

Going Vegan

- Sejal Parikh

The transition to veganism wasn't a cakewalk, but the firmness of my conviction ensured I didn't falter. I also realized that once you push yourself into something, ways emerge automatically. Contrary to the popular misconception, veganism is not synonymous with deprivation.

Since I hail from Ahmedabad, Gujarat, people presume that I am a cultural vegetarian. And I was, until college days. Thereafter, I have been a vegetarian by choice. I could see the contradiction behind some animals cherished as pets and some ending up on our platter - butchered. I could see that it was my fundamental duty not to put to pain any being that can feel pain. It took me several years to recognize that a vegetarian doesn't necessarily uphold this principle. When I learnt through a doctor friend of mine as to how milk and its products also involve immense cruelty, I was totally shaken up. For someone who grew up gorging on milk sweets, this was a really bitter pill to swallow. But I fought off the inhibitions and made one of my proudest decisions ever: to become a vegan.

Essentially, Vegan (pronounced vee-gun) living refers to the choices that are made with compassion towards all living beings. It excludes all products derived from animals, namely, milk and its by-products; meat, fish, eggs; honey; wool and leather. In simple terms, a vegan diet consists of "nothing that comes from a mother, nothing that has a face".

It's astounding how so many of us overlook the fact that the cow is a mammal, and to produce uninterrupted milk, she must be forced into pregnancy



over and over again! This implies either forceful mating through a common bull or (more popularly) a process called artificial insemination. To 'maximize' this 'resource', growth hormones are also administered, causing the cow severe stomach cramps. The calves, the rightful owners of the milk, are actually deprived of it! Some of you would know that like all mammals, cows are extremely attached to their young. Yet, calves are separated from their mothers who are seen letting out cries of anguish for days! To cap it all, once these milk machines stop producing satisfactorily, they are sent to a slaughter house, which is often located in a far-away state because cow slaughter is not permitted in all states. This process too is so barbaric that nearly half the animals

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are usually dead by the time they get to the slaughter house! Here's one of the many videos documenting these: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CE9DlnqZxkU>. I have seen some similar treatment first hand as part of my nine-month exploration across the country.

Veganism stands for deep ecology

I thought that I was an enlightened, progressive person, believing in gender equity and did not endorse racism and casteism. Yet, for a long time, I was guilty of practicing an ideologically synonymous 'ism' - speciesism, the exploitation of one species by another. What gives us humans the right to enslave and torment cows, pigs and chicken for pleasure (NOT survival)? How is it okay to hurt beings from other species, when it's not okay to hurt beings from other castes and races? Why should equity and compassion be confined to humans when animals too can feel pain as deeply? This train of thoughts reinforced my original belief that justice ultimately boils down to one simple rule: Never put to pain anything that feels pain.

As per the dominant scientific opinion, certain plants do respond to stimuli, but that is distinctly different from perceiving pain, which requires a highly evolved nervous system. Compared to this, animals even feel psychological pain.

Moreover, even if we hypothetically assume plants to be capable of perceiving pain, non-vegans still would kill/hurt more as farm animals are bred/farmed using a massive amount of plant based food and natural resources. For example, to make 1kg of beef, it takes 12-13kgs of grain (2-3 kg for a chicken). Therefore, environmentally too, it is a wise choice to go vegan!

A Vegan diet is more healthful

Though my vegan move was due to ethical reasons, I now know many people who are vegan for health. Even after turning vegan, I initially believed in milk's nutritional value. Several reading sessions and health seminars later, I now know better. One of the influential books was 'The China Study' - based on arguably the most comprehensive nutritional study ever conducted to explore the linkage between diet and health. Its author, Prof. Colin Campbell, actually began with a flawed hypothesis before he uncovered this «dark secret»: Milk and meat are not only needless they also cause or aggravate many dreaded diseases! Another resource I recommend is the PCRM (Physician Committee for Responsible Medicine) website. Both of these irrefutably shattered the myth I believed in, that milk is indispensable for calcium and protein. Except for vitamin B12 (which even non-vegans are typically deficient in), there's absolutely no nutrient that vegan food cannot provide. There's also a CNN documentary titled «The Last Heart Attack», capturing why Bill Clinton became vegan. The awareness is on the rise in India too. It has been my privilege to know Dr. Nandita Shah, who has successfully helped a number of patients reverse - not just control or alleviate - diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases through merely a healthy vegan diet.

The transition to veganism wasn't a cakewalk, but the firmness of my conviction ensured I didn't falter. I also realized that once you push yourself into something, ways emerge automatically. For instance, I would never have imagined that I would myself be able to cook vegan versions of many of my favourite dishes (cakes, ice-creams, cheese, curd-rice)! Though eating out limits your options a bit, we have done that quite often. You just have to specify the instructions explicitly up front, and you will find most restaurants complying. Contrary to the popular misconception, veganism is not synonymous with deprivation.

But then, don't plants feel pain too? As per the dominant scientific opinion, certain plants do respond to stimuli, but that is distinctly different from perceiving pain, which requires a highly evolved nervous system. Compared to this, animals even feel psychological pain. Moreover, even if we hypothetically assume plants to be capable of perceiving pain, non-vegans still would kill / hurt more as farm animals are bred / farmed using a massive amount of plant based food and natural resources. For example, to make 1kg of beef, it takes 12-13kgs of grain (2-3 kg for a chicken). Therefore, environmentally too, it is a wise choice to go vegan!

A few tips to jump on the band-vegan!

Anyone who wants to begin a vegan diet should start with substituting animal milk with healthier, plant based milks made of cashew, almond, coconut, soy, rice, etc. Coconut milk is one of the better and cheaper options. You can make almost every dish with coconut milk, be it cold/hot coco, cold coffee, kheer or even ice-creams! For paneer lovers, tofu (a soy product) tastes identical. I also make delicious cashew cheese spread for sandwiches, pastas and pizzas. I don't buy a lot of packaged foods, but there are vegan versions of biscuits (Hide-n-Seek, Oreos and many more) and chocolates (Bournville and Nestle's dark chocolate) available in the market.

Sejal Parikh is a techie-turned-budding-writer with a peculiarly diverse set of skills and experiences under her belt. Having been trained as an Electronics and Communication engineer, she had an eventful six-year stint with various IT companies. By then, her urge to explore and help with social and environmental issues had risen enough for her to take up a full-time fellowship to explore rural parts of India, which also helped her observe and volunteer with numerous non-profit groups and movements.

She is now a freelance technical/content writer where she intends to blend her corporate rigor with the life lessons learnt through volunteer work. She blogs at <http://sejswirlpool.wordpress.com/>



Yummy and creamy vegan chocolate ice-cream!

This delicious ice cream is unimaginably easy to make! Just take the albumen (coconut pulp) of a few tender coconuts after you drink water from them.

Blend them with cocoa powder and sugar or date syrup (Lion brand). Increase the amount of cocoa powder until the taste of coconut goes away. Blend it for a good 5 minutes or until mixture becomes fluffy. Add a few spoons of water if the mixture is too thick (max up to 8-10 tsp). Put it in a container and freeze for 1-2 hours.

Blend again for 2-3 minutes and freeze again for an hour. Scoop it in a bowl or an ice cream cone and savour it! Put some Bournville chips to make a chocolate chip ice-cream.