

- an EVEN exclusive interview -

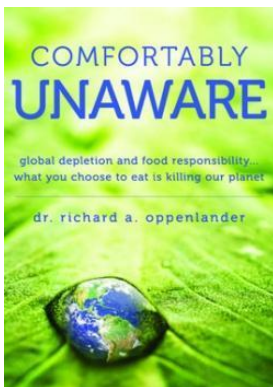


with

## **DR. RICHARD OPPENLANDER**

**RESEARCHER, AUTHOR,  
CONSULTANT, LECTURER**

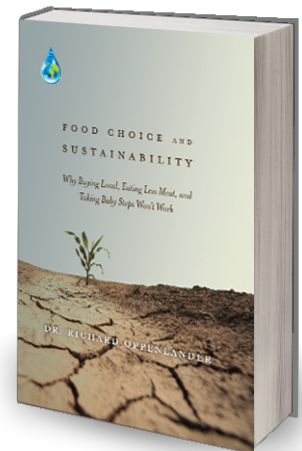
*Dr. Richard Oppenlander is a sustainability consultant and advocate, researcher, and author whose award winning book, [Comfortably Unaware](#) has been endorsed as a must-read by Ellen DeGeneres, Dr. Jane Goodall, and Dr. Neal Barnard, among others.*



*Dr. Oppenlander is a much sought after lecturer on the topic of food choice and how it relates to sustainability, all within the framework of fresh perspectives and critical insights. He also serves as an advisor to world hunger projects in developing countries and with municipalities in the U.S. He has spent 40 years studying the effects food choices have on our planet and on us.*

*He started an [organic vegan food production company](#), operates an animal rescue sanctuary (with his wife Jill), and is the founder and president of a non-profit organization called [Inspire Awareness Now](#).*

*Dr. Oppenlander has written a new, groundbreaking book titled, "[Food Choice and Sustainability: Why Buying Local, Eating Less Meat, and Taking Baby Steps Won't Work](#)", which has just been released and is now available. Visit [Comfortably Unaware](#) for more.*



**EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?**

**Richard:** My wife, Jill, and I began eating and living by way of fully plant based alternatives to any animal products (vegan lifestyle) as a brief evolutionary transition from vegetarianism nearly 35 years ago. The first step for us in the 1970's occurred primarily because I had discovered the human health and environmental damages caused by eating animals and animal products while involved in medical research as a graduate student—in the laboratory. This then was combined with witnessing the cruelties of animal research and Jill's innate compassion for animals.

**EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?**

**Richard:** I don't think I would have reached the level of veganism that I am at today without Jill's influence early on (four decades ago) related to the beautiful souls found in animals—particularly those farmed animals that we humans have tortured for so many years, those that have been harvested and slaughtered from our oceans, and those that have been devastated by loss of habitat due to animal agriculture.

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Approach the vegan activist movement  
by first being an example of the highest level of  
peace and logic/reasoning — rather than letting your emotions  
dictate the situation.

— Dr. Richard Oppenlander

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**EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?**

**Richard:** I think the most important advice I could provide to anyone wanting to become more of an activist is the following:

## 1

*Increase your own awareness levels*  
to round out your comprehension on how eating animals effects our environment and human health, rather than only approaching the activism from an animal rights or welfare standpoint.  
This way you will likely increase the positive effect you will have on others.

## 2

certainly there is a place for passion and emotion,  
but approach the vegan activist movement by first  
*BEING an example  
OF THE HIGHEST LEVEL  
OF PEACE & LOGIC/reasoning*  
—rather than letting your emotions dictate the situation.

**EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?**

**Richard:** I'm assuming by "hard for people" you mean what makes veganism difficult for individuals (who are not vegans) to accept and adopt as a lifestyle, but your question could also imply that veganism is difficult as a lifestyle for those who already are vegan, and, both are very good questions! So I will answer both perspectives.

The difficulty people, organizations, or institutions who are not vegans, have with embracing veganism as a lifestyle lies in a complex web of cultural/social, political, and economic influences which I believe begins with awareness.

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The more aware one becomes of the devastating effect raising and eating animals has on the animals (wild and domesticated), our planet, and ourselves, and conversely all the positive aspects of eating purely plant based foods, the more likely one will be to appreciate and adopt a vegan lifestyle. It is about awareness.

— Dr. Richard Oppenlander

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Now, what creates difficulties for those who are *already* vegan is, of course, the misunderstanding, misinformation, and indifference caused by multiple layers of cultural and political influences that inhibit the world from allowing proper progress to be made. This actuality, and the frustration caused by it, becomes perhaps the most challenging aspect for vegans—seeing and knowing that, despite their best efforts, there is still killing and devastation happening every second around the world—all quite sad and unnecessary.

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Asking someone to stop eating animals and to adopt a vegan way of life should no longer be viewed as an infringement of individual rights since it is actually the other way around.

— Dr. Richard Oppenlander

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**EVEN:** What, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

**Richard:** Since everyone is fairly familiar with the obvious misunderstandings surrounding the human health benefits of a plant-based diet (for example the protein or calcium myths, etc.), I think it's important to touch on other misunderstandings perhaps rarely discussed. There are many misunderstandings about veganism that range outside of the human health topic, but these are most relevant:

### 1

DISCUSSIONS OF 'ETHICAL' FOOD CHOICE REGARDING  
VEGANISM SHOULD NOT BE CONFINED TO ANIMAL  
RIGHTS OR ANIMAL WELFARE.

Instead, the following questions should be posed—with ethical or humane food choice being viewed in a much larger context:

Is it ethical, for instance, for any of us to eat food that causes the extinction of other species if we don't need to?

Is it ethical for the vast majority of the humans on earth to cause irreversible climate change, loss of ecosystems, and resource depletion, while 2% of all humans have adopted a vegan lifestyle that actually protects earth?

Is it ethical for any of us to use our planet in a way that exacerbates world hunger and extracts the potential for future generations to survive?

And, is it ethical for 310 million Americans to impose their diet related health care costs on the 5 million who choose to eat the right foods?

There is a gross misunderstanding, or disconnect, related to the fact that what we decide to eat can significantly impact something somewhere else in the world. In continuation of that disconnect is that those who consume animals and animal products are casting irreversible ecological damage and the cost of these damages on those who have adopted a vegan lifestyle. Asking someone to stop eating animals and to adopt a vegan way of life should no longer be viewed as an infringement of individual rights since it is actually the other way around.

## 2

ANOTHER LARGELY MISUNDERSTOOD PERSPECTIVE IS THAT WE HAVE TIME LINES RELATED TO OUR SPECIES' EFFECT ON OUR PLANET AND ULTIMATELY OUR VERY EXISTENCE —MOST OF WHICH CAN BE REMEDIED BY MASS COLLECTIVE CHANGE TO A FULLY PLANT BASED DIET.

In other words, we humans have reached a point in time where we can adversely impact our biosphere (litho, hydro, and atmosphere) and are doing so in an irreversible manner—so much so that our survival as a species is questionable beyond 50-100 years. What is vastly misunderstood is not only the time lines we are presented with (greenhouse gas emissions/climate change, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, collapse of our oceans, etc.) but the role that our food choices present and that massive and swift global change to a fully organic, whole plant based diet is the only way we can steer ourselves through this evolutionary bottleneck we are faced with.

### 3

THERE IS GREAT MISUNDERSTANDING WITH NEARLY ALL FOOD MOVEMENTS THAT WE SEE TODAY—AND THE PROPER ROLE OF VEGANISM.

All of the following are riddled with inaccuracies, misinformation, lack of proper direction and therefore anyone following these movements are being misled: local food, organic/biodynamic, grass fed/pastured, cage free, sustainable seafood, traceable, humane, farm or seed to table, urban agriculture, "Real" food, "Cool" food, etc. None of which are sustainable, healthy, or humane if they include the raising, harvesting, slaughtering of animals...which they all do.

**EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?**

**Richard:** More than anything, I wish I had the opportunity to understand and appreciate the connection between what I was eating and where it came from--not just from a human health standpoint, but in order for me to really open my eyes to the beautiful lives that were being raised and slaughtered and that there was another, more peaceful and just way for us to eat. This awareness should be fundamental to every child and therefore a critical component of early childhood education, and then reinforced by every academic institution at all levels--it should be mandatory learning for many reasons and on many levels.

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Let your emotion fuel the desire for change to occur but keep it nicely balanced with objective reasoning that has been formed by your increased base of knowledge and keen awareness.

— Dr. Richard Oppenlander

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**EVEN:** If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

**Richard:** The most relevant guidance I could offer a younger person today would relate to both breadth of knowledge and then emotion. First, it is so very important to continue learning all that is available from reputable sources about the role food plays with our human health, the state of our planet and implications of global depletion, and the animals effected (wild as well as domesticated).

Be in a constant state of increasing your own awareness and be constantly updated. Understand that the vast majority of humans are indeed comfortably unaware and some are aware but unable to move forward. Both types (unaware and partially aware), while unwittingly contributing to irreversible damage of our planet and life on it, will ultimately rely on leaders such as you to help guide them toward truth. The future is actually now, in terms of food choice, and our youth have the greatest opportunity of all to create the positive change necessary on a global scale. Let your emotion fuel the desire for change to occur but keep it nicely balanced with objective reasoning that has been formed by your increased base of knowledge and keen awareness.

**EVEN:** Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

**Richard:** From a spiritual standpoint, every meal that is made with fully organic, whole plant foods is a gift and what "works" for me. Truly.



Although I have many favorite meals and am quite spoiled (Jill is a phenomenal artisan vegan meal-crafter), I suppose at or near the top would have to be (everything must be organic/biodynamically grown, an appropriate distance away from any animal operation) a raw salad with predominately kale fused with other veggies of many colors, multiple vegetable (including potato) curry, with Kamut or quinoa on the side, and also lightly steamed collard greens (nothing added—no oil or seasoning) on the side as well, and a buckwheat-amaranth roll. There are so many fantastic vegan meals—I just happened to have had this last night which is why it moved up to first place!

**EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?**

**Richard:** Knowing that with every bite of food, article of clothing, or anything else consumed by me, it is with the most efficient use of resources, it optimizes my own health, and I didn't contribute to the slaughtering of another life.

Also, knowing that I may be able to, by directly influencing or simply by example, increase awareness for others and open the door for them to find the most peaceful, healthy, and compassionate lifestyle.

**EVEN: Any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?**

**Richard:** As you know, I have many thoughts about this and most have been covered in either in my first book, *Comfortably Unaware*, or my newest book *Food Choice and Sustainability: Why buying local, eating less meat, and taking baby steps won't work*, which was just released a couple of weeks ago.

The most critical insights I could leave you with regarding the future of veganism in today's world would have to be those related to just that—our future. Not so much 'our' future as an individual, but more the future of our human species—the need to begin looking outside of self—at all living things (plants, animals, insects) around us and at future generations.

Without moving critical mass (the majority of the global human population)



in a swift manner (within 3-4 years) toward a 100% plant based diet, there may not *be* a future. The Gaia Theory may indeed be valid, but the complex species-environment interactive and supportive relationship could reach a point where the human species is not part of the equation.

The interesting issue at hand is: that in order for any of us to reach a state of true sustainability, we have to move in a collective manner or else none of us may make it—we have to make the journey together—AND that collective journey toward true sustainability cannot be realized without inclusion of a vegan lifestyle.

It's time for all vegans to inspire others to become aware. That single act will determine our future—today.

### [Dr. Oppenlander's next lecture](#)

NYC/Times Square,  
January 11, 2014,  
9 AM to 10:30 AM ET

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The thought of achieving sustainability must extend through many layers — economic, social, ethical — not just ecological — and ultimately be carried by our choice of foods.

— Dr. Richard Oppenlander

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