to being. I try to stress in my classes the idea of a "whole person." And whenever you do something bad to yourself physically, it disrupts social relationships, mental abilities, peace of mind, and spirituality. The Greek idea of seg-

menting and separating one from the other really has no basis in reality. When people have problems, they go to psychologists or nutritionists or pastors, and I think people get

the impression that life is fragmentary. But I think the biblical idea of *Shalom* integrates all of these ideas. When you speak about health, you can't really separate physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions. I really think that's the key to the Adventist view of health. Over 100 years ago, we had the idea of "holistic living," but I think we really dropped the ball somewhere and others picked it up and ran with it.

***Shabbat Shalom:* Is eating related only to health issues?**

**Craig:** When you eat, it's done in a social relationship and a cultural context. You can't change people's eating habits without changing their very sociocultural heritage. So, with that culture, of course, come religious connotations—the mixing of certain foods, hot/cold principles. It all becomes very complex. Food is not just eaten for strength; there's so much more. If you really want to get to

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know people, you have to eat with them. I would have to say that food has to do with everything in life, really.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What are your religious practices in regard to food and drink? Can you justify your position?

**Craig:** My religious practice and my eating habits consist of following the original diet.

Man was created to live on fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables—and the least processing of those foods as possible. It's when we process foods, extracting certain vitamins, sugars, oils—and those things are used in heavy amounts—that we have all the chronic diseases that we see today. I think if we look at the Creator and his manual, from Genesis 1, the principle seems to be simplicity, along with exercise, fresh air, sunlight—a natu-

created. So not only does a plant-based diet conserve the environment, and make more sense ethically, it's also better for you healthwise.

The leading nutritionists in the world, members of the World Health Organization, have made the statement that the optimal diet is low in fat, especially saturated (animal) fat, and high in complex carbohydrates—with an

abundance of fruits, grains, vegetables, and legumes. This diet, as opposed to a meat- and dairy-based diet, is their recommendation for the whole world. It's the consensus of all the leading nutritionists that a plant-based diet is the healthiest.

When it comes to drinking, it's fairly obvious that drinking water and fruit juice is quite harmless. But when you get into coffee, tea, and alcohol, things that Adventists have tradition-

Dragon in Disguise," which includes highway carnage, family dysfunction, high blood-pressure, and cancer among the many things that alcohol consumption can cause. If something's dangerous, it's smart to just stay away from it.

**Shabbat Shalom:** The Bible lists some animals as clean (fit for consumption) and others as unclean (unfit for consumption). Can you see any reason for this scientifically?

**Craig:** I have problems with it as a nutritionist, because when you look at all the epidemiological data about pork and beef, there's really not much difference; they're both high risk. I was just teaching this morning on diet and cancer. The latest book on this subject, *Food, Nutrition, and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective*, was published last year. It contains about 800 pages of material about how what we eat relates to the problem of cancer. It goes through all of the different cancers of the body. Continually you see meat and animal fat surfacing as two of the primary factors leading to cancer. But there's really no distinction between different kinds of meats. In fact, beef gets a worse write-up than pork in this book. So if you try to extrapolate the biblical standpoint over to scientific data, you're in trouble, because all the meats are considered problematic. Fish seems to be more on the safe side, but all the others seem to be equally damaging in terms of risk of chronic disease. So for me, it's difficult to talk about "clean" and "unclean" meats. The terms probably have more meaning than I am aware of as a nutritionist. It's probably more of a theological issue which I can't relate to as well. When it comes down to the wire, it

*If you really want to get to know people, you have to eat with them.*

*"More people die from eating too much than from eating too little . . . eat a third, drink a third, and leave a third of the capacity of the stomach empty."*

*Talmud b. Gittin 70a*

ral lifestyle as much as possible. Of course, we live in 1999, which is pretty far removed from the Garden of Eden.

I think another part of it is from the standpoint of ethics. Do we really have license to take another life, even one of an animal, just to satisfy our appetites, when a plant-based diet is better for us anyway? We can also look at it from an ecological view. Plant-based eating conserves the world's resources. That's been well documented in many places. The air would be cleaner, the water would be cleaner if we didn't eat meat. The waste from meat-processing plants and "factory farming" is just a tremendous ecological disaster, a crisis we've

ally been warned against—I think there's good evidence that the stimulatory effects of caffeine are not healthy for our already-overstimulated society. Alcohol is one of the severest depressants around and is associated with about 20 evil things. In my book there's a chapter called "Alcohol—A

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really comes down to the animal's background, what it was fed, how it was medicated, its living conditions. It seems, at least today, that the safety of animal products depends on how we are producing those products.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Why does the Bible tell us not to eat the blood of an animal?

**Craig:** The only thing I can really designate is that the blood is the life current that connects the cells together. So it supplies glucose and oxygen, but it also receives all the toxic and waste products from the cells. It's also where all the infectious agents are carried. So there's just danger, in the sense that it contains all the toxic elements. I wouldn't really call it the sewer, but it's kind of like the canal that traffics around the body, picking up all of the waste products. If there is disease in one part of the body, then it is going to get transmitted to the other parts of the body through the blood. I would think that getting rid of the blood would get rid of a lot of the risk of contamination. It's more a physiological or biological question than it is a nutrition question, I think.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Do you have a special meal that characterizes Adventist cuisine?

**Craig:** That's really a cultural question, more than anything else. Even if they're all Adventists, if you were to ask an American or an African American, or a European, or an African, or a Hispanic, you'd get very different answers as to what is typical cuisine. I can tell you what I associate in my life, but even I am not fully representative of my culture within Adventism. Traditionally Adventists do eat a lot of vegetables, a lot of salad—more than

the general population. But I think that maybe the general population has caught up with us, with more people realizing the benefits of fresh fruits and vegetables against chronic disease. But the question is really too cultural to give a broad answer.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Is it a religious value to be a gourmet?

**Craig:** The idea of simplicity is typical to Adventist thinking. And usually the word gourmet is associated with richness and complexity. But if you take the real meaning of a gourmet, someone who is continually experimenting and testing and trying new frontiers, I don't think there is necessarily any religious connotation to that. Some people are just that way and like to try new things. Other people like the status quo, like more traditional foods, and don't particularly want to try anything new. But I don't think there's anything wrong with either position.

**Shabbat Shalom:** What happens if an Adventist does not follow these health rules? Does that person still remain an Adventist? Is that person "lost" to God?

**Craig:** I guess my first reaction is that we don't really have rules, as such. But we do have principles and guidelines that help us to choose. Basically the principle is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. So we want to keep our bodies, minds and spirits in the best shape possible. People who are committed to God will eventually ask themselves, what can I do, or what should I avoid that will make me a better servant of God or a better reflector of His love? Sometime or other they will come upon lifestyle—how you dress, how you spend your time, what you watch, what you read,

whom you associate with, what you eat, what you drink. So there is a connection between spirituality and lifestyle, but there are millions of people out there who don't know about Adventist lifestyle, and who are close to God. The health message can help us to be better people. It doesn't make us better people—only God can do that. It may help us to maintain a better connection with God. Is a person who doesn't do those things lost? No. I believe that those who are reckless in eating and drinking are often reckless in morals. I think it has to do with choices, discrimination, and carefulness.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Are Adventists more healthy, better people, closer to God because of their eating and drinking?

**Craig:** I'd like to believe so. There are many elements which factor into spirituality, so I don't know about that. Certainly, the question about better health should receive an affirmative response. It's been well documented that, as a whole, Adventist men live about seven years longer (and Adventist Women about three years longer) than their non-Adventist neighbors. There are more than 265 research papers in the literature about Adventist lifestyle and its effects on health. But it's not just what we eat and drink; there are many more factors in lifestyle than just what we eat and drink.

But when it comes to spirituality, I don't really know that there's any measuring stick we can use to measure one person's spirituality against another's. So I'm not even going to go down that path.

**Shabbat Shalom:** Thank you very much for doing the interview.

**Craig:** It's been my pleasure.

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\* Interview conducted by Jay L. Perry.