



BEING VEGETARIAN

Radha Soami Satsang Beas

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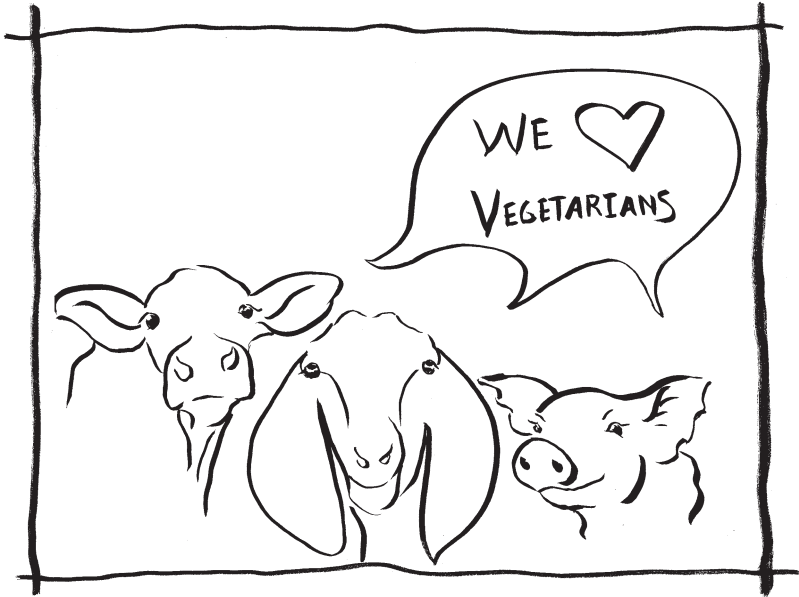
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INTRODUCTION



Don't you know yet?
It is your light that lights the world.

Jalal ad-Din Rumi



Questions and choices

Understanding that we are capable of shaping our own lives – our personal responses to the beauty, complexity, bewilderment, and cruelty of the world we inhabit – leads us to inevitable questions: What really matters? What kind of person do we choose to be? How can we nurture a tranquil mind and a courageous heart? How can we be happy and help others be happy, too? Maybe we've had moments when we've looked around our lives and asked that old question, "Is this all there is?" We want fulfilment and joy; we want both to have a good life and to be a good person. We know inherently that those things are connected, the results of focused, conscious choices.

What are those choices, and how do we make them? What direction leads to the joy, compassion, peace of mind, and wisdom we want to cultivate? How do we create a way of being within the invisible walls that surround us – walls made of expectations from family, friends, and society? All of us want to answer these questions for ourselves and, consciously or unconsciously, we do answer them through our actions. The actions

*Shaping our
lives requires
conscious
decisions.*

we take – or fail to take – reflect our beliefs. Shaping the life we desire requires us to be mindful of the connections between *believing* and *doing* rather than letting our lives spin by without purpose or focus. As we consider our choices and give attention to their results, we become more aware of

how those choices and results are inextricably woven together. Shaping our lives requires conscious decisions.

We want to do more than simply slide from event to event, jostling through jobs and people, stumbling across sorrows, catching what happiness we can.

We're looking for something more, something deeper, something that soothes a longing we feel tugging at our spirit. We've often ignored this persistent hunger or pretended it wasn't important, but doing so hasn't made it go away or feel less significant. We hope there's more to life – more beauty, more love, more tranquillity, joy, and meaning – than the daily routine we see all around us, but what? And where is it? Where do we go to get more of what we cannot buy or touch or taste or smell?

QUESTIONS AND CHOICES

Wise teachers in every culture throughout time have taught that the answers to life's most important questions come from inside ourselves, from within the stillness of each individual. Inside each of us lies the key to understanding ourselves and crafting a life that reflects that understanding. Our thoughts manifest in our actions, and those actions develop our habits and character. A well-known saying goes: "Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an act and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny."¹ Thoughts and the actions that flow from them create our lives. We have joy, courage, and compassion because we turn our attention to these qualities and work to nurture them. Just as we cannot plant chillies and expect the seeds to grow into cucumbers, we cannot cause pain to other beings and expect that pain to return to us as pleasure. All we do comes back to us.

When we consider this statement in relation to food, the basis of a vegetarian diet becomes clear. While every creature must eat to live – whether that means eating plants or other animals – humans can choose to do the least harm possible and consume a plant-based diet, perhaps including dairy products. Even a small child understands that, while picking a flower from the neighbour's carefully tended garden may be naughty, harming the neighbour's cat is a much worse offence. Harming the neighbour herself is worse yet. In the same manner, while consuming fruits, vegetables, and grains is taking a form of life, plants are less conscious than sea, air, or land creatures. We can keep our killing on the lowest possible level of consciousness,

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preventing immense suffering and creating a deep sense of connection and harmony. As we reduce suffering and nurture connections, we are also affecting ourselves – our health and happiness – and Planet Earth in positive ways.

Being vegetarian can help satisfy our hunger to lead a more fulfilling, peaceful life. Unlike other creatures, we have the ability to choose what we eat. When we observe the world around us, we note that of all living beings, humans are the only ones able to make conscious choices. All other animals – from lizards to lions, from rabbits to rhinos – have instinctual natures they must obey. Only in the human form can we say, “I want to do better” and change our course. We are able to consider alternatives and use reason to set objectives.

So we can decide to stop killing animals for food. What a privilege and responsibility this is! The hungry jackal cannot choose to forego eating gazelles or rabbits in favour of more fruit; the giraffe cannot turn from eating the leaves of mimosa trees to chasing tigers. We humans can change our attitudes and behaviours in ways that are unthinkable among the animal kingdom. We can decide that we will no longer make a graveyard of our bodies, that eating animals is neither justifiable nor necessary, and become vegetarians. This small book will explore how and why we do so, as well as the benefits and challenges that decision creates.

WHO, WHAT AND WHY



If slaughterhouses had glass walls,
everyone would be a vegetarian.

Sir Paul McCartney²



Who?

Millions of people around the world, of all ages, races, and religions, are vegetarians. College students, grandparents, babies, Gen Xers, teens, middle-aged working men and women – we abound in every age group and most nations. Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Rastafarians, atheists, Hindus, agnostics, yogis, humanists, Buddhists, Jains, Daoists, Bahais, and more – we come from every system of belief. Like humans everywhere who are passionate about their convictions, people who have made the commitment to live without eating animals generally love to share their ideas and experiences.

Perhaps you, too, are thinking of adopting a way of eating and living that embraces vegetarian ideals and leaves a soft footprint on our planet. If you have questions about what such a life might be like, a few keystrokes will have resource information rumbling across your computer screen. Virtually every library will have print material and comfy chairs for curling up and reading. Lots of DVDs on various aspects of vegetarianism are available for order or for viewing on line. One of your best resources may be face-to-face conversations with vegetarians themselves. Go ahead – ask us!



What does 'vegetarian' mean anyway?

At times, we've all probably encountered someone who states he's a vegetarian right before ordering the wild salmon dish for dinner ... or is a vegetarian except for chicken ... or except on holidays or when they're visiting their family. For anyone first thinking of joining the veg ranks, this can be confusing. What does the word mean, anyway?

In the world of vegetarianism, we find many degrees of conviction, but let's define our terms clearly here and state that vegetarians don't intentionally eat any form of conscious being, ever. No living being, that is, that has the ability to try to save itself when it senses it is about to be killed, for even plants have been found to be conscious to some degree. Vegetarians don't eat other sentient beings, not when we're home for a break from college, not when eating out in social groups we'd like to blend with, not when we're hungry and the menu doesn't show even a token veggie meal, not to please the boss who's

WHAT DOES 'VEGETARIAN' MEAN ANYWAY?

just ordered a steak dinner. People who eat some degree of meat in a few situations may be 'partially vegetarian' or 'working on becoming vegetarian'. Many who have been committed vegetarians for decades initially made these kinds of choices before taking the bolder step of full commitment. Others felt ready to simply begin fully engaged.

Ovo-lacto (or lacto-ovo) *vegetarian*: Derived from the Latin terms *ovum* (egg) and *lac* (milk), this phrase refers to those who include eggs and dairy products in an otherwise plant-based diet. They may eat a plate of eggs, foods such as pastas and desserts that contain eggs, and any kind of dairy product.

Lacto-vegetarian: This category of vegetarian includes dairy in their diet, along with an abundance of grains, nuts, vegetables, and fruits. Lacto-vegetarians do exclude eggs, whether fertilized or unfertilized, from their food choices. They believe that eggs are potential vehicles for conscious life.

Vegan (pronounced vee-gun): Eating a completely plant-based diet is a commitment that vegans make to themselves, the animals they care about, and the planet we all share. A vegan diet and lifestyle does not include dairy products of any kind nor eggs in any amount, and sometimes also restricts the use of honey (derived from the labour of bees), the buying or wearing of leather for any purpose, and the use of cosmetics and products that have been tested on animals. As the vegan population expands, we've seen an increase of food products, books, magazines, and websites specifically for them. Restaurants around the globe are also offering vegan selections. This small but growing movement is motivated by a variety of beliefs but is more and more propelled by people who see evidence

that living as vegans leaves the lightest possible footprint on our Earth.



Why be vegetarian?

At every level of the natural world we live in – from the lowly worm to the lordly lion – the life of one creature ends violently so another creature can survive. A gentle deer struggles and gasps its last breath held by the jaws of a tiger; scavenging hyenas and vultures snarl and snap at each other over the remains of carcasses killed by other predators; to supply the meat industry, human beings wreak death upon millions of defenceless creatures behind closed doors and walls with no windows, so none should see the suffering caused. We live in a violent world. We cannot escape this fact.

But we can choose how we live with it.

A vegetarian lifestyle is an affirmation of compassion and an action we can take to support wellbeing and nonviolence in the world at large. By choosing vegetarianism, we opt for a life where we cause minimal suffering to creatures as well as having minimal impact on our planet's resources. When living creatures are killed for food, do we really think they die willingly? Do we think they don't suffer? Imagine a blade put to our throat, or witnessing the blows to the heads of our companions in the slaughterhouse. Would we not be terrified and try to escape? While animals may lack the higher thinking powers of humans, no one who has ever loved a pet believes they lack emotions.

Decades of studies of animal behaviour have reshaped our understanding of their intelligence and emotional complexity.

Ongoing research continues to surprise and humble us, reminding us more than ever that we have much in common with nonhuman animals. Consider the contributions of such noted scientists as Jane Goodall, the English ethnologist who spent decades studying and teaching about the social life of wild chimpanzees, and Irene Pepperberg, whose work with the highly intelligent African Grey Parrot she named Alex reshaped our beliefs about the mentality and vocal abilities of birds.

Marc Bekoff, professor emeritus of biology at the University of Colorado Boulder, writes convincingly from both a scientific and experiential perspective in his book *The Emotional Lives of Animals* as he makes the case that mammals, fish, and fowl have complex, emotional reactions to their worlds.³ Most of us have seen animals – perhaps our pets, perhaps zoo animals, occasionally animals in the wild – display curiosity, anger, sadness, boredom, or joy. Now science is reinforcing the belief that animal lovers have had for untold years – animals have rich interior lives.

When a person chooses to be vegetarian, he or she acknowledges that interior life and steps consciously away from participating in the violence that so often surrounds even the raising and always the killing of these creatures. As committed vegetarians, we sweat the small stuff because we do not want to be connected to the suffering of other conscious, feeling creatures. In other words, we pay attention to details such as whether or not Thai curry has fish sauce (almost always!), yogurt has gelatin (made from animal by-products such as hooves, skin, and bones), or a formerly favourite salad dressing is made with mayonnaise (which contains eggs). Yes, this level of detail takes some getting used to, but it actually gets routine pretty quickly,

as one learns what to reach for and what to leave alone – which brands of barbecue sauce are made without anchovies, cheeses without rennet, and breads without eggs.

We pay attention to these details because doing so is important as we work to nurture compassion. It doesn't matter that anchovies can be less than one inch long; how big does a fish have to be before we let it live? It does matter that rennet comes from the stomach of a slaughtered calf and that eggs are meant as a vehicle for the life of a chick rather than food for a human.

Compassion is important to us. If we sow fields of bitter suffering, can we expect harvests of sweet happiness? Can our wellbeing be built on the misery of other sentient beings? Cause and effect, action and reaction. By acting with kindness, we receive kindness – even if we sometimes receive it eventually rather than immediately. What we give and what we get are inseparable. Understanding this principle, we realize that eating animals involves us in violence that is harmful to both ourselves and those animals.

The meat on our plates rarely comes from creatures that have led natural, tranquil lives but has instead been carved from animals that have suffered in life and died in pain. Knowing this, how can we continue to choose palate over compassion?

So we make the commitment, firm in our head and heart that being a vegetarian is who we are. We figure out how to eat, play, work, socialize, and live through the ups and downs and changing circumstances of our life while being vegetarians. Doing that generally requires time, trial and error, asking for advice, experimenting with different foods, delighting and

rejecting, realizing that what worked one month when life was steady may well need adjusting the next month when life takes a tumble. At some point, we realize that we're solidly, thoroughly, vegetarians and can't imagine being anything but.



Five basic benefits

How do we, our families, and our communities benefit from this way of life? How does being vegetarian help us become more peaceful, healthier, and more conscious? Hopefully, this small book provides some answers to these questions; our own lives surely provide many more. Here are five important ways being vegetarian is good for everybody and everything:

1. Planet Earth and its inhabitants benefit tremendously, beautifully. Imagine a resurgence of the rainforests that are currently being slashed and burned, cut and scraped away at the rate of more than *one acre per second*. Ninety-one per cent of this destruction is done to clear land for animal farming, including pasture and animal feed crops such as soybeans.⁴ Imagine cleaner streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans, and more abundant water resources. Untreated manure from cattle just in the United States *in one year alone* is enough to cover eleven of the world's largest cities – Tokyo, Paris, New Delhi, London, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, New York, and Berlin – *plus* the countries of Bali, Costa Rica, and Denmark!⁵ This huge quantity of faeces and raw urine, full of environmental toxins, seeps into our soils and waterways. In addition to polluting water

through waste runoff, livestock production gulps inordinate amounts of water. A pound of beef requires up to 2,500 gallons of water, but a pound of tofu only 250–300 (estimates for all foods vary somewhat from source to source). Our Earth is feeling the effects of humanity's addiction to eating animals. Imagine immediate alleviation of many of our most urgent environmental problems, including global warming, solved or hugely remediated by turning away from feeding ourselves on the carcasses of other beings.

2. Our own health is enhanced, especially if we are eating a vegetarian diet rooted in whole, unprocessed foods. Many rigorously conducted inquiries – for example, *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted*⁶ and *The Oxford Vegetarian Study*⁷ – have shown that vegetarians have significantly reduced risks for cancers, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and obesity. Eating meat, fish, fowl, or eggs puts one at risk for food-borne diseases and exposes consumers to toxins as well as a formidable variety of nasty parasites. While vegetarians are by no means exempt from the diseases that plague people all over the world, we are afflicted with significantly fewer ‘big killer’ maladies.
3. The suffering quotient in the world is dramatically reduced when we no longer create demands for the raising and slaughtering of meat. Classically, humans have rationalized meat production with the belief that the animals involved have no souls and have very limited intelligence and emotions. We've told ourselves that they do not suffer, or if they

FIVE BASIC BENEFITS

do, their suffering doesn't matter. We've turned a blind eye to the fact that many animals' lives are spent in confinement – often extreme confinement – ending in brutality. Any feeling person who honestly examines the manufacture of meat must at least squirm with discomfort when the facts become clear. While farm animals are treated differently in different areas of the world, the increase in factory farming worldwide means that conditions for the vast majority of animals raised for meat are absolutely miserable, and their deaths are often unnecessarily cruel. We recognize that we can choose to step away from that cycle of cruelty.

4. When we decide to live our ethics with every food choice we make, we experience deep satisfaction. That satisfaction grows and spreads within us. We realize that we are no longer making choices from just the point of view of self-gratification, but from compassion. We begin to see ourselves differently, for we are different. Our choices and actions now resonate with our ethics, and our sense of self becomes more whole. We have used compassion, reason and logic to guide our actions, and by living within these chosen parameters we support our own wellbeing and happiness, as well as the wellbeing and happiness of life around us.
5. When we choose to live our values and stop eating other creatures, we reduce the burden of cause and effect that is the natural law of our universe. The word "karma" is in the everyday vocabulary of many people around the globe and is intrinsic to our discussion of the benefits of

being vegetarian. The karma resulting from the taking of plant life – which has limited consciousness and volition, as opposed to animal life with its higher awareness and will – is much less severe.

Remember the child who knew that picking a flower would not get her in as much trouble as hurting a cat, which in turn brought about less punishment than harming a person? That same understanding applies here. We exist on what can be visualized as 'a ladder of consciousness' with humankind on the top rung and plant life on the bottom. This concept is easy to understand simply by observing how life around us operates every day. Among all species, only humans have the ability to do advanced reasoning, to question our existence and wonder about the universe, to seek to understand the mysteries and meaning of life and death.

While taking any life at all has consequences, killing lower forms of life naturally results in fewer consequences. The karmic burden of eating plants is analogous to climbing a steep mountain wearing a T-shirt, shorts, and hiking boots – easily done – while the karmic burden of eating animals is like making that climb with boots of iron and a very heavy backpack – virtually impossible. We want to divest ourselves of the weight of karma resulting from our participation in the deaths of animals.

So why be vegetarian? The answer is straightforward: for the Earth, for our health, to reduce the suffering of animals, to increase wellbeing and compassion, and to lighten the heavy load of karma that killing piles upon us. We can choose a way of living that benefits every aspect of life.

VEGETARIANISM: A HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE



Learn how to see.
Realise that everything
connects to everything else.

*Leonardo da Vinci*⁸



In the past twenty years across much of the Western world, stereotypes of vegetarians have crumbled like week-old pastries. Skinny. Malnourished. Sickly. No, no, and no. Today, many people, even if they personally do not want to stop eating meat, acknowledge that eating less meat is healthy. Certainly vegetarians have an abundance of science to back them up. In 2004, the World Health Organization (WHO), working with the United Nations, issued a document titled "Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health" which stated that, across the globe, nations need to "increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and legumes, whole grains and nuts."⁹ Doing so, the report states, is good for both the individual and the planet. We'll explore how being vegetarian is good for our Earth further on in this book, but let's begin with how it is good for humans.



Lowering the risk of chronic diseases

Heart attack, stroke, diabetes and various cancers are among the top ten deadliest diseases in our world.¹⁰ We have clear evidence that a plant-based or plant-and-dairy-based diet is a powerful tool in helping us avoid these illnesses. Health organizations, scientific studies, and governmental agencies are urging us to eat whole, plant-based foods. In doing so, we increase our chances of living longer and healthier lives and avoiding these killers as well as health problems such as high blood pressure, obesity, and food-borne diseases.¹¹

We have a digital world and libraries full of books that verify the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. When we read the research, our understanding and commitment is often given a great boost. The following are a few suggestions:

- *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted* by T. Colin Campbell, PhD and Thomas M. Campbell II, MD.¹² Written in clear, informal language, this book examines a study done in the early 1970s involving 880 million Chinese citizens, a study ordered by Premier Chou En-lai as he was dying of cancer. It is a powerful and comprehensive indictment of diets rooted in meat and dairy products, based on “the most ambitious biomedical research project ever undertaken.”
- *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer.¹³ A combination of storytelling and science, Foer’s work examines the “moral dimensions” and environmental consequences of our food choices. Be prepared for some difficult scenes

as the author takes his readers into the reality of the lives and deaths of animals on factory farms and in the massive trawling nets of the fishing industry. While this text is informative for even long-time vegetarians, it may be most useful for those who are wondering why and how to create their own guidelines regarding eating animals.

- *Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease: The Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven, Nutrition-Based Cure* by Caldwell Esselstyn, MD.¹⁴ Written by an internationally known surgeon, this book makes a case for both the prevention and possibly reversal of heart disease through diet and includes helpful vegetarian recipes.
- *Cowspiracy*, directed by Kip Anderson, is a movie that uses statistics from United Nations data and other reputable scientific sources to discuss the environmental devastation of meat production and the overfishing of our oceans. The film makes an excellent case for the claim that the single most important action anyone can take to help the Earth is to be vegetarian. *Cowspiracy* has its own website with an excellent 'Facts' section at <http://www.cowspiracy.com/facts/> and there is a companion e-book *Sustainability Secret*. All provide startling information on the ecological impact of animal agriculture.¹⁵ A successor film *What the Health* highlights the health issues.¹⁶
- *Forks Over Knives*, directed by Lee Fulkerson,¹⁷ "examines the profound claim that most, if not all, of the degenerative diseases that afflict us can be controlled, or even reversed, by rejecting animal-based and processed foods."

In our search for vibrant health, what we choose to chew and swallow plays a major role. Our bodies need to constantly regenerate and repair themselves, a job that is much more difficult – and sometimes impossible – when we fill ourselves with fatty, processed, and sugary foods. On the other hand, reaching for the multitude of plants and fruits that fill our markets is a vital step towards glowing health. Over and over again, we've heard "We are what we eat." Eating plants, which are naturally loaded with vitamins, minerals, and fibre, creates bodies filled with – guess what – vitamins, minerals, and fibre, all of which prevent and deter a host of diseases, including many of the most common and deadly.



Basic body design: built to be herbivores

Knowing that a plant-based diet is healthy may still leave a question about whether it's natural for humans to thrive on a vegetarian diet. Are humans biologically herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores? Do we have physical characteristics most like those of the herbivores, the carnivores, or the omnivores found in the animal kingdom? By comparing the design of the human body with that of non-humans, perhaps we can answer this question.

Let's start with our teeth. Of course, teeth are all about food, and we sometimes hear a justification for eating meat posed as: "That's why we have canine teeth! To tear into meat like animals do!" But look up a few pictures of the mouths of herbivores like the hippopotamus or almost-herbivores like the gorilla

(which is 98% herbivore, with a small percentage of insects added to the diet) and we find that these plant lovers have huge canines, which obviously *aren't* in their mouths for ripping into meat. Yes, we have teeth labelled 'canines'; so do other animals that are vegetarian. Human canines are much reduced in size, which allows for the side-to-side chewing motion seen in herbivores but not in carnivores or omnivores.¹⁸ Rather than having a mouthful of long, lethal canines useful in slashing meat or through the hides of prey, the few and comparatively blunt canines of humans are well adapted to crunching foods such as apples, nuts, and carrots.

Herbivorous animals, like humans, have differently hinged jaws that enable these side movements of chewing and grinding food thoroughly. The jaws of carnivores and omnivores "only open and shut in an up and down motion," adding strength and stability to their bites through flesh.¹⁹ The mouths of plant-eating animals and humans also have well-developed salivary glands in order to predigest food.

In addition, our saliva contains ptyalin, a chemical used to break down starches. Meat eating animals, however, lack ptyalin in their saliva because their digestion takes place predominantly in the stomach with strong hydrochloric acid.

As well as being very acidic – a condition which helps break down proteins and destroy bacteria living on decaying flesh – the stomachs of mammalian meat eaters are huge. Large

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a major role.*

stomach size works well for an animal that typically kills, on average, about once a week. Carnivores also have short intestines, allowing for quick expulsion of food, while the intestines of herbivorous animals and humans are much longer, giving more time for the complex breakdown of carbohydrates.

In addition, carnivores lap water with their tongues (think of a cat), while herbivores take liquids by suction. Imagine working outside on a hot day and then being offered a cool drink of water. Would you lap or gulp that water?

Carnivores don't sweat through their skin, but rather control body heat through panting and rapid breathing. Humans and herbivores, such as horses, sweat through their skin.

Finally, the long teeth and retractable claws of carnivores are perfectly designed to help them chase, take down, and devour prey. Some herbivores such as rhinos and bulls are fierce and are equipped with intimidating weapons, but these are used in defence and/or in mating displays rather than as aids in running down prey. We humans are not physically well designed to chase down our food.

However, let's be objective. With the ability to make tools and weapons and to build fires, perhaps it could be argued that humans can eat meat without being physically adapted to killing and eating raw flesh.²⁰ We can make weapons to kill animals and fire to cook the raw meat that would putrify in our long intestines if left uncooked. Certainly, we could make such an argument, but what we *can't* reasonably do is declare that human bodies are *designed*, by either evolution or a Creator, to capture, devour, and digest meat.



What about dairy products?

Cold milk. Creamy yogurt. Cucumber raita. Those are just the beginning of the very long list we could make of delicious foods made from the milk of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats, and other animals. Hundreds of different cheeses, ghee, ice cream, whipped cream, clotted cream, lassi, and kefir are also produced from various kinds of milk. Lacto-vegetarians eat and drink these foods because animals are not killed to obtain them. For many people, especially small dairy farmers and village dwellers, dairy products are relatively inexpensive sources of protein and calcium.

Yet the issues around the production and use of dairy products, especially from cows, are sometimes troubling. The health benefits, environmental costs, and ethical issues deserve a closer look, and then individuals can make informed decisions.

Milk from lactating animals provides easy-to-get protein and calcium. Each cup of cow, buffalo, or goat milk²¹ has 8–9 grams of protein. In comparison, almond milk has only 2 grams.²² However, hemp milk has somewhat more, 5 grams.²³ Soy milk and milk made from split peas both have about the same amount of protein as cow milk, 8–9 grams per cup.^{24,25} Hemp and other non-dairy milks are fortified with calcium so that, like cow milk, a cup provides up to 50% of your daily needs.²⁶ Buffalo milk has 20% more calcium than goat milk and 33% more than cow milk.²⁷

Everyone has the right to choose how strict he or she wants to be, where their parameters lie. But we can develop those parameters with open eyes, understanding what our choices involve and support.

If we're using dairy products, let's make sure that the nutrition we're getting is as clean as possible. A growing concern regarding dairy products and health is the use of antibiotics and hormones to treat diseases and increase milk production in non-organic dairy animals, especially cows. Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone or Somatotropin (rBGH or rBST), a genetically modified version of a hormone that cows naturally produce, is administered to cows to increase milk production beyond normal levels. These higher levels of production come at a cost to the cow. One of the many problems they contribute to is mastitis, an infection of the udder. To counter the mastitis, antibiotics are routinely used. Because of possible links to several cancers in humans and because of the harmful effects on dairy animals, rBGH is banned in the European Union, Canada, Australia, and numerous other countries. In the United States, this artificial growth hormone and the accompanying use of antibiotics continues on some non-organic dairy farms.²⁸

Supporters of organic dairy practices tell us that it really is possible to treat animals better and to have healthier milk. For example, problems with mastitis could be reduced by better diets, cleaner housing, more space, and less automated milking.²⁹ Efforts in the USA are currently focused on creating genetically modified cows resistant to mastitis.³⁰ We know that steps to improve the lives of animals and increase the safety

WHAT ABOUT DAIRY PRODUCTS?

of our food generally come with an increased cost, and as consumers, we have to make choices that consider our priorities and our budget.

The standards for humane and healthy treatment of dairy animals vary. Of serious concern in India are cattle left to forage for themselves who graze from rubbish dumps and eat plastic bags. One study of milk in Uttar Pradesh revealed dairy contaminated with detergent, starch, and artificial whitener.³¹ The increase in dairy *factories* – as opposed to farms – around the world has bred a range of problems. Animals kept indoors all year round can become lame, develop mastitis, and show unnaturally aggressive behaviour. Yet factory dairy farming is growing rapidly, with cows kept enclosed virtually all their lives. For example, in Denmark in 2001, 85% of farms were grazing cows on grass, but by 2010 this number had been reduced to just 35%.³²

Vegetarians who choose to eat dairy products and also want to support kind and healthy treatment of animals have some options. Visit a local farm and see if the animals have access to fresh air, natural feed sources, and clean stalls. Call the farmer who makes a favourite goat cheese and ask how much recovery time adult females are given between pregnancies. If possible, choose organic milk products to avoid the hormones and antibiotics that are routinely used in non-organic commercial dairy operations. In some countries, we can look for the label “certified humane raised and handled.”

Choosing dairy products from creatures that have been well treated and cared for is possible. Being informed helps us

decide where we want to draw our own lines. Do we want to be particular about the dairy foods we bring into our homes? Would we also be particular when eating with friends, on business, or travelling? What about becoming vegan? Should we stop wearing leather shoes or driving cars with leather seats? Or refuse to eat honey, as strict vegans do? The ability to make choices is one of the great gifts of being human, and one of the great responsibilities.



How do we get our protein?

Imagine letting family and friends know about our decision to stop eating meat. “Mom, Dad (Victoria, Kapil, Devaki, or Felipe), I’ve become a vegetarian.” Unless these folks are already familiar with a plant-and-dairy-based diet, they are likely to respond with initial concerns, the most common of which is “How will you get your protein?”

The concern over getting enough protein reflects a lack of knowledge about nutrition, shared by meat eaters and vegetarians alike. This lack of knowledge is the *real* deficiency. The problem of protein is easily solved: if we eat a balanced diet with sufficient calories, we’ll get enough protein.³³ Women who are pregnant or nursing generally need to increase their calories as well as their protein.³⁴ A half-cup of dal and small serving of naan bread will easily provide 25 grams of protein plus extra calories.^{35,36} Or try a bagel, a couple of tablespoons of peanut butter, and a cup of soy milk for about the same 25 grams. Vegetarian/vegan athletes at even the highest levels of competition, such as triathlete Austin Barbisch (winner of

HOW DO WE GET OUR PROTEIN?

the 2014 Run Like the Wind 24-Hour Race), have shown us that meatless diets can produce winning results on the field, in the water, and around the track.³⁷ We don't need meat-based protein for good health.

Even lifelong or decades-long vegetarians are sometimes mistaken about protein needs, believing that we have to put extra effort into making sure we and our families eat plenty of protein-rich foods such as beans, lentils, oats, nuts, soy, quinoa, or dairy products. As healthy and tasty as these foods are, they're not the only ones on the protein shelf. While a half cup of kidney beans will net seven grams of protein, a medium potato topped with a small serving (half cup) of spinach will net six grams. We can dish up a portion of tofu for ten grams of protein and gain another eight grams by adding an ear of corn and a medium artichoke to our dinner. Essentially, the possibilities are as bountiful and varied as the world's gardens themselves.

The idea that vegetarians must work diligently to eat correct combinations of foods which 'complement' each other has discouraged some people from becoming vegetarians or

DELICIOUS PROTEINS!

Hummus	Seeds	Edamame	Peas & Beans
Quinoa	Nuts	Spinach	Dairy Milks
Artichokes	Oatmeal	Asparagus	Almond Milk
Seitan	Tempeh	Soy	Hemp Milk

vegans. However, Jeff Novick, MS, RD, and other researchers have concluded that, without a doubt, eating whole, natural plant foods provides an abundance of protein and essential vitamins; we have no need to worry about combining this food with that food.³⁸

Many vegetarians embraced the concept of complementary protein when Francis Moore Lappé published her 1971 best-selling *Diet for a Small Planet*, which led the way in exposing the environmental impact of meat production. Lappé originally declared that particular foods must be combined in one meal in order to have a full range of amino acids and, therefore, adequate protein. In later editions of the book, she altered her view on this matter.³⁹ Unfortunately, by the time Lappé changed her thinking her first declaration had been widely repeated and published, and this may have discouraged some people from adopting a diet that helps fight heart disease, strokes, diabetes, obesity, and some forms of cancer. However, as research on nutrition has developed, this myth is finally fading. Even the U.S. Department of Agriculture declares, in a section of its official website devoted to healthy eating tips, "Combining different protein sources in the same meal is not necessary."⁴⁰

LET'S GET PRACTICAL



People eat meat and think
"I'll be as strong as an ox."
They forget that the ox eats grass.

Pino Caruso (Italian actor)⁴¹



FAQs about being vegetarian

Switching from a diet that includes meat to one that is plant-based or plant-and-dairy-based naturally makes us wonder how many other folks are doing the same thing and brings up questions about our overall health and about the simple pleasure of eating as a vegetarian. Let's tackle some of those questions.

How many vegetarians are there in the world anyway?

The stats on this differ, sometimes significantly, depending on the source and how 'vegetarian' is defined. The number of vegetarians is around 10% worldwide.⁴² Most of the numbers by country are estimates, but in general we can say that India has the most vegetarians of any country – 32% to 40%, depending

on whether those who eat eggs are included. In Taiwan, with its Buddhist vegetarian tradition, 13% follow a vegetarian diet all or part of the time while in Japan the figure is around 5%. Italy reportedly has a higher percentage of vegetarians than any other country in the European Union – about 10% – and

The number of vegetarians is around 10% worldwide.

Portugal at approximately 0.3% the fewest, though Spain is close with around 0.5%. The figures in the United Kingdom range from 3% strict vegetarian or vegan to around 10% partly vegetarian, with young people aged 16–24 increasingly being vegetarian or vegan. In the USA more than 3% of the population are strict vegetarians or vegans,⁴³ while considerably more (13%) now describe themselves as vegetarian or vegan.⁴⁴ The number of vegetarians worldwide seems to be increasing⁴⁵ – certainly the number of vegans is rising fast.⁴⁶

Will I be tired all the time?

No! Assuming no unrelated health issues, you will likely feel more energy instead of less. If you have vegetarian friends, ask them how they feel. If you don't, think about the millions of people on earth who work many hours a day without eating animal-based foods. Carpenters, professors, engineers, nurses, librarians, farmers, and salespeople put in long days, year after year, without consuming meat. From Hindu construction workers clambering up and down scaffolds all day long to campesinos working on the land who avoid meat simply because of the cost, to wealthy business owners and world-class vegan/

vegetarian athletes, the world abounds with energetic, hard-working vegetarians. Their stamina is notable.

Isn't it hard for vegetarians to get B12?

In today's world, getting enough B12 is hard for everyone. Vitamin B12 is produced by bacteria in water, soil, and guts of animals, including humans. But how often do we drink from a stream or pull carrots from the garden and eat them with a little dirt clinging to the sides? Or pick a strawberry and just brush the dirt off a little before popping it into our mouth? Our animals don't often drink from streams, munch on grass growing in a pasture, or peck through the dirt for bugs either. Even if they do, pesticides used on plants and grasses kills the available B12, and antibiotics routinely given to animals inhibit the ability of B12 to flourish. Their sources of B12 are almost universally through feed supplements. Almost everyone, vegan and carnivore alike, is in need of a Vitamin B12 supplement.⁴⁷

We don't need very much B12, but we do need it regularly for red blood cells, nerve fibres in our brain and spinal cord, and for DNA synthesis. B12 is available through dairy products, fortified cereals, and plant-based milks as well as numerous vegetarian supplements. Look for one that's chewable in order to absorb more of the good stuff.⁴⁸ *B12 is really important. If it's not in your pantry, go get some!*

How will I get the iron I need? Doesn't meat have a lot more iron than vegetables?

Most of us know that we must have adequate iron for our brains and nervous systems to develop and function well, so iron in

our food is important. Meat has both heme (from haemoglobin and myoglobin, found only in animal tissues) and nonheme iron, while veggies have only nonheme. Heme iron is more readily absorbed by the body than nonheme. While this seems to be a plus for meat eaters, it may turn out to be good news for vegetarians. The American Association of Cancer Research reported in 2011 that "Red meat and processed meat intake is associated with a risk of colorectal cancer, a major cause of death in affluent countries . . . evidence supports the hypothesis that heme iron present in meat promotes colorectal cancer."⁴⁹

In a November 2015 article linking meat with cancer, *Time* magazine stated, "A larger share of heme iron is absorbed by the body than nonheme, and in the time the stuff spends hanging around, it can reach the colon, causing potentially toxic reactions."⁵⁰

*Vitamin C
helps us
absorb iron.*

Our bodies absorb iron more easily when we're also eating vitamin C, which is abundant in vegetarian diets because it's found in large quantities in foods we eat frequently –

nuts, legumes, fruits, and veggies. Dr Reed Mangels in his article "Iron in the Vegan Diet" includes the statement "Iron absorption is increased markedly by eating foods containing vitamin C along with foods containing iron. Vegetarians do not have a higher incidence of iron deficiency than do meat eaters."⁵¹ When we eat a varied diet full of fruits and vegetables of all colours – nutritionists like to use the phrase "eat the rainbow" – we naturally include high-in-vitamin-C sources such as strawberries, oranges, papayas, broccoli, kiwi, and bell peppers in a diet that has foods which are high in iron. Dark

green leafy vegetables, dried peas or beans, and tofu, are just a few of those iron-rich foods.

We can explore an overflowing cornucopia, remembering that health professionals around the globe encourage us to heap our plates with fruits and veggies, preferably organically grown, and ladle smaller portions of whole grains and beans beside them. Unless a person is pregnant or menstruating or has a particular medical condition requiring more than normal amounts of iron, a varied diet will include sufficient amounts of iron. One more thing we can relax about!

What about vitamin D3?

Many people worldwide, vegetarian or not, are deficient in this important “sunshine” vitamin these days.⁵² We can easily find a vegetarian supplement that will supply bone-building and disease-fighting Vitamin D.

Will I miss meat?

For a few weeks or a few months, yes, you might. Or you might not. The first few times you say no to an offer of a hamburger, sausage, or fillet of fish, you may be making your choice based on resolve rather than taste buds, though many new vegetarians just dive with delight into an abundance of foods they’d never thought to explore. They don’t miss the meat, especially meat that is bloody on the plate or at the bone.

Will my food taste as good as meat?

You be the judge. Some vegetarians enjoy meat substitutes made from seitan or soy; some never go near those substitutes. Leaf

through vegetarian cookbooks or look online for countless ideas; then pick a few recipes to try. Cook up a batch of eggless blueberry pancakes and douse them with maple syrup, or grill portabella mushrooms with onions and serve over Arborio rice laced with saffron. In other words, play around with the thousands of choices many of us are lucky enough to have in today's markets.

Don't vegetarians, and especially vegans, have a reputation for being self-righteous? What's up with that?

Rabbi David Wolpe addressed this issue with insight and humour in an article, titled "What Meat Eaters Get Wrong About Vegetarians," published on the website for *Time* magazine:

Friends, self-righteousness is a universal quality. Whatever habits people hold dear, they tend to discuss in moral terms. So yes, some vegetarians slide into self-righteousness, but have you ever heard hunters defend their hobby? Or meat eaters talk about the design of the human body, digestive system, and manifest evolutionary advantages? I have had people tell me they cannot be vegetarians because they are 'foodies' with the same pride as if announcing they are relief workers in the Congo.⁵³

Rabbi Wolpe is telling us that humans in general tend to be preachy about their beliefs. Vegetarians and vegans aren't unique in this way and arguably aren't any more prone to self-righteousness than other groups strongly committed to an idea or a cause. Even though some people may decry self-righteous vegetarians while holding on to some righteousness in their

own attitudes, we don't want to let their example guide our behaviour. By giving up eating animals, we feel strongly that we've taken the moral high road, but let's remember that other roads run up the mountain, too, and a few of those could be labelled "acceptance of others' views," "giving up judgment," or "humility."

Isn't it hard to be a vegetarian when you're travelling?

Honest answer? Sometimes it is. But we learn to make road trips with coolers on the back seat, tuck protein bars into our carry-on luggage, and scout out natural food stores and veggie-friendly restaurants. We adapt, and often have a grand time doing so. Think of exploring some part of a city you'd otherwise never visit, tracking down rumours of a vegan chocolate cake. Or planning a vacation based on access to great vegetarian food.

In addition, vegetarians have a natural bond with one another that can transcend politics, social standing, and religious views. Because vegetarianism is gaining favour and respect around the world – especially with young people – we can end up with a 'family' in unexpected places.

Fortunately, some products common in vegetarian diets are also commonly available – salads, rice, pizza, bagels, yogurt, nuts, fruit, and, very importantly, chocolate 😊. We may not get to eat what we want when we want it, but we can choose to see challenging situations as adventures rather than burdens.

Vegetarians have a natural bond that can transcend politics, social standing, and religious views.

Millions of vegetarians who love to or need to travel wouldn't dream of compromising deeply held beliefs about vegetarianism because finding good food can be harder than normal while on the road or in the sky.

Some parts of the world are easier for vegetarians to navigate than others; in general, the globe is becoming much more veg-friendly. Internet access has been a great help for travellers seeking vegetarian food or wanting to double-check ingredients, especially in a foreign country where the language may be unfamiliar or unknown. Even though we're willing to take the time and ask our waiter details about menu items, sometimes the staff just don't know the answers and don't pursue finding them; however, access to any smart phone can usually resolve those questions pretty quickly.

Confused about what's in *escamole* and unable to speak Spanish? A couple of minutes online will let you know this dish, resembling rice, is actually made from ant eggs. Or perhaps you've heard that *casu marzu* means "rotten cheese" in Italian, and you're thinking about trying some. In a few taps, you can see that it contains live insect larvae. Or perhaps you're used to the handy red or green dot systems used in India to easily identify vegetarian foods and you're travelling in the USA for the first time. As a vegetarian, you'll want to read the small ingredients lists on the backs of packages. If you're doing this with cheese, you'll notice the ingredient "rennet." Google can quickly tell you that rennet is an extract from the fourth stomach of a young calf, goat, or sheep, so you'll need to look for the label "microbial enzymes" or "vegetarian rennet" and stay away from plain "enzymes" or "rennet."

FAQS ABOUT BEING VEGETARIAN

On a back road or broad boulevard in a part of the world you've never explored before? Want to know if anyone can recommend a place to calm the stomach's growls? Search your phone's veggie app for restaurants, or access websites that identify vegetarian restaurants, complete with customer reviews. Some travellers find it helpful to bookmark blogs posted by vegetarians in areas where they're planning to travel; then accessing those blogs becomes even easier when stomachs begin to grumble. Of course, most of us have friends who've wandered – either purposefully or not – around the globe, and the ease with which we can keep in touch digitally makes getting their suggestions easier. We can take advantage of the expanding web of vegetarians we know personally or digitally.

The internet continues to make travelling as vegetarians easier and easier. If we're trying to buy food in a store where we have absolutely no clue about the language, we can use online translation services to turn incomprehensible words into our own vocabulary. Find the ingredients list, take a picture, and let translation programs zap it quickly into German or Hindi or Punjabi or Spanish or English or ...

In spite of how much easier it's becoming to connect with veg-friendly food sources, we all know entertaining stories about restaurants where ordering vegetables is "like swearing at the wait staff." One amused vegetarian reported that, after ordering a serving of vegetables, a confused waiter told her, "But vegetables are what meat eats." Another server, when asked if being vegetarian was a problem in his restaurant, replied, "Only for you, madam, only for you."

We smile and continue to travel as vegetarians.



Vegan and vegetarian athletes

Sprinting down the track, straining under a bench press, racing a bicycle faster and faster along a path, slicing quick, clean strokes through the water – athletes use their body's power to accomplish what many of us only sit and admire. Those who compete, especially at national or international levels, focus intently on every aspect of their performance, whether physical, mental, or emotional. Naturally, diet is a major part of this focus. Athletes and their trainers are constantly striving to learn more about which foods contribute to enhanced speed, endurance, strength, flexibility, and concentration. Additionally, professional and world-class athletes – just like the rest of us – are concerned about longevity and optimal health over the entire course of their lives, not just the years during which they compete. So we find that some athletes in virtually every sport have chosen to become vegetarian or vegan.

The list of such athletes could take up pages and pages, but we'll begin with just a sampling of the names of competitors who are now or were outstanding in their fields. With a bit of further research, readers could easily add many others.⁵⁴

- Patrick Baboumian – bodybuilder, won title of Germany's Strongest Man in 2011
- Austin Barbisch – ultramarathon champion
- Tia Blanco – professional surfer
- Mac Danzig – mixed martial artist, retired
- Meagan Duhamel – pair skater, winner of two Olympic medals and numerous titles

VEGAN AND VEGETARIAN ATHLETES

- Mika Ireste – competitive roller derby player, vegan since age four
- Scott Jurek – one of the world’s leading ultramarathon (100 miles or more) runners and author of *Eat and Run: My Unlikely Journey to Marathon Greatness*⁵⁵
- Billie Jean King – won 39 Grand Slam titles during the course of her career in tennis
- Sushil Kumar – wrestler, won medals in both 2008 and 2012 Olympics⁵⁶
- Anil Kumble – cricket champion⁵⁷
- Carl Lewis – Olympic gold medal winner, track and field
- David Meyer – won two World Championship gold medals in Brazilian Jiu-jitsu in addition to numerous gold medals in national competitions⁵⁸
- Martina Navratilova – held World No. 1 ranking as a professional tennis player longer than any other person in the history of the sport⁵⁹
- Fiona Oakes – World Record holder, fastest female to run a marathon on all seven continents⁶⁰
- Weia Reinboud – record-holding track and field athlete in Masters division
- Robert Parrish – professional basketball player, retired. Elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame 2003
- Michael Zigomanis – professional ice hockey player, retired

We all want strong, flexible, healthy bodies. We all want to be able to enjoy hiking, swimming, biking, dancing, golfing, playing soccer, doing yoga, or any of the myriad other activities

that bring us pleasure and a sense of satisfaction, that enhance our daily lives. Knowing that some elite athletes choose vegetarianism gives confidence to those of us who generally exercise for fun or health rather than as a career. We can smile as we sweat, realizing that being vegetarian is a way to both live our ethics and build fit bodies, whether we're professional athletes or not.



Hidden in plain sight: animal ingredients in surprising foods

Wandering the aisles of a grocery store, we see shelf after shelf of food we no longer want to eat – cookies with eggs, beans with lard, sauces, stews and soups made with animal flesh. But as we take a positive approach, we also notice the heaping produce section with bins of apples, mangoes, coconuts, lychees, pomegranates, bananas, oranges . . . on and on, and that's just the fruit section. Stroll by the veggies and choose from potatoes, onions, cucumbers, broccoli, mushrooms, eggplants, okra, peppers, and many more.

Then we arrive at those aisles with bottles, jars, boxes, and cans, and things get more complicated. No worries; practice and awareness simplify our grocery list. After checking ingredients a few times, we know automatically which brands we want – which pasta sauce, crackers, and cheeses are completely vegetarian. Of course, since food selections and ingredients are constantly rotating and changing, it's important to stay heads up. If we live in or are travelling through a country with an easily understandable labelling system for veggie products,

we can quickly see which foods fit our diet requirements and which ones can be automatically eliminated.

Here's some ingredient and product information to keep in mind:

- *Albumen* – This protein component – most commonly derived from egg whites but also from animal blood, cow's milk, plants or seeds – is used extensively in processed foods, especially pastries and baked goods.
- *Carmine/Cochineal extract* (red dye) – Used in candies, pastries, and some brands of yogurt, this red or purplish-red pigment is made from dried female scale insects. Females are used because their abdomens, which house fertilized eggs, are the most carmine-rich part of the insects and are separated from the rest of the body to be mined for that carmine, a red colour often labelled "natural red 4" or simply "natural colour."⁶¹ Suddenly, that pink yogurt doesn't look so pretty...
- *Cheese* – As discussed in the FAQ section, many cheeses contain rennet, an extract from the stomach of calves, goats, or sheep. Some labels will blatantly state "rennet," "rennin," or "animal rennet," but others insert the vague term "enzymes," which may or may not be from animal sources. To be confident that we're eating cheese without rennet, we look for the terms "vegetarian rennet" or "microbial enzymes."
- *Caesar dressing* – The small fish "anchovy" gives this salad topping its salty taste. Vegetarian/vegan alternatives do

exist, but unless you're sure of the source, simply buy or order a different dressing and leave the fish to swim another day.

- *Dashi* – A common ingredient in Japanese soups (including miso soup), dipping sauces, and simmered dishes, dashi is usually made from fish, though it can also be made from kelp. Rather than assume the salty miso you love is vegetarian, check the label for ingredients. Finding miso without dashi in a grocery store generally isn't difficult, but vetting Japanese foods in non-vegetarian restaurants requires care.
- *French onion soup* – Beef stock is a classic ingredient in this dish, as well as Parmesan and Gruyere cheeses containing rennet.
- *Gummy treats* or *gumdrops* – Children especially like the sweet gummy 'bears', vitamins and Starburst candies so popular for snacking and as Halloween treats. However, these sugary snacks contain gelatin, a protein obtained by boiling skin, ligaments, tendons, and/or bones with water.⁶² Knowing that, they don't sound much like a treat after all . . .
- *Ice Cream* – Oh, no! Many kinds of ice cream contain eggs. Fortunately, when you're craving a cone of that sweet, cold dairy product, you can almost always find it without eggs, too. Serve it to non-vegetarian friends, and they probably won't even taste the difference, no matter which flavour they choose. Vegans appreciate that more and more ice cream is being made from soy or coconut milks. These are often so good they disappear from the

freezer faster than the others. For a lighter frozen treat, reach for sorbet, that icy combination of fruit, sweetener, and water or juice.

- *Jello* – Mix together gelatin, water, sugar, and food colouring to come up with this jiggly dessert. Just like gummy treats, this food has substantial portions of animal by-products. We can make this a cruelty-free dessert by using arrowroot powder (from the rootstock of several tropical plants) or agar agar (from algae).
- *Kimchi* – A staple in Korea and commonly eaten in other countries, these pickled vegetables are often fermented with fish sauce or dried shrimp. Reading labels will help you find a brand without seafood.
- *Marshmallows* – Roasted over flames and then slipped between graham crackers and topped with pieces of chocolate, marshmallow s'mores (as in "I'll have some more!") are synonymous with campfires in the USA. You'll also find them floating on cups of hot cocoa, in boxed cereals, or in bowls of jello. Containing gelatin and dried egg whites, traditional marshmallows fall far short of vegetarian standards. However, vegan alternatives are becoming easier to find, either online or in grocery stores. At least one major chain in the United States has begun advertising "Vegan Marshmallows!"
- *Refried beans* – Lard has traditionally been used in refried beans for Mexican foods. When buying cans of refried beans, it's easy to simply read the ingredients and screen for lard; when eating at a restaurant, getting accurate information becomes more problematic. Some

vegetarians question the restaurant staff closely; others use a veggie restaurant app or web search to find a place that states they serve beans without lard. Fortunately, because of the growing numbers of customers who would prefer this and also because lard is an added expense, more and more Mexican restaurants are cooking their beans without adding animal fat.

- *Rice and Risotto* – In both Mexican and Italian restaurants, rice and risotto are sometimes cooked with chicken stock.
- *Thai curry* – Fish sauce is a common ingredient used to make the fragrant curries served in Thai restaurants. However, some restaurants do offer curries without fish sauce. If so, that option will often appear on the menu with a notation such as “strict vegetarian available.”
- *Vitamin D3* – D3 supplements are made from non-vegetarian, vegetarian, and vegan sources – fish liver oils, lanolin (from sheep wool), or lichen. Vegetarians make sure their D3 source is from lanolin rather than fish oil, and vegans look for lichen-based Vitamin D3.
- *Worcestershire sauce* – If you’re grilling veggie burgers and then dousing them with this traditional sauce – uh-oh; you’ve just added anchovies (fish) to what you thought was a meatless meal. Vegetarian Worcestershire sauces do exist. Here’s a mantra to help scout out the right brands: Read labels, read labels, read labels.

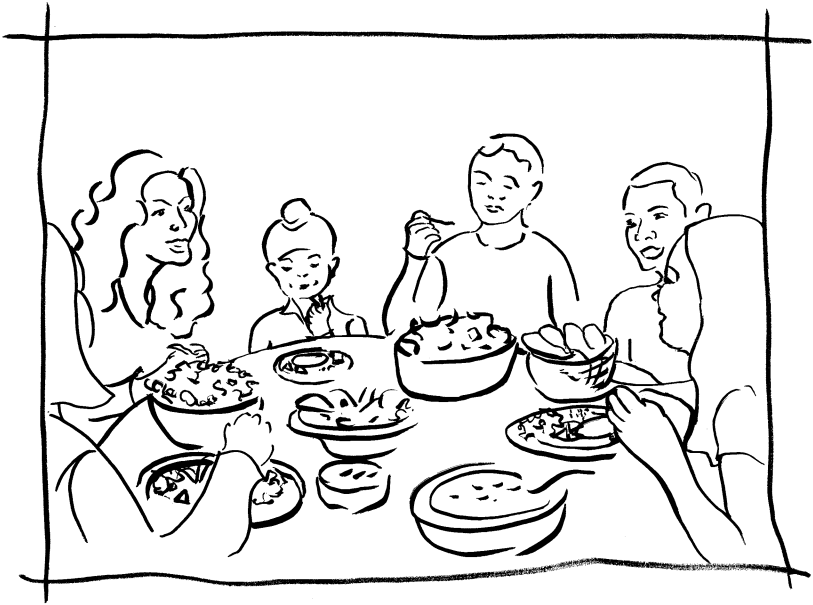
*Read labels,
read labels,
read labels.*

THE WEB OF FAMILY AND SOCIETY



I'm not telling you it's going to be easy;
I'm telling you it's going to be worth it.

Art Williams



Gathering around the table

The zest of cumin or ginger, the smell of garlic or coriander – these ancient spices still fill modern kitchens. The family is seated around a table laden with aloo gobi, shahi paneer, chana masala, and chicken tikka. The naan is being broken and dipped into sweet and tangy mango chutney; mint lassis have been poured. Mamma and Papa, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and cousins of all ages are gathered to enjoy being together, perhaps to celebrate or to remember.

How is this scene coloured if one of the family – perhaps the youngest son home from university and newly vegetarian, or the new daughter-in-law raised in a vegetarian household – objects to traditional meat dishes? If father says, “Beta, you

must try the chicken tikka; it is mother's specialty," how does that son or daughter-in-law respond respectfully and lovingly and still hold their own values?

Or consider the scene at another family table set with a traditional meal from the southern part of the USA. Admire the bounty of foods – two bowls of freshly picked butterbeans – one spotted with bacon grease, the other just plain ole beans, water, and salt – warm biscuits made from scratch with white flour and vegetable shortening, platters of sliced home-grown tomatoes and corn on the cob, fluffy mashed potatoes with butter pooling on top, and in the centre, crunchy fried legs and breasts and wings of chickens. I once sat down to this meal and was grateful to see the accommodations made for me, the vegetarian daughter visiting from thousands of miles away.

It had been two decades since I'd eaten any form of meat, yet as we sat together before saying grace, my father, who simply couldn't fully accept that I'd become vegetarian, asked, "Beck, do you eat chicken?" I had to grin as one sister, thinking I'd be hurt because Dad had once again forgotten something so important to me, jumped to my defence, saying, "Dad, she hasn't eaten chicken for twenty years! Get used to it!"

How does the conversation flow as the food is eaten? Do carnivores and vegetarians clash over differing philosophies? Or are boundaries and preferences respected?

How our families and friends respond when we choose to become vegetarian matters to us. We encounter encouragement, opposition, scepticism, admiration, and disdain – often sitting around one table. Social tides shift just a little when

we make such a huge decision, especially when that decision is made based on compassion, health – both personal and environmental – and ethics. Others sometimes feel that their own eating choices are being judged. This sense of judgment, whether accurate or not, can create a hotbed of reaction and resentment. On the other hand, it can also provide a flicker or a flame of inspiration.

Gracefully being vegetarian in the midst of people who aren't requires some of the same internal qualities that we wish to cultivate in the world around us – gentleness, tolerance, commitment, and respect for others' opinions. We sooner or later learn, sometimes only after pulling a really big foot out of our mouths, that no one needs a lecture on our deeper understanding of the virtue of living without eating animals. Those who really want to know will ask. Realizing that we can't force understanding is an important step. When we catch that concept, we can relax and, while staying fully within our own beliefs, respect the fact that others have the right to disagree. In this way, we cultivate harmony with our families as well as friends and work groups; we continue to participate in 'table fellowship,' creating and sustaining the bonds that all of us need – humans and animals alike – so that we feel tethered, connected, to one another.

Practically, how do vegetarians remain involved in the social experience of sharing food when it seems to our meat-eating friends and family that we've left their table entirely? How do we keep from alienating those we want to hold close? Isn't it terribly hurtful to tell Grandma that we can no longer eat the

cake we grew up begging for or to tell Auntie that the chicken pakoras we once loved are no longer wanted? Where's the kindness and compassion in hurting another's feelings?

It's not unusual to hear from beginning vegetarians that they can't face disappointing family members by insisting on strictly vegetarian foods. Being prepared for such almost-inevitable scenarios would probably be helpful for any aspiring vegetarian. We can be tempted to simply 'be polite' and accept or pretend to accept non-vegetarian food. This almost inevitably leads to confusion and only delays the honest conversations we need to have. When we first change our eating, friends and family may, in spite of good intentions, simply forget or not understand our new dietary guidelines. Experience has taught many a vegetarian that it's best to be courteous and clear and to remind others in advance of a feast or tea or simple dinner that we no longer eat any portion of any animal. Be explicit – pasta without eggs, pies without lard, salads without bits of bacon on top. And perhaps offer to contribute a vegetarian dish that everyone can enjoy.

Remembering why we are – or why we are becoming – vegetarians is a good first step. Then we face the knowledge that our job is to monitor our own feelings, words, and actions and that we are simply not responsible for the way others feel, speak, or act. Grandma may be disappointed; auntie may get mad. That disappointment and anger may dissipate quickly or linger for a lifetime; auntie might end up admiring the family's new vegetarian. Or might not. None of us can see into the future or predict the results of living by our ethics, of being the person we deeply want to be. Most long-time vegetarians can spin

tales of how mom (or some other family member) never, ever accepted the fact that her child had stopped eating all forms of meat. However, we can also speak of seeing resistance simply seep away when we consistently, without wavering, remained vegetarian. Our commitment over time clears away many of the concerns families and friends may have. They see that being vegetarian is a way of life that we have fully embraced.

Yet even with supportive family, friends, and co-workers, we sometimes encounter hostility, though more often polite disagreement, confusion, or a hint of disdain. In those moments, we get the opportunity to be our best selves, to root relationships and interactions in sweet civility, motivated by our desire to be kind, loving people.



A different view

Matzah balls for Passover, turkey for Thanksgiving, minced pies for Christmas, fish soup during Semana Santa, chicken curry at the close of Ramadan – family lives worldwide are filled with celebrations centred around food. From a birthday party to a bar mitzvah, a wedding to a funeral, we mark passages and holidays with food. We bind ourselves together as family, friends, neighbours and even nations over tables stacked with the foods of our culture. We may eat eagerly from paper plates with our fingers or dine delicately from porcelain with silver forks, but we all cement and celebrate with food.

When we become vegetarians, does the cement begin to crumble or the celebration to sag? As we think of dramatically changing our diets and our approach to the concept of animals

as food, aren't we somewhat afraid of that potential crumbling and sagging? An old advertisement for boxed baking products was accompanied by the jingle (sing along if you remember this one . . .) "Nothing spells lovin' like something from the oven." McDonald's declares, "I'm lovin' it." We've been immersed all our lives in a blending of food with love, love with food. If we become or are vegetarians, what do we do about that?

Surely this question has lots of answers, individually tailored to each of us. One approach that has benefited many long-time vegetarians is blending the old and the new. Cheese and bean burritos can sit alongside meat ones. A deep dish of vegetarian lasagne can be served along with the one that has beef, or artichoke soup can sit next to the chapon. Everyone gets something he or she likes. Lots of groups work harmoniously this way.

Within our own circle of vegetarian friends and families, perhaps we want to take yet a different approach. We can create new memories, new traditions, bonds based on a common desire to put our ideals into practice as we break bread together. Jonathan Safran Foer addresses his decision to engage in creating new memories and traditions in his powerful book *Eating Animals*. He explains, "*Changing what we eat and letting tastes fade from memory create a kind of cultural loss, a forgetting. But perhaps this kind of forgetfulness is worth accepting – even worth cultivating . . . to remember animals and my concern for their wellbeing, I may need to lose certain tastes and find other handles for the memories that they once helped me carry.*" After discussing some of the food changes he and his family are incorporating into their lives, including backyard

barbecues and Passover, Foer adds, "The point of eating those special foods with those special people at those special times was that we were being deliberate, separating those meals from the others. Adding another layer of deliberateness has been enriching."⁶³

Forging different traditions and creating new memories can indeed be enriching – a pleasure to which the heart responds. Being surrounded by food made of ingredients we enjoy and feel good about using is a delight. A potluck where vegetarians can eat every single dish laid out? Now *that's* a treat. A vegan Thanksgiving? Oh, what a real celebration! Forget the dead turkey carved into slices; perhaps an Asian theme is appealing – eggless pad thai and kung pao tofu; raw carrots, cucumbers, onions, tofu, and Thai basil all rolled into rice paper wraps and smothered with spicy pepper and peanut sauce; squash soup with lime; hot veggie tempura; brussels sprouts cooked with sesame oil; and dairy-less pumpkin, pecan and coconut crème pies. All eaten with gratitude and joy, consciously connecting with our peaceful centre as stories are shared and blessings recounted.

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By eating meat we share responsibility for causing climate change, the destruction of our forests, and the poisoning of our air and water. The simple act of becoming a vegetarian can make a difference in the health of our planet.

Thich Nhat Hanh⁶⁴



What's important?

Of course, we're important to ourselves and to a handful of other people, perhaps even a big handful. We may have a small or large family, one we're close to or not, a tribe of tight friends or a few acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues, buddies we play sports with or friends who work out together – all the other humans with whom we share bonds. To a greater or lesser degree, many people around us are important.

Besides those folks, who else do we care about? Surely we care about other people, even if we'll never meet them. We care if they suffer, if a typhoon strikes their community or if an earthquake shatters their school. We wait anxiously for news

about men trapped in mines or girls kidnapped by extremists or a baby fallen down a well, though we're often thousands of miles away. Conversely, when we hear of someone who has faced extreme difficulty but is still triumphant – the Stephen Hawkings, Nelson Mandelas, and Malala Yousafzais of our world – a deep chord of hope and goodwill rings inside. Though our feelings for strangers are less intense than for our own circle of friends and family, we care.

What about animals – pets, strays, livestock on farms, animals in the wild? Again, we tend to cling tightly to those animals whose lives entwine with our own. Some see pets as family. Kids raising animals for slaughter often name them and accept their eventual deaths as inevitable. A few individual animals become media stars, and the entire world hears about Willy, the whale who needed saving; Ham, the first ape in space; or Elsa, the lioness in the movie *Born Free*. We sometimes get angry about the carnage caused by trophy hunters and can be appalled over and over by reports of the massacre of almost entire species. Animals are important.

The millions of plants that inhabit our forests, mountains, plains, farmlands, and deserts matter both because of their inherent beauty and because no other form of life could exist or thrive without them. So we naturally care about plants, too.

The Earth itself matters – the vast waters and lands, the air around us, the core that extends almost 2,900 kilometres (1,800 miles) below us.⁶⁵ Earth and sky stun us with their wonder, beauty, and power.

We see that much of our material world is crucial. How important is our non-material world – the feelings and thoughts

IS “REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE” ENOUGH?

that compel us daily to act or react, to move or remain still, to speak or hold our tongue? Do we value our own inner lives enough to actively cultivate the happiness and contentment everyone wants? Most of us do. We want to take care of what lies within us as well as what lies outside us. As we nurture feelings of gratitude and compassion, we are often naturally inclined to serve others. Seeing all of humanity as equally deserving of respect and dignity also shapes our responses to people and events. These feelings and actions help answer the question “What’s important?”

As humans, whatever we cherish, we work to preserve and nourish. Being vegetarian is one of the most important ways we help both the diverse world around us and the peaceful world within us to thrive.



Is “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” enough?

We’ve heard about landfills twenty storeys tall and millions of tons of plastic polluting our oceans. We’ve seen the smog that clings to cities. Perhaps we’ve put on a mask before going outside or avoided our favourite swimming place because it’s become polluted. Ordinary folks and Olympic competitors both face dangers in sewage-laden waters. Record-breaking heat waves and mega snowstorms plague our planet. These problems are intensified by waste ‘greenhouse gases’ created not only by the burning of fossil fuels, but also by the methane produced by grazing animals.⁶⁶ Across the globe, people are banding together to reduce the mountains of garbage, to reuse what we can, and to recycle what we

can't reuse. Will these efforts be enough to save us from our own waste?

The situation is dire, but not hopeless. Across the world, people aren't just sitting still waiting for disasters to pile up until we're completely inundated. The United Nations has an Environment Programme to help us understand and solve the complex problems facing the whole planet. Governments worldwide have set up technical, educational, and hands-on programmes that make a difference. Laws are being passed to help – for example, banning free plastic bags at checkout counters. Some communities have a deposit/refund scheme for plastic bottles to make sure they're recycled. There are programmes to recycle old cell phones. Schools have recycle boxes in classrooms. As individuals, we're becoming more and more aware of the opportunities we have to help through small, simple things such as taking shorter showers, turning off lights we don't need, and recycling newspapers.

Yet the impact of these efforts is dwarfed by the positive impact of being vegetarian. Some researchers state that every environmental problem on the planet could be solved or dramatically improved if the world turned from a meat-based diet to a plant-based diet.⁶⁷ How could they make such a claim? Let's explore the facts.



Quenching our thirst for water

Gulp down a glass of cool water, soak in a hot bath, dive into a refreshing pool. Use water to cook or clean or grow a garden. Whether we get it through a pipe, from a well, or from a dirty

puddle, we must have water. However, when pollution spoils wells, rivers, and oceans; when oil and gas drilling contaminates water tables; when salty sea levels rise and affect shoreline soils; when animal wastes run untreated into waterways, we deprive ourselves of the clean water essential for life. We are both spoiling and using more water than can be replaced or refreshed by natural cycles, so clean water is becoming more scarce as the population increases. What can we do to make sure that worldwide we have enough water for ourselves and our families?

Being vegetarian is a clear, powerful step in that direction.

Let's look at some examples of how raising, feeding, transporting, and killing animals degrade our world's waterways. The full picture is disturbing, yet we need to see clearly the effects of our choices. Though many of us maintain images of placid, beloved animals kept on small farms, patted and scratched, given names and led around hay-strewn barnyards, the reality is brutally different. The ways in which animals are kept and killed have changed dramatically over the last 100 years. Increasingly, around the globe, most of the production of meat is done by 'factory farms'. Their mission is to maximise profits.

Raising animals for food accounts for 27%–33% of all the fresh water consumption in the world.

One of the consequences is water consumption and pollution. In the documentary *Cowspiracy*, which explores the devastating impact of animal agriculture on Earth's resources,

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co-director Kip Anderson reports that raising animals for food accounts for twenty-seven to thirty-three percent of all the fresh water consumption in the world.⁶⁸

In addition, animal agriculture plays a leading role in creating aquatic 'dead zones' – areas below the surfaces of oceans, large lakes, and rivers that lack enough oxygen to sustain most plant or fish life. The waterways of Earth are estimated to contain 400–1,000 such dead zones, each spanning hundreds or thousands of square miles.⁶⁹ Sewage, fossil fuels, and industrial wastes contribute to their creation, and some occur naturally; yet it is animal agriculture that deals the single most fatal blow. Inevitably, the millions of kilos of manure and chemical fertilizers spread annually on land used to grow crops for animals make their way into the waters of the world.

As an example, let's look at hog farming for pork products in the United States. A 200 pound pig produces an average of about fourteen pounds of faeces per day.⁷⁰ What's a company to do with the tons and tons of waste produced by the more than 80,000 pigs that the average farm has?⁷¹

The modern solution is barns with slatted floors that allow pig waste to seep into an underground tank. The waste is drained to massive open lagoons that are often as big as several football fields and that "emit toxic gases such as ammonia,

**Producing a pound of beef takes 2,500 gallons of water.
A pound of soybeans takes 250 gallons.**

hydrogen sulphide, and methane.” These foul-smelling lagoons of faeces and urine are holding ponds. When they’re full, the waste – and the “dangerous microbes, nitrate pollution, and drug-resistant bacteria” that such waste contains – is sprayed over nearby farmlands as fertilizer.⁷²

Although hog waste can be a good soil conditioner when applied at reasonable rates, factory farms produce many times more excrement than the land can absorb. The spray, applied too frequently, causes runoffs into streams and rivers, contributing to algal blooms and fish kills, and poisoning groundwater with nitrates. These nitrates contribute to miscarriages as well as serious health problems for babies.⁷³ In addition, the stench of this toxic spray fouls entire communities.

Just as our image of a few contented animals wandering bucolic barnyards is no longer reality, the romantic notion of ranching – with its broad plains and blue skies, weathered cowboys, and cattle lowing as they amble across the prairie – has given way to the mass production of beef. More and more, helicopters are used to round up cattle. Raising cattle for meat is big business with devastating consequences. Everywhere, turning cows into burgers devours massive quantities of water and pollutes water supplies.

For every pound of beef sold, nearly 2,500 gallons of water have been consumed.⁷⁴ Producing a gallon of milk from a cow requires 1,000 gallons of water; a pound of cheese uses almost 900 gallons.⁷⁵ Compare that to the 250 gallons needed for a pound of soybeans or 25 gallons for a pound of wheat. We begin to see how using animals for food uses much more water than growing food from plants.⁷⁶ Not only does a cow

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drink large amounts of water – anything from 3 to 30 gallons per day depending on various factors – growing the plants consumed by livestock requires immense quantities of this natural resource.⁷⁷ Almost one third of all the fresh water in the world is used to irrigate crops grown solely to feed animals.⁷⁸ More water is needed for the animal foods alfalfa and hay than is required for all the vegetable and fruit production of the United States combined.⁷⁹ While lakes are drained and governments dispute water rights, we spend this essential resource to create meat.

As well as reducing available water, how does animal agriculture contribute to the poisoning of our water? As *Living the Farm Sanctuary Life* reminds us, “Exhausting our natural resources is one problem. Poisoning them is another. Many of the vast tracts of land harvested exclusively for animal feed are riddled with the pesticides and fertilizers used to grow GMO (genetically modified organisms) crops as rapidly as

HOW MUCH WATER DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE:

A turkey sandwich?	200 gallons
One egg?	100 gallons ⁸⁰
1 lb of broccoli, cauliflower, or brussel sprouts?	34 gallons
1 lb of tomatoes?	26 gallons
1 lb of asparagus?	258 gallons
1 lb of eggplant?	43 gallons
1 lb of artichokes, cucumbers or lettuce?	98 gallons ⁸¹

possible.”⁸² These chemicals seep into groundwater, find their way to rivers and oceans, create toxicity for animals and plants and foul our waterways.

Factory farming of pigs and cattle has disastrous impacts on clean waters worldwide. What about poultry production? How does the feeding, maintenance, and slaughter of chickens, turkeys, emus, ostriches, guinea fowl, Japanese quail, ducks, and geese – mostly kept in captivity – affect our water supplies? Consider the two most commonly eaten birds, chickens and turkeys. Worldwide each year, over 50 *billion* chickens are slaughtered.⁸³ In 2013, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that 239 million turkeys were killed in the USA alone.⁸⁴ Aside from the cash cost, what is the environmental cost of this staggering destruction in terms of *water*?

All poultry have to be fed and watered. Manure has to be stored; carcasses from diseased birds have to be disposed of; poultry has to be processed through water-intensive slaughterhouses. All of this uses or pollutes water. ‘Manure management’ has had specific scrutiny. A study done by the United Nations reports that “Pollution of soil and water with nutrients, pathogens, and heavy metals is generally caused by poor manure management and occurs where manure is stored.”⁸⁵

In addition to localized problems of odours, flies, and rodents, antimicrobial agents used to treat animal diseases often end up in surface and ground water. The same report says 67% of water samples collected were contaminated with antimicrobial residues, possibly leading to an increase in antibiotic resistance for humans and animals.⁸⁶



Raising livestock = razing rainforests

Prepare to be surprised, and not in a happy way. Our planet is being overwhelmed by the resources needed to feed, water, and slaughter the animals we eat. While hundreds of millions of humans – about one in nine – suffer from malnutrition⁸⁷ and billions of us crowd into human-friendly habitats, *30 percent of the land surface of the entire planet* is dedicated to growing food for or sheltering animals! Another statistic only adds to our dismay: we use *70 percent of all agricultural land* for livestock production. Yet, according to the United Nations, “livestock products” (meat and dairy) only account for “one third of humanity’s protein intake.”⁸⁸ By any calculation, this isn’t a good return on the Earth’s investment.

Aside from gobbling up land and consuming and degrading water resources, what other environmental effects stem from livestock production? Unfortunately, none of the answers to this question is positive.

The devastation of our forests, particularly rainforests, is due to several factors, such as harvesting wood, extracting minerals, constructing roads, and creating land for destitute farmers, but the worst offender is the livestock industry, largely the beef industry.⁸⁹ To visualize one small portion of our disappearing forests, look around and mentally map out an area about 2.5 meters by 2 meters (about 8 feet by 6.5 feet). That much of the rainforest is wiped out to produce one quarter-pound hamburger.⁹⁰ Rainforests – often called the lungs of our planet – are being sacrificed to the tastebuds of humans. Once covering fourteen percent of the world’s surface, by 2015 they

had been reduced to about six percent. They could be totally gone in the next 40 years.⁹¹

The fertile 'green band' around planet earth – the wide belt which straddles the equator between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and receives the most sunlight – is crashing down under the roar of chainsaws or falling victim to slash and burn agriculture. We are left with ravaged land that in turn contributes to the ravishing of Earth. Because forests absorb and store CO₂ (twenty to a hundred times more carbon than the agricultural crops that replace them) and they release that CO₂ when they die, their rapid death on a vast scale contributes to global climate change.⁹² Also, the canopy of trees creates shade for the land beneath, and when that canopy is wiped out, our Earth heats up.

Disturbingly, when these forests disappear, they take with them innumerable plant and animal species often found nowhere else in the world. Rainforest researcher Leslie Taylor reports that:

- A single pond in Brazil can sustain a greater variety of fish than are found in all of Europe's rivers.
- A 25 acre plot of rainforest in Borneo may contain over 700 species of tree – a number equal to the total tree diversity of North America.
- A single rainforest reserve in Peru is home to more species of birds than the entire United States.
- One single tree in Peru was found to harbour 43 different species of ants – a total that approximates the entire ant species of the British Isles.

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- *Less than one percent* of the biodiversity of tropical rainforests has been studied for possible human uses.
- When tropical rainforests are lost, the number of plant, animal, and insect species lost with them is staggering – estimated at *over 137 species every single day*.⁹³

These rainforests have been the pharmacies and foodstores of the world for thousands of years. What are we losing that we don't even know we're losing? What invaluable cures, delicious tastes (like chocolate, coffee, bananas, ginger, coconuts, avocados!), and intriguing insects will be destroyed before we even know of them? Currently, we take advantage of a large pharmacopeia of rainforest-based remedies, from the Madagascar periwinkle plant (used in treating childhood leukemia and Hodgkin's disease) to quinine from the bark of the chincona tree (effective against malaria) to annatto tree oil extract (used to protect skin from ultraviolet rays, and in insect repellents and blood pressure and diarrhea medications). When forests are bulldozed or burned, an undiscovered potential is crushed and burned along with the foliage.

Eating beef contributes directly to this destruction. Though the grocery stores or fast-food outlets may be thousands of miles from the verdant rainforests, we can draw a straight line from them to the scarred acres left behind when trees are cleared to grow cattle feed. The burger we buy comes at a much greater price than the money that exchanges hands over a counter.

We don't understand the price the world is paying to eat meat. While visiting Ecuador in the mid-1980s, I met briefly

with a scientist studying rainforest plants for possible medicinal uses. He worked in conjunction with the renowned Missouri Botanical Gardens, to whom he sent plant samples for study. This impressive scientist told me that he found a previously unknown plant – at least unknown to non-natives – *about every three weeks*. The staggering loss of potential goes hand in hand with the staggering loss of rainforests.

These facts are depressing enough, yet unfortunately only part of the story. The cascade of rainforest devastation rips through our biosphere like the falling trees themselves. When forests are gone and land is laid bare, the cycle of water absorption and release is disrupted. In a healthy canopy of trees, about three quarters of the rainfall returns to the atmosphere through evaporation and transpiration (leaf cells releasing water vapour). The returned water moves away, cools, and is converted to rain. But after deforestation, cleared land returns only about a quarter of the rainfall. This means much drier surrounding areas, and the circle of destruction widens.⁹⁴

Other lands endure flooding. With plant life gone, the denuded earth can't cope with heavy rains, triggering mudslides and floods. Excess water runs into the ocean instead of seeping through the soil to replenish aquifers we all depend upon.⁹⁵

Most of this devastation is to clear land for cattle pastures and animal feed crops that won't grow again after just a few years. Rainforest soil is quickly depleted. Where forests are lush, we think the soil must be incredibly fertile. It isn't. Tropical soil by itself isn't fertile; it has little organic matter and almost no ability to store nutrients. Instead, tropical nutrients are quickly

cycled back into the sheer mass of living and decaying plant matter.⁹⁶ Once that vegetation is gone, the land yields crops for only one to four years⁹⁷ then becomes essentially barren. Expensive and potentially toxic fertilizers and pesticides can extend the productivity cycle, but eventually agribusinesses and farmers move on to kill another section of rainforest for pastures and crops to feed cattle to feed people.



A stinky business

If you're eating, stop for a minute. We're talking now about livestock farts, faeces, and belches. Not a pleasant subject, but one that's a lot worse for the planet than it is for anyone munching a meal. The methane produced by these discharges is a major contributor to global climate change.

But how on earth does digestion and elimination in cattle contribute to climate change? Let's back up a moment and explore what 'global climate change' means.

We're talking about the big picture of shifting weather patterns around the world. In general, the Earth and its oceans are getting warmer, rainfall patterns are shifting, sea levels are rising, and storms of all kinds – snowstorms, cyclones, hurricanes – as well as floods are becoming more extreme. Some of us have felt the force of a record-breaking gale, or heard family elders describe how the weather was different when they were young. We've seen pictures of mountains no longer covered with snow year-round or island nations struggling with high tides that threaten their existence. We've seen footage of blizzards stranding whole sections of our country; perhaps

we've experienced the changes ourselves. While our world has never stood still, the pace of alteration has accelerated from a slow crawl to a dangerous gallop.

Climatologists have been reliably keeping track of global temperatures since 1880, when instruments became available to record precise weather data. The sixteen hottest years on record have all been since 1998.⁹⁸ 2017 was expected to be even hotter than the previous record-breaking years.⁹⁹

Why is the weather all around us changing so much?

The answer lies in understanding the phrase "greenhouse effect." The sun constantly bombards us with radiation (including heat). The Earth would get really hot, really fast, except that some of that heat is sent back into space. If *all* the heat escaped, it'd get way too cold. We need a balance. Land, oceans, and greenhouse gases such as water vapour, methane, ozone, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen oxides trap some of the escaping heat, keeping temperatures moderate. This is essential for plant and animal (including human) life to flourish. Without such heat retention, earth's average surface temperature would be a freezing minus six degrees C (21 F) and not the current warm fifteen degrees C (59 F).¹⁰⁰

The sixteen hottest years on record have all been since 1998.

But because the amounts of these heat-trapping gases have skyrocketed in the last hundred years, our atmosphere is getting warmer and warmer.¹⁰¹ Less heat can escape through the thickening cover of these gases, which means that more heat is reflected back to earth. It's something like a man snuggled

under a cosy quilt, feeling just right. His body heat has warmed the space around him. While some heat escapes through the quilt, most of it stays comfortably underneath. Adding more and more greenhouse gases to the earth's atmosphere is like throwing on another – and another – quilt. Then the man goes from just right to uncomfortably hot, because *too much* warmth is trapped under the quilts.

So where do these greenhouse gases come from, and what do any of them have to do with livestock, particularly cows?

These gases come from many different sources – from simply breathing, from heating our homes, from driving vehicles, from using fertilisers in our gardens. All of these routine activities and many more create greenhouse gases. Remember, we need these gases to keep the planet from becoming too hot or too cold, so in the right amounts they are good for life.

Livestock activities contribute more to greenhouse gas emissions than all forms of transport combined.

Animals also contribute to greenhouse gases. They breathe, belch, fart and defecate, producing tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄).

We've known for years that burning 'fossil fuels' (oil, gas, coal) for transportation and energy is heating up our planet. We've been urged, for environmental reasons, to get out of our cars and onto our feet or bikes and to use mass transit (bus or rail) whenever possible. This is important because transportation exhaust (methane, carbon dioxide, nitrous

oxide) worldwide is responsible for thirteen per cent of all greenhouse gases.¹⁰²

However, we've seldom heard that, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, livestock activities contribute an estimated *eighteen per cent* of all greenhouse gas emissions. That's more than all the planes, trains, trucks, automobiles, buses, and boats in the world combined!¹⁰³

These shocking figures are created, in large part, by the process of converting animals into meat. Turning animals into food for humans requires, of course, the animals themselves – billions of animals used to feed billions of people. In addition, land is needed to shelter and feed them, fertilizers are heavily used on their food crops, those food crops often have to be transported to where the animals are, manure must be managed (or not), and the animals have to be shipped to market and then to slaughterhouses.

Each of these activities contributes to the greenhouse effect, especially the animals' production of methane and nitrogen oxides, which are far more toxic for our atmosphere than the CO₂ we've traditionally thought of as the most destructive greenhouse gas. In fact, nitrous oxide has "296 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide" and it "stays in the atmosphere for 150 years!"¹⁰⁴ Methane is *eighty-six times* more potent than CO₂ in terms of global warming potential over a twenty-year period.¹⁰⁵

And livestock pass a *lot* of methane. While methane is the by-product of many human-related and natural processes – for instance, the breakdown of plant materials in wetlands, landfills,

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and rice paddies – livestock are a major source of this gas.¹⁰⁶ Cows produce approximately 250–500 litres (66–132 gallons) of methane *per cow per day*. With an estimated 1.5 *billion* cows in the world, the math becomes mind-boggling.

A farm with 2,500 dairy cows produces about the same amount of waste as a city of 411,000 people. Worse, while human waste is often treated before discharge into water systems, animal waste is either minimally treated or untreated.¹⁰⁷ Nitrous oxide is also produced in vast quantities by animal agriculture, by both the fertilizers used in growing animal feed and the manure and urine excreted by those animals. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations tells us that “livestock account for 65 percent” of nitrous oxide emissions created by human-centred activities (such as raising animals for humans to eat).¹⁰⁸

With all these greenhouse gases spewing out and piling up, no wonder Earth is feeling the heat.

While creating more fuel-efficient gas, diesel, hybrid, or electric vehicles is good, we can reduce greenhouse gas production immediately by reducing our use of animals for food. We don't have to wait for technologies, governments, economic policies, and industries to catch up. Eliminating meat from our diets results in a greater reduction of methane, a more urgent need than reducing the CO₂ from our vehicles. Carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for at least a hundred years, but methane remains around twelve years (some sources say even less – eight to ten years).¹⁰⁹ We can't wait a century to start healing the planet. Choosing to be vegetarian means that each of us can quickly – perhaps within just one or two

years, as numbers of livestock decrease – do our part to reduce harmful methane.¹¹⁰

We know that our choices have consequences, intended or not. When we examine global climate change, we understand how choosing to eat meat affects our soil, water, and air. Nearly everyone agrees that we must do something now to avert increasing environmental disasters. While nations discuss, dispute, and negotiate, we, as individuals, can act. We can choose not to support the meat industry – the single largest source of greenhouse gases.



The fishing industry

I remember being a seven-year-old kid and going fishing. I'd dig for wiggly, gray worms, pick up a cane pole, grab an empty bucket, and stroll with my brother and sister down the dirt road in front of our house to see if the fish were biting. We'd plunk down onto the wooden bridge that crossed a small creek, dangle our feet over the side, and fold a worm in half to stick it good and firm onto a sharp hook. (Actually, that was a pretty gruesome business that I always tried to get my brother to do for me, but he generally told me not to be a sissy and wouldn't help.) After letting the line drop gently into the water below us, we'd wait.

On a day we thought was lucky, that wait wouldn't last long. A five or six inch perch would go after its meal and get a hook tangled up in its mouth. That was our cue to quickly jerk the line up and yank that fish onto the dry bridge, away from the water it so desperately needed to return to. The perch would

bend itself into a bow shape, flopping first one end and then the other, lifting its small body off the boards, going through the desperate motions of dying. I'd ignore my own fluttering heart, grab it with two hands, and toss it into the bucket – usually squealing pretty loudly all the while.

After carrying our pail back home, the job of cleaning the catch had to be done. Slit, cut, clean – a grisly experience, and I was happy that my dad did it for me.

*If we continue current fishing practices, some scientists say that we'll have **fishless oceans by 2048.***

As repugnant as this memory seems to me now, at least one good thing can be said about our fishing trips: no matter how much we fished, the water still had fish left in it.

That may not be true by the year 2048.¹¹¹ We can scarcely comprehend empty oceans – with whales, sharks, dolphins, seahorses, shrimp, clams, eels, jellyfish, algae, kelp, anemones, and soft coral disappearing, along with the other estimated 230,000 marine life species.¹¹² Yet some scientists tell us it's a fact we are facing if the fishing practices of today continue.

How did the situation get so dire? To understand that, we need to examine today's fishing industry, whose interactions with fish "have come to resemble . . . wars of extermination," according to the Fisheries Centre of the University of British Columbia. Industrial fishing is vastly different from a kid with a pole or a crew in a small boat with a net, and that difference has been devastating for sea creatures. When a single vessel

has the ability to haul in *fifty tons of ocean animals in a few minutes*, the situation is absolutely unsustainable.¹¹³

Because the mid-levels of our oceans have been over-fished for decades, large scale fishing operations are more and more directed to the floor of the ocean – hence, “bottom trawling.” One of the methods of commercial fishing that causes both extensive environmental damage and ghastly pain to sea creatures is ‘beam trawling,’ the most destructive form of bottom trawling. Large, weighted nets – as much as 40 feet high and as wide as a rugby field – are dragged across seabeds, scraping up everything they encounter. In the drive to capture profitable fish, like hake or sole, these nets destroy many, many other species – such as coral, sponges, sea fans, kelp, anemones, mantas, eels, jellyfish, and deep-water sharks. Because this beam trawling happens out of sight – as much as 6,000 feet below the water’s surface – the devastation often goes unnoticed. However, one environmental organization has declared “if the same technique were used on land, it would be like dragging a vast net across the countryside – crushing trees, farms, and wildlife in the process – to catch a few cows.”¹¹⁴

The nets are shaped like huge bags whose mouths are kept open by heavy beams and whose sides are elevated by metal frames. These beam trawlers “smash and crush everything in their paths.”¹¹⁵ As they gather thousands of fish in a single sweep, the fish at the bottom of the net are crushed by the weight of those above them. When a full net is reeled upwards, the rapid changes in water pressure can cause trapped fish to suffer in several ways. Their swim bladders, used for buoyancy,

may overinflate; stomachs and intestines may be pushed out of their mouths and anuses; eyes can squeeze out of their sockets. Those fish that arrive on a trawler's deck still alive flap and struggle for minutes as their gills collapse and they begin to suffocate out of water. Fishermen continue the killing, which can be done using several different methods. Cutting off heads, tearing gill arches so that fish bleed to death, knocking them on the head, or electrical stunning are common ones. Species that aren't intended for sale are thrown back into the water, mangled, dying, or dead.¹¹⁶

In fact, the *majority* of fish caught in these kinds of nets are unwanted by the fishing industry, which calls them 'bycatch.' The numbers of bycatch discarded are vastly greater than the numbers of creatures kept. The general public is completely unaware of this. We can wonder what the effect might be if sushi restaurants put a sign next to a roll of tuna sushi that said, "If this plate were to hold all the animals that died for this serving, it would need to be five feet long." What if a family sitting down for dinner of trawled shrimp from Indonesia saw a label that let them know the truth – that "twenty six pounds of other sea animals were killed and tossed back into the ocean for every one pound of this shrimp?"¹¹⁷ Or imagine someone sipping sharkfin soup from a porcelain bowl, and wonder how that person would feel if he knew that 90% of what were once vast numbers of large predatory fish are now gone.¹¹⁸ These are the appalling percentages, the enormous wastes – part of the true cost of industrial fishing.

But what about fish farms, where a specific type of fish is raised for harvest without the problem of bycatch? Farm fishing,

or 'aquaculture', where fish live in enclosures and are fed by 'farmers' rather than foraging for their food, is becoming more and more common. Would eating these cultivated fish ease our concerns about the suffering of netted sea creatures and the disappearance of species? Is a person scoring points for the environment if she wanders in a fish market, eyes the shiny wares laid out on thick ice, and looks for labels indicating a fish was farmed, rather than wild?

Let's look at the environmental issues around raising and eating fish grown in pens rather than caught in open waters.

The two most common types of fish farms are 1) self-contained pens set up on land or 2) open-net pens anchored offshore with marine waters flowing freely in and out. Both types are replete with environmental problems. Growing large numbers of sea creatures crammed into a relatively small space comes with its own set of issues. These include antibiotics and fish faeces filtering through nets into open waters, sea lice from penned salmon infecting wild salmon, the extermination of natural predators like seals and sea lions that are attracted to open-net pens, and the fact that marine animals such as porpoises and dolphins get caught in the nets and are subsequently shot by aquafarmers.¹¹⁹ Additionally, fish that escape open-net systems can breed with wild fish and compete with them for food. Salmon and trout bred in captivity are genetically weaker than wild fish, causing concern among scientists, fishermen, and Native Peoples that escaped fish can introduce negative genetic traits and damage wild fish.

Fish that are raised in pens suffer some of the same inhumane conditions that crowded factory farm animals endure.

They are crammed into small enclosures. These close quarters almost inevitably lead to about a third of the fish dying from disease. Living with the stress of such confinement, many fish respond by biting others, dismembering fins and tails. Creatures that under natural conditions have wide areas of oceans or rivers to navigate, who would perhaps migrate hundreds or even thousands of miles every year, can be given an area equivalent in size to a bathtub. In pens, they swim endlessly in circles and have been compared to captured zoo or circus animals pacing up and down their cages.¹²⁰

How can we endure being a part of this? Without consumers craving the taste of these animals, the near annihilation of sea creatures could stop. Think of the beauty of all these species living without the massive human interference now involved in capturing them to eat. Of course, we aren't naïve enough to think that all problems for marine animals, such as pollution or habitat loss, would disappear if people stopped eating them, but wouldn't just letting them live be a great start?



An alternative: vegetarian, organic, and unprocessed

If we stroll the sidewalks of any city in the world, hurry through any airport, plunk ourselves down in any sports arena, wander in almost any food market – in other words, participate in modern life – we are surrounded by a culture of meat, by people who delight in talking about, cooking, and consuming dead creatures. Many of these people have heard of vegetarianism but have never even considered such a radical break with the

habits and traditions of their cultures. Conversely, perhaps they've grown up vegetarian but are now wondering if the customs they were taught while young are relevant to life outside their family circle.

How are we to live? This ageless question still begs for an answer. And we all do answer it, whether consciously or not.

One conscious answer is that we respond to the suffering of fellow creatures with empathy and determine not to eat them. We respond to the devastation of our environment caused by chemical fertilizers and pesticides and attempt to eat organically grown food. We nurture our own health and wellbeing and eat whole grain, unprocessed foods as often as possible. Health advocates and nutrition experts uniformly agree that foods with long lists of added ingredients – often unpronounceable chemicals, saturated oils and sugar – don't have the same nutritional value as basic foods cooked with natural ingredients. With our food choices, we can create a life that benefits our health and expresses our values, a deeply satisfying life built on compassion. Then we can add gratitude, appreciating the fact that we have the urge, the ability, and the circumstances that allow us to live as vegetarians.

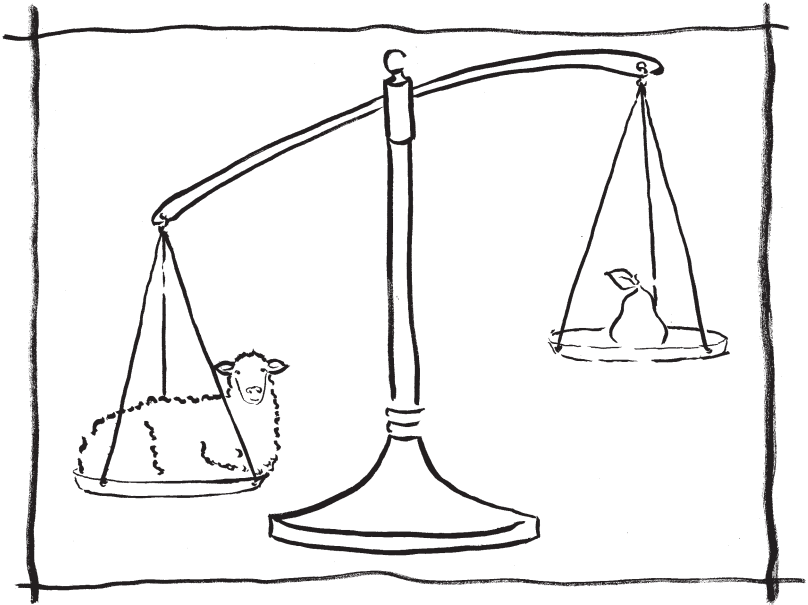
This is no small gift. We have found a way through the labyrinth of a world that tells us in a multitude of ways that killing animals for food is the essential order of life, that animals feel little or no pain, or that the pain they feel doesn't matter. Through education and awareness, we have come to understand the ways in which vegetarian, organic, natural foods are good for our bodies and our Earth. We have many reasons to declare, shout, state, or murmur, "thank you."

ETHICAL ISSUES



Kindness is the golden chain
by which society is bound together.

Goethe



What are ethics and why bother with them?

A university student is anxious about his upcoming biology exam. Though he's studied all term, the course material has been hard to understand. He has four other finals to prepare for, and the workload feels overwhelming. When he gets a text from a friend offering a swiped copy of the test, the student is grateful to have less work to do and less anxiety about the bio final.

A man driving home from his work at a warehouse, tired from a long day of stacking boxes and following orders, sees a woman on the side of the road standing beside a car with smoke pouring on the side of the road from the engine. In spite of his own eagerness to

get home to dinner and an easy chair, the man pulls over and helps her.

A young woman is celebrating her recent promotion at work with co-workers. As they crowd into their favourite restaurant, she's thinking of ordering her usual saag paneer and naan. But she hesitates as her colleague speaks up, saying, "I know you're a vegetarian, but, honestly, I don't really understand why. After all, animals are going to die whether or not we kill them for food. And how do you know plants don't feel pain, too? Besides, meat tastes so good! I'm ordering the chicken. Why don't you try some, too?" The young woman hesitates, unsure what to do or how to answer the questions. She'd like to fit in, and perhaps experimenting with different things, like eating meat, is part of what being young is about.

How do we want to *be* in life? How do we want to connect to other people, to animals, the environment, our work, our play, our spiritual lives, ourselves? The answers to these questions centre around our ethics and can be complicated. *Ethics* refers both to a field of philosophical study and to practical guiding principles that help determine what is right and good in the world. They can be a moral code, or an effort to lead a life of integrity that may or may not be rooted in religion. People face ethical decisions every day regarding how we treat others, how honest we are, what and whom we vote for, how we work at our jobs or run our businesses or raise our children, choose our food, make decisions about our health, or a multitude of other possibilities that create the framework of our lives.

WHAT ARE ETHICS AND WHY BOTHER WITH THEM?

Being ethical is about being a good human. Being ethical is *not* about just following laws or traditions. We can all easily think of laws and traditions that have been, or are, unethical: legalized slavery; laws that discriminate against a particular race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation; traditions that keep women from being educated, that grant respect and power only to some castes or social groups. Each time and place has its own struggles with creating an ethical society, just as the individuals in that society struggle to embody their personal ethics.

Finding an ethical code that rings true is a huge task for each individual, and one that each person can only accomplish for him or herself. We're all influenced by our family, peers, religion, schooling, society, and by the times in which we live, but ultimately most of us want to set a course for ourselves. As we experience life – as we get an education, care for family and neighbours, travel, see the beauty and the suffering of the world, or find partners – we figure out our own ethics. Often we begin to think beyond just our own families and homes, to feel empathy for people we'll never meet and concern for places we'll never go. We expand our 'circle of compassion'. Our ethics both spring from, and create, our experiences.

*Being ethical
is about being
a good human.*

Some people turn to religion for an ethical code; some turn away from religion for the same thing. Each of the major religions of the world has devised guidelines or commandments that share similar basic ideas – treating others the way we want

to be treated; taking care of our children and our parents; honouring life; being honest, loving, and compassionate.

Let's think about the ideal that human life is to be respected and preserved, that taking another's life is not the rightful decision of any individual. Interpretations of this belief vary. Applying this simple, basic principle to the realities of life can be complex, resulting in difficult decisions. Sometimes families decide to remove life support from someone they love dearly because that person is lingering in a vegetative state. Many people who oppose a woman's right to choose an abortion would grant that right in cases of rape. Others believe that an incurable disease is justification for a person to take his or her own life. Religious or spiritual beliefs that vary in many other ways often agree that killing in self-defence or in defence of another, if absolutely unavoidable, is ethical. So even in our efforts to preserve *human* life, we find situations that are not straightforward.

When we begin to consider plants, birds, fish, and animals, matters become increasingly complex. Some people think "do not kill" refers only to humans and not to any others who are part of the teeming life on our planet. Though such a rationale is seriously flawed from the point of view of a vegetarian, it is understandable. After all, any version of "do not kill" is impossible to follow completely, as every creature must consume some form of living matter to survive. However, all societies acknowledge differences between killing humans, animals, insects, and plants and between killing for pleasure and for necessity. The few examples of people who have killed and eaten humans for sport

WHAT ARE ETHICS AND WHY BOTHER WITH THEM?

or pleasure are generally considered barbaric. Yet in every nation, eating animals is common practice, mostly considered normal and good among much of the population. Many, many people do not consider killing and consuming animals to be an ethical issue at all. As we move down the food chain – humans, mammals, fish and fowl, insects and reptiles, and plants – the acceptance of killing becomes more common. We seem to recognize that a hierarchy of consciousness and value exists, with humans at the top and plants at the bottom.

Much of the world's population eats a wide variety of four-legged animals. Sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, squirrels, bear, deer, rabbits, guinea pigs, elephants, rats, horses, monkeys, dogs – scarcely any species is exempt from becoming food. Ironically, most of these mammals that humans eat flourish on largely vegetarian diets.

Eating fish of all types and birds of all kinds is more common than eating mammals. Where people can afford to make a choice, some refuse to eat 'red meat' – attributing a higher level of consciousness to these animals – yet willingly eat all kinds of fish and birds. Using insects as food is also ordinary for some people, if repellent to others. Of course, everyone eats plants.

So we all kill to eat. However, virtually none of us murders our own species in order to eat. Such an act is considered horrific, yet killing other species is not only accepted, but often applauded. While human life is universally seen as valuable, animal life is seen as expendable.

Can we expand our ethical ideas about the importance of life to include animals? In a way, many people have – most

would never consider eating their pets. Birds, cats, dogs, horses, gerbils, lizards, turtles, and other animals are eaten in some

Can we expand our ethical standards beyond who or what matters just to us?

cultures while valued as companions in others. The puzzling thing is that so many people who lavish love and money on their own animals, who wouldn't dream of using them for food, don't question the killing and

eating of other creatures. Just as people we don't love or even know still have worth, so, too, do animals.

Can we expand our ethical standards beyond who or what matters just to us? It's easy to love an animal – to scratch a puppy's belly or groom a horse. We get so much from our relationships with our own pets. Surely we can understand that creatures we may never encounter also have an equal value and deserve to live. Virtually everyone enjoys watching birds soar, or monkeys swing gracefully from branch to branch. Tourists travel from every part of the globe to see the majestic big cats of the Serengeti Plains, the howler monkeys of Costa Rica or the migratory whales of the Pacific Ocean. Every animal is unique, and many have emotions we can easily observe if we are prepared to look. Understanding the intrinsic worth of *all* animals – not simply the ones we know personally – is an important step in our ethical/spiritual maturity and has reverberations across our lives and into the world we inhabit.



Life and death in a factory farm and slaughterhouse

Let's return to farms, sources of most of the world's meat. Today, the idyllic vision of gently nurtured, contented, healthy creatures ambling through barnyards and munching on verdant grasses is mostly a myth. Modern factory farms are an environmental threat, spewing toxins and animal waste into our earth, air, and water. Now let's look at the lives of farmed animals through the lens of ethics.

One of the difficulties here is that conditions for keeping and killing animals vary from nation to nation, from farm to farm, and even from slaughterhouse to slaughterhouse. Some places have more humane practices than others, but in all these places the animals end up dead, even if the suffering they experience while living and dying varies from humane to hideous. The worst conditions exist on factory farms, where chickens, turkeys, pigs, or cattle lead lives of misery until their often brutal deaths.

On dairy farms, calves are separated from their mothers within a few hours of birth. Many males are taken to be raised for beef. Other males and excess females – ones not needed for milk production – are confined in small veal cages two feet wide, with heads chained to restrict movement so the calves can't walk, turn around, or even lie down comfortably. Thus, they can't develop muscles, so their meat is very tender and considered a 'delicacy'. Veal lovers like their meat pale and anaemic, so the calves are fed synthetic formula, not their mother's milk. In addition to the physical pain, the calves and their mothers are deprived of the

emotional bonding that is normal for cows.¹²¹ Cows are social animals with long memories and strong family bonds. 'Strong family bonds' are not economically feasible on most dairy farms. Calves are often taken away from their mothers within twelve hours so that the mother's milk can be used by humans rather than calves. While cows naturally live 20–25 years, dairy cows confined to milking stations and subjected to constant artificial insemination and pregnancies are worn out in four or five.¹²² Then they're shipped off to make low-grade meat products.

The situation for chickens, ducks, and turkeys is arguably even worse. In the average factory farm shed, tens of thousands of fowl are crammed without room to spread their wings. Because the space allotted for each animal is tiny, they can scarcely move at all. These sheds reek with a stench of ammonia from bird droppings that burns eyes and lungs and can cause blindness. Workers wear gas masks while the fowl get chronic respiratory diseases, sores, and blisters.¹²³ Under this stress, birds may begin feather-pecking, so their beaks, filled with nerve endings, are "sheared off with a hot blade."¹²⁴

The plight of caged, egg-laying birds is similar, with the additional misery of spending their lives in metal 'battery cages', with four or five chickens crammed into a tiny space. Because they're constantly rubbing against and standing on metal wire, the birds suffer feather loss, bruises, and damage to their feet – feet meant to scratch earth. Artificial lighting extends the hours of 'daylight', which increases egg production. However, the unnaturally high rate of laying eggs leaches calcium from bones, causing painful osteoporosis.¹²⁵ When egg production declines, the fowl are sent for slaughter. In the United States,

they are exempt from the Humane Slaughter Act, which decrees that animals should not die in pain.¹²⁶

'Cage-free' and 'free range' eggs are hot topics these days as educated shoppers discover the conditions of animals in factory farms. Understandably, many people want to avoid responsibility for cruelty by eating eggs from happy chickens. Unfortunately, 'cage free' means only that – the metal bars aren't around a chicken's body. It *doesn't* mean that the hen has any more space than a caged hen or avoids debeaking or lives in a shed where the lights go off at night. Similarly, 'free range' *doesn't* mean ranging freely. All it means is the animal must have access to a small area – perhaps just five square feet – of outdoor space. Whether the hen ever gets to it is not considered. With tens of thousands of hens in a shed having perhaps one small door to one tiny outside plot, we can see how the designation 'free range' means virtually nothing.

Most people remain largely ignorant of what life is like for the farmed animals we eat. While the torture of veal calves has been relatively well publicized, much less is known about hens reared for egg production, and the sad fate of male chickens is commonly overlooked. Reading the details of how animals are killed is gruesome. Many people simply choose not to know. However, perhaps understanding the reality of suffering for other beings is a way to expand our circle of compassion.

Male chicks in the egg production industry, who can't lay eggs and are not suitable for meat – because they haven't been genetically manipulated to have large breasts and thighs – are put through meat grinders while still alive, suffocated in trash cans, or gassed.¹²⁷

Meanwhile, whole fowl destined for dinner plates, on entering a slaughterhouse are pulled from crates and shackled upside down by their ankles on a moving belt – a process that often causes broken bones, bruising, or haemorrhaging. They move along to an electrified water bath, and when their heads are dipped into the water an electric current runs through their bodies up to the metal shackles, hopefully stunning the birds, before they reach a mechanical neck cutter.¹²⁸ The Humane Society of the United States reports that, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, “millions miss the blades and drown in tanks of scalding water while conscious and able to feel pain.”¹²⁹

An alternative method used to kill fowl is gassing the birds while they are still in transport crates. Some researchers say this method of killing is more humane than electrical stunning, as the fowl are never handled or shackled while alive and are not conscious when their throats are cut.¹³⁰

Larger animals may be strung up on a factory production line to be slaughtered in large groups, or killed individually in the backyard of a farmhouse. They may be zapped first with a stun gun or left fully conscious to feel the slicing of a knife. Pigs may be knocked unconscious with a bolt gun, strung up conscious from a tree branch or hung from a hind leg, stabbed and allowed to bleed out, disemboweled, and split in half with a bone saw. All kinds of creatures die all kinds of deaths to feed humans.

When we eat their meat, we have participated in their deaths. How can we do this to another being? How can we do this and create peaceful, joyous lives for ourselves? Sooner or

later, we all face the consequences of our choices. In the studies of both science and spirituality, we learn that “every action has an equal and opposite reaction.”¹³¹ Whether we think of this as a scientific law, a spiritual teaching, or simply folk wisdom, the concept is the same. “We reap what we sow.” “What goes around comes around.” Eastern spirituality refers to the same idea using the term ‘karma’. At times, the results of our actions and choices are obvious and immediate; at other times, they’re obscure or delayed. Nevertheless, wait for it . . . here it comes. Actions create reactions, whether or not we’re aware of the connections.

Believing that actions have results offers a practical way to understand what we see happening daily, even if the results aren’t immediately apparent. Dumping nitrates into a stream doesn’t instantly cause dead zones in our oceans or create health risks for infants, but continued dumping over time causes severe environmental and health problems. Our actions and choices – even our choice *not* to take action – sooner or later have consequences.

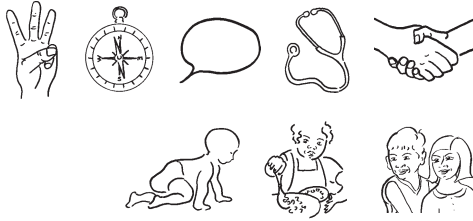
Many spiritual teachers have explained that the consequences of our actions can ride with us from lifetime to lifetime and manifest in ways we cannot predict. We can grasp how physical science works, but we often lack the ability to see how spiritual science works. If our actions include consuming dead animals for the taste, what are the reactions to such consumption? Remembering that “every action has an equal and opposite reaction” can influence our choices. Our behaviour may continue to change if we add the belief that, while the reaction may not happen in this lifetime, it will eventually

ETHICAL ISSUES

happen. Perhaps then we pause before tearing into that beef patty or adding chunks of lamb to our curry. What will be the reaction to such an action? How can such food choices lead to the deep sense of wellbeing every human craves?

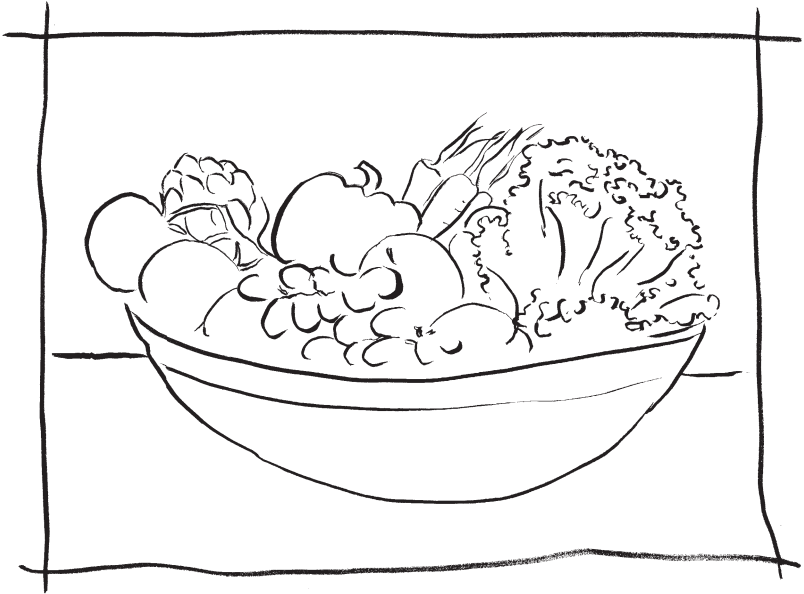
Both because we care about other creatures and because we care about ourselves, choosing to be vegetarians is a natural, healthy, and compassionate approach to life.

LIVING AS A VEGETARIAN



Don't wait for a better world.
Start now to create a world of
harmony and peace. It is up
to you, and it always has been.
You may even find the solution
at the end of your fork.

*Sharon Gannon*¹³²



Life happens constantly. It gets pretty routine – put on clothes, eat breakfast, brush teeth, perhaps do the same for children or elders, then off to work or stay home and take care of family matters. Lunch follows, with exercise and rest if we're lucky, and more work. We scramble through traffic or amble across fields, back to dinner and an evening at home. While we may dream of lying on a beach in Goa, walking through the English countryside, or strolling down the avenues of Paris, we spend most of the time in our hometowns, following everyday habits. Do our ordinary lives change if we decide to be vegetarians? Let's look at some practical aspects of everyday life and see how we manage them while keeping our commitment to a vegetarian diet.



Three times a day plus snacks!

It usually begins within a few minutes of rolling out of bed – the constant supply of drink and food we sip, gulp, chew, and swallow. Feeding our bodies, our emotions, or our cravings goes on all day and into the night. Often, we simply eat and drink too much for our own good, but perhaps that’s another book entirely. For now, let’s examine how we fill our plates and bowls with healthy vegetarian fare.

Many people say they never realized the amazing variety of foods available until they eliminated meat. Vegetarians are sometimes asked, “But what do you eat?” by those confused by our food choices or by a host who’s anxious about having us over for dinner. A little education and creativity can put that confusion and anxiety to rest. (A happy sidenote: The number of people who are uneasy with vegetarianism is decreasing every year. Across the world, our diets are becoming more accepted and respected.) Every geographic region is teeming with foods that don’t involve killing animals, though discovering those foods can be daunting for new vegetarians as well as non-vegetarians. So let’s combine a dollop of education with a pinch of creativity and see how we make this way of life easy and natural.

To stock our home with basic grains, beans, fruits, and veggies takes only a trip to any market. For ideas and inspiration, a beginning vegetarian can find a world full of recipes online or in hundreds of meat-free cookbooks. Vegetarian and vegan groups delight in publishing ways to make ordinary ingredients taste extraordinary. Add basic herbs and spices to kitchen shelves, and a constantly expanding variety of tastes

is possible. The options multiply again when we consider moving beyond dairy products to a delicious variety of soy, coconut, hemp, cashew, and almond milks and cheeses. In 2015, environmentalists and entrepreneurs Neil Renniger and Adam Lowry began selling 'pea milk', a creamy, high-protein dairy alternative made of split yellow peas.¹³³ Currently (2017) sold under the brand name Ripple, this 'milk' is getting rave reviews for being tasty, nutritious, and eco-friendly.

New products are entering the world's markets continually. Consider the Impossible Burger, a plant-based burger that replicates the taste, appearance, sizzle, texture, taste, and even the 'bleeding' (Oh, no!) of a beef pattie. This burger is made entirely from plants and without added hormones, antibiotics, or artificial ingredients. Its production "uses 95% less land, 74% less water, and creates 87% less greenhouse gas emissions than a meat burger."¹³⁴

Researchers and foodies are constantly coming up with innovative ways to create vegetarian options that have traditionally only been available to omnivores or ovo-lacto vegetarians. Ever heard of aquafaba? If not, check it out! It refers to the liquid left over after cooking beans such as chickpeas. Vegans striving to develop an eggless meringue collaborated online, and in March of 2015 decided to call their new product "aquafaba."¹³⁵ In addition to creating luscious meringues, aquafaba can be used in mayonnaise, butter, or cheese.

If we grew up thinking that rice, corn, oats, and lentils were the only grains or pulses available, we're surprised to learn that quinoa, polenta, kamut, spelt, barley, millet, amaranth, and more are also on the shelves or in the bins of local stores.

Include some of the many different nut butters and seeds; consider vinaigrettes of pear, peach, coconut, or fig; expand our list of vegetables and beans beyond those most commonly used, and we quickly see that having choices about what to eat is not the issue. Of course, we're often most comfortable with familiar foods. Perhaps we can explore new ways to put them together – potato gnocchi with fresh herbs, grilled mushrooms over rice, or creamy coconut eggplant curry.

However, it's sensible to ask how much time it takes to cook with all these delicious ingredients. We're busy folks, or perhaps we just don't like to cook, and even if we want to slow down and linger over meal preparation, carving out the time is often hard to do. Well and good if our grandmothers baked their own bread and made pies or soups from scratch, but we've just slammed the door on an eight-hour day and a snarled commute or crammed subway, and dinner needs to happen soon. Who can spend two hours cooking beans and chopping veggies or patting tortillas and blending salsas?

Fortunately, we have some sensible ways to simplify meal preparation. Perhaps the easiest is to make extra servings of food when we do have time and freeze leftovers for those busy nights when we just need to get a decent meal on the table before we start gnawing our arm. From lasagne to dal to soup, lots of foods freeze well and can be moved from the freezer to the refrigerator to thaw. Frozen foods also can be defrosted on the stove or in a microwave.

A new generation of pressure cookers has also made cooking much, much faster, especially if grains or beans are soaked in advance. Think of cooking lentils in 14 minutes instead of

45, garbanzo beans in 18 minutes instead of two hours. Buying pre-chopped vegetables, though they are more expensive and less nutritious than using fresh veggies, can be another time saver. For those who don't want to cook, no matter how quickly the whole process can be taken care of, several purely vegetarian food companies make meals in cans, boxes, and frozen containers that are healthy and tasty. Spending lots of time in the kitchen creating meals doesn't have to be anything other than a labour of love.



Navigating social situations

A business lunch with no vegetarian entrées, a neighbour who drops by with a meat casserole, a romantic dinner date with someone who doesn't know you're a vegetarian, a surprise birthday cake with eggs – oh, no! Being vegetarian in a world full of meat products can feel precarious. How do we avoid hurting or offending people who either don't know about or don't understand our diet choices?

The chapter in this book titled "The Web of Family and Society" reflects on the connection between food and relationships, focusing generally on families and close friends. Let's enlarge those relationships and think about new friendships, casual acquaintances, colleagues and business associates, neighbours, and potential romantic partners. How can we mix with different kinds of people in different settings, keep away from social landmines around food, and maintain our values?

A solid place to start is with confidence and joy. We have chosen to be vegetarians out of compassion for animals, concern

for our planet's wellbeing and our own health, and/or a desire to avoid the consequences that come with participating in harming animals. These are all laudable reasons, a positive response to the carnage and ruin of meat production. We can move through life clearheaded and sure about our decision and feel happy and blessed to be vegetarians.

We also know that people have a right to their own choices. Whether or not we agree with those choices doesn't change this.

People have a right to their own choices. Whether or not we agree with those choices doesn't change this.

Many people sincerely believe that eating animals is natural, healthy, and tasty. Genuinely respecting – rather than judging or criticizing – their right to these beliefs is important. After all, we're asking them to respect ours, even though they may strongly disagree. Respect is a basic ingredi-

ent of harmonious relationships. This is true for every form of connection humans have with one another, and the connections between vegetarians and meat eaters are no exception.

From hip urban restaurants to small cafes on a dirt road, most folks know or have met at least a few vegetarians. Lots of people, even if they don't want to be vegetarians, admire our principles. They're often willing to accommodate us, and we can do our part by being relaxed and appreciative. Let's have some fun! Embrace an adventure, make new friends, create bonds.

While living with confidence, respect, and an adventurous spirit, we can also remember a very practical technique to avoid

detonating landmines: Tell people *in advance* and in clear terms what our diet restrictions are. Here's what doesn't work well: Showing up for dinner and then announcing that we can't eat the fish. Telling a host at the last minute that we can't eat pasta made with eggs. Grilling friends about ingredients in dishes as they're being set on the table. Okay, better late than never, but it's much more gracious and courteous to speak in advance.

Accepting an invitation for a meal needs to go hand-in-hand with an explanation, and maybe an offer to bring along a vegetarian dish. Though most people have vegetarian foods they enjoy serving, be ready to help the host. Have a few simple food suggestions to make if you're asked "What can you eat?" Sometimes people are reassured when they hear that we eat many ordinary dishes – any vegetable, fruit, or grain without added ingredients derived from animals. We can ask what our host likes to cook or is thinking of serving and make easy, practical suggestions for turning a meat dish into a vegetarian one. Once our way of eating is accepted, we can lightly remind folks of the details – for example, that we don't eat curries with fish sauce. Or maybe we need to gently inquire about specifics: Is there mayonnaise in the salad dressing?

Being easy to please, as long as vegetarian requirements are met, goes a long way towards helping people relax around food, whether the occasion for gathering is business or pleasure. Of course, we'd like to have a vast selection of veggie entrées laid out before us, but that desire isn't generally satisfied at restaurants and homes in the West. Sometimes we get grouchy because everyone else has a dozen choices of foods while we

have one or two. Long-time vegetarians have sage advice when resentment starts to creep up: Let it go. Yes, we can wish that people at the office would occasionally pick a restaurant with lots of veggie options or think to include eggless desserts in a holiday celebration. However, our desires and reality will sometimes knock against each other like tree limbs in a hurricane.

Instead of resentment, let's try gratitude. We have wonderful reasons for staying away from the beef tacos or lamb risotto. Do we see only a salad or a tray of vegetables to eat? Great! We have healthy options!

An elevator pitch

Let's pretend for a moment. The doors of an elevator have just opened, ready to take you up to an acting audition with a television studio you admire. As you stride into the elevator, you see that the only other person there is the studio's Chief Executive, whom you recognize immediately. This is an unbelievable stroke of luck, a private moment with someone who would normally be way too busy to give you an interview. But you only have a minute to introduce yourself and spell out clearly what you do. A one-minute elevator pitch – that's what you need. Many people develop concise, interesting explanations of their work, product, services, or organization based on this concept.

The same idea can come in handy when answering the constant question, "Why are you a vegetarian?" If living without meat is new to you, get ready; this inquiry is coming your way! A heartfelt, simple answer usually works well and is a chance to share the basis of our beliefs. This is also an opportunity

to put another person at ease if we sense that's needed. The questioner may be motivated by curiosity, a sincere desire to understand, or even scorn; he or she may respect vegetarians or think we're foolish. Whatever the motivation, we can act positively rather than defensively. We can explain without over-explaining. Experience has taught us that with virtually every topic of discussion, if people are really interested, sooner or later, they'll ask for more. There's no need to sell vegetarianism to reluctant listeners. A short pitch can travel a long way, but only if the time is right.

So why are you a vegetarian? Really, this is a flattering question. Someone is showing interest in our lives, our thinking, our motivations. Everyone's answer will be a bit unique but will also probably have some common elements. Here's one possible 'elevator pitch':

I stopped eating red meat when I was twenty because I had heard so many awful things about the way cattle and pigs are treated and the hormones and antibiotics they're fed. I mean, I've never owned a cow or a horse, but I grew up owning dogs and I have a cat, and I could see that animals have emotions and intelligence. I didn't want to keep eating them.

Then I began to learn more about how chickens and other kinds of birds are raised on factory farms, and their lives seemed terrible, too. And I'd seen how fish struggle against dying. It didn't feel right to contribute to such misery just because I used to like the way they tasted. I knew I didn't need to eat animals to be healthy. In fact, I did some reading and found out that being a vegetarian has a ton of health benefits.

So, to start with, not eating meat was mostly about the treatment of animals and my own health. Then I watched a couple of videos and read a book about the environmental effects of using so much of the Earth's land and water to grow food for animals rather than food for people. And when I think about the connection between global climate change and animal industry, I'm more and more certain that becoming a vegetarian was one of the best choices I've ever made.



Getting medical advice

We usually walk into our doctor's office or naturopathic clinic or acupuncturist's reception room with an attitude of respect and expectation of help. What happens if that help comes with advice to take medicines or supplements that contain animal products? Perhaps someone suffering from joint pain – maybe a runner with knee problems or a person with osteoarthritis – is advised to take chondroitin sulphate, often made from shark cartilage or bovine sources. What if the recommended vitamins have "stearic acid" on the label or come in gelatin caps? How can we possibly even know the ingredients in the thousands of medicines available?

First of all, we can educate ourselves about the basics. There's no need to worry about getting a medical degree, thank goodness, but knowing some common pitfalls for vegetarians in prescriptions, vitamins, and nutritional supplements can be a literal lifesaver (speaking for the animals).

Capsules containing gelatin are arguably the most common problem because gelatin is made from animals, typically the bones, hides, and skins of pigs and cattle.¹³⁶ However, in recent years, vegetarian capsules have become an easy-to-find replacement for gelcaps. Today it's possible to buy supplements with plant-based capsules on line or in health food stores. Look for "V-caps," "veggie caps," or "suitable for vegetarians" on the label.

Stearic acid is another ingredient vegetarians want to be aware of. Used to prevent caking during the manufacture of many vitamins, it can be from either animal or plant sources. Search the ingredients list to see if "vegetarian source" appears next to "stearic acid."

Because we can't possibly keep up with the multitude of substances in changing medications, *communicating* with our health care providers is crucial. They need to know any parameters we have for prescriptions or supplements. Giving and receiving specific information is important. Providers may not have answers immediately, but such information is possible to find. We depend on our chiropractors, doctors, homeopaths, nutritionists, and acupuncturists to help us, and asking them to research ingredients – or give us information so that we can do such research – can be a routine part of a medical appointment.



Business meals

The good news is that being vegetarian is becoming more and more common. It's very possible that our boss and co-workers are vegetarian or know other vegetarians. Still, we can sometimes feel unsure how to do business over food

without the fact that we're vegetarians overshadowing all else. We naturally want to please our bosses, and we want to fit in with our colleagues.

Again, people who have grown up as vegetarians or have been vegetarians for many years have good advice. They say repeatedly that we can maintain our values while we do business. No one guarantees that we'll never have an awkward moment, but those pass. Sometimes nobody even notices that we're simply eating a baked potato and salad. If they do, we can plainly state the facts: "I'm a vegetarian, so I'm happy to stick to this." Those of us who have been vegetarians for decades generally find that others respect our commitment when we say, "I've been a vegetarian for *blank* years, and this food really agrees with me." And then we can turn the conversation back to the other person and ask, "Have you found something you like on the menu?" Questions like this pleasantly tilt the topic in another direction.

So we see that, with social skills and a little practice, we can participate in meals over business. But what about those times we're expected to pick up the check for a meat-eating client or associate? How do we handle that?

Each person needs to find his or her own answers here, but as we search for those answers let's be honest with ourselves. *When we buy meat for others, we take on a portion of the responsibility for an animal's death.* We become part of the chain of meat production. When we choose to purchase meat or meat products in our role as a spouse, caregiver, parent, or employee, we pay a price that extends beyond the cash laid out, and we may simply accept that fact as part of living in the world.

Buying, cooking, and serving meat to our families is often seen as a duty that many vegetarians choose to fulfil. However, doing so for business reasons is, in some minds, less justifiable. Others say that insisting on purely vegetarian business meals isn't practical. Perhaps a person starting out in a new career is required to entertain an important client. If the company is paying for the meal, the moral dilemma evaporates. But what if the employee is expected to pick up the tab and believes the client would be offended if meat were not an option?

Many variations of this scenario exist. We each have to weigh the circumstances and make decisions we feel are appropriate. At times, we may come to the conclusion that we have a duty to our employer, just as we have to our family. If we find our hearts are heavy with that duty, we may be able to take steps to change our situation.



Raising vegetarian children

Babies wailing to be fed. Toddlers grouchy with hunger. Pre-teens raiding the kitchen for an after-school snack. Teens devouring everything in the fridge – practically eating the refrigerator itself. Our children must be fed, and we respond to the primal pull to satisfy their hunger. Parents want to have healthy, happy children and to give them the best they can. They also want to pass on values, to see their children develop integrity and ideals.

Fortunately, these desires fit naturally into life as a vegetarian. Because we believe deeply that our food choices are best for ourselves and our world, we want to raise children who make

the same choices. How can we help our children be happy with a plant and dairy-based diet when so much of the world around them dines on flesh? Babies and small children eat what we put in front of them, but what about older kids? What about school lunches and birthday parties and spending the night at a friend's house? What happens if our extended families aren't vegetarian? How can we control what our teenager eats outside the home? (Short answer here: We can't.)

Wouldn't answering these questions be easier if we just had a rulebook? One that told us the really right, completely-correct-all-the-time thing to do? Maybe, but we know that's not the way life is. In reality, we have to figure out what works for our unique children, our unique family in our time and place.

However, we're not alone with our questions or struggles; we have a support group in the form of millions of other vegetarians who have raised children. In addition, we know that children learn by watching what their parents do. Walking the talk speaks more loudly than any lecture. From toddlers to teens, children are observing the people around them, learning continually from what they do more than what they say. Because parents have a primary role – one hopefully infused with love, respect, and discipline – they have a powerful impact on a child's way of seeing the world and their place in it. Academic studies confirm what we know from life experiences – parents are role models, whether positively or negatively, for their children. If the parents are vegetarian, they have a headstart in raising kids who will be, too.

What parents don't have is a guarantee. Sooner or later, the child who happily eats purely vegetarian meals will realize that

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many other people eat animals. How will he or she respond? Families who have been vegetarians for generations know that the reactions are as varied as the children themselves. Some will be appalled, even to tears; some will want to try eating animals, too. What can we do about that?

Sorry, but this question doesn't have an answer in any rulebook either. We are called to do our best, to consider both our family's needs and our child's needs, to consider the age and temperament of the child, to be patient and kind and loving in our response to a request that might be unnerving and inconceivable. As the Lebanese-American poet Kahlil Gibran wrote in his book *The Prophet*:

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters
of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you,
yet they belong not to you.*¹³⁷



Will my child be healthy without meat?

A happy baby is one of life's great delights. Little toes kicking the air, tiny fists flailing, and a huge toothless grin – those things make up a sweet picture in any culture. Helping our infants thrive emotionally and physically is a primary responsibility that parents take very seriously, beginning with what to feed the baby. Parents and health experts have both solid experience and science to support the idea that breastmilk, in most cases,

is absolutely the best food for babies. Many paediatricians recommend that babies drink only mother's milk for at least six months, with continued breastfeeding as solid foods are gradually introduced. The La Leche League, a well-respected international organization that provides support and education regarding breastfeeding, recommends "continuation of breastfeeding for one year or longer as mutually desired by mother and infant."¹³⁸

When a baby begins to reach for solid foods, parents might wonder if some of those foods need to be meats. Perhaps family members are putting on pressure, sincerely worried that the little one won't develop well without animal products. Maybe the doctor isn't supportive of vegetarianism. It's natural for parents to ask what's really best for their child. Mom and Dad, Amma and Baba, Mama and Papa – by whatever names, parents everywhere want the greatest good for their children. If these parents are new to a plant-based diet or are the first people in their circle of friends and family to be vegetarians, they could have concerns.

This book asserts that babies, young children, teens, adults, and seniors can be healthy in all phases of life while remaining vegetarians. But no one has to take the word of one small book. Libraries and the digital world are full of both physical and virtual shelves with information about healthy diets for children. Examine information from reputable sources such as *The China Study* or the Vegetarian Resource Group. Talk to your homeopath, paediatrician, midwife, and other vegetarian parents. Look around the world and see that millions of healthy adults were

raised as vegetarian children in homes where generation after generation of families ate plant-and-dairy-based diets.



Children – their friends and their food

No matter how young or old we are, we want to feel like we belong, like we're part of a tribe, even a small one. Children especially don't want to be left out, to be seen as odd. So how does fitting in socially work for a young vegetarian?

The good news is that saying "no" to meat is becoming more common around the world. Whether we live in India, which has had a huge vegetarian population for thousands of years, Asia, Europe, or the Americas, being a vegetarian kid is not so unusual. In fact, being a vegetarian is sometimes seen as 'cool', especially among older children and teens. Young people are generally aware of what's happening to their planet, and they often respect peers who have made a choice to make a difference. Of course, there are some places where the idea of not eating meat is inconceivable – (Really? Never?) – but the numbers of these are dwindling.

We want to feel like we belong, like we're part of a tribe, even a small one.

Whether or not a child is the lone vegetarian on her soccer team or in his classroom or club, some general guidelines can help them participate in the food celebrations that come naturally when people of any age are working or playing together. First, we need to know who our children are studying, playing,

or hanging out with. Explaining our child's diet restrictions to teachers, coaches, and other parents is easier if we already have a connection, even a small one. In any case, especially with really young children, parents can be active in helping them feel comfortable as other kids reach for hamburgers, biryani with mutton or chicken, and eggy desserts. We can't reasonably expect other adults to monitor the situation, but we can provide attractive alternatives for our children to make their choice of vegetarian foods easier.

For example, before a birthday party, have a chat with the host and explain that, because your child doesn't eat eggs, you'd like to send her to the party with cookies to eat when other kids are having cake. Then pack up a few of your kid's favourites, the one she reaches for every time. Have a simple conversation with your child about the cake/cookies choice – the younger the child, the simpler the conversation – hand her the treats, give a hug, and off she goes to make her own life in a big world.

The same approach works for classroom or group celebrations. In addition, volunteering to bring food makes the occasion even easier for your child, just like it does when we attend a gathering of adults. Bake or buy tasty, healthy – well, maybe an occasional bag of tortilla chips or packet of biscuits can slip in 😊 – treats that everyone will enjoy, and odds are that no one will even notice that your child is eating only the vegetarian goodies. If they do notice, better odds are that they'll respect those choices.

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All tremble at violence; life is dear to all.

Putting oneself in the place of another,
one should not kill nor cause another to kill.

One who, while himself seeking happiness,
oppresses with violence other beings
who also desire happiness,
will not attain happiness hereafter.

*Dhammapada*¹³⁹

A grandfather was teaching his young grandson about life and explained that everyone has two wolves inside their hearts which are always at war with each other. One is a good wolf who represents bravery, compassion, love, generosity, and truth. The other is an evil wolf who represents fear, cruelty, hatred, selfishness, and lies. "This fight is going on within you – and within everyone else as well," he pointed out. After thinking for a moment, the young boy asked, "Grandfather, which one will win?" The old man replied quietly, "The one you feed."

*Humans
have
choice.*

Humans have choice. We can decide which wolf, which aspect of ourselves, to feed. Of all the world's species, we alone are given the power of discrimination. While animals can have rich emotional lives, ultimately they do not have the power to decide to be one way or another. The jackal cannot make a commitment to live as an antelope; the elephant cannot adopt the habits of a tiger. Humans alone have the power, an innate free will, to choose between actions and attitudes that will help us achieve our highest aspirations or those that will lead us away from them. As humans, we can even wonder, "What is the real point of life? What is our objective?"

We have both the ability to ask these questions and the ability to answer them. People in general have never been as free as we are today to inform ourselves on any subject we choose, to share our ideas and communicate across the globe,

and to manipulate nature. This freedom and power carries with it an increased urgency to bring to the forefront of our lives the human impulses of love and compassion.

We cultivate these qualities through our actions, which lead inevitably to their logical conclusions. In order to have hearts and minds filled with joy, generosity, and wisdom, our actions must be rooted in those same qualities. Wellbeing and happiness are the consequence of deeds that caused wellbeing and happiness to others; pain and suffering are the consequence of deeds that caused pain and suffering. This is the law of *karma*, or the law of cause and effect. The equivalent repercussion of every action bounces back to the doer. There are no exceptions.

While science has revealed some of the workings of creation, it can explain only what can be observed and measured. Science is a wonderful tool for understanding our world, but it is limited. What about those important parts of life that can't be perceived with the physical senses, like love, sorrow, happiness, or pity? Aren't these emotions as real as gravity or radio waves? Yet they fall outside the bounds of science.

The law of karma, too, falls outside those bounds. The explanation for this law comes from spiritual leaders and philosophers rather than textbooks. The logic of karma is a foundation for understanding our lives and is intertwined with teachings of the eternal reality of who we really are. These beliefs teach that the spirit of all living forms never dies but moves from body to body, carrying a record of all thoughts, words, and actions. The effects of our actions may not be felt for many lifetimes, but they will definitely be felt.

Killing creates a load of karma that is carried like a heavy suit of armour as our soul transitions from one body to another. When we restrict our killing to the simplest forms of life, we free ourselves from much of that weight. Avoiding this burden is a strong motivation to be vegetarian. Aside from the benefits to our environment and our health, many people choose to eat plants rather than animals because doing so is good for their souls.

As a principal law of creation, karma makes us accountable – sooner or later, in this life or in another – for every single thing we do. Understanding the inevitable workings of karma is a strong motivator for making compassionate, wise choices to shape our lives. By the law of karma, life will deliver to us only the crops of seeds we ourselves have planted. When we recognize that our experience of pain is rooted in pain we've caused others, we begin to learn to act differently. As we taste the fruits of our positive choices, our desire to be loving increases, not simply in order to receive love in return but because we are pulled by its magnetic attraction.

We want to respond to this magnetism and to minimise suffering – our own as well as others'. Choosing a vegetarian diet is a natural outcome of this desire. In doing so, we distance ourselves from the violence of a world where life subsists violently on life. We decide to eat plant-based foods, rejecting the idea of living off creation's more complex forms – animals, fish, and fowl. This choice is a spring from which happiness and all other positive feelings can flow. When we act with compassion and caring as we choose food – saying "Yes!" to the rainbow of

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vegetables, fruits, grains, and beans grown around the world – we are choosing kindness many times each day.

As we use our minds wisely to make compassionate choices, we are responding to our deep desire for happiness and fulfilling our natural ability to reason. By committing ourselves to living with compassion, we choose to fulfil our longing to live in a circle of love so large it encompasses all and everyone. We can use reason, and we can love.

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