

an **EVEN** exclusive interview –



with
Joanne Kong

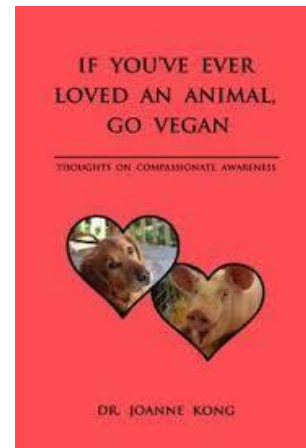
Speaker, Author, Animal and Environmental Advocate

Dr. Joanne Kong has been praised as one of the most compelling advocates for plant-based nutrition today, centered ethically in raising awareness that greater compassion for animals and our planet is vitally necessary for transformative growth and positive world change.

Interviewed for the upcoming major documentary *Eating Our Way to Extinction* and recipient of the University of Richmond's 2017 Sustainability Leadership Award, she addresses the urgency with which the world community must acknowledge the devastating impacts of animal agriculture on our environment, and motivates others to bring about a kinder, more compassionate world through veganism.

Joanne's recent presentations include Oakland VegFest, the Veggie Pride Parade in New York, San Francisco's World Veg Festival, Green Food Fest in Norway, the North American Veg Society's Summerfest, a 3-week speaking tour of India, and she was honored to be a guest speaker for EVEN this past year.

Dr. Kong is the author of *If You've Ever Loved an Animal, Go Vegan*, and her highly-praised TEDx talk, currently at over 400,000 views on YouTube, is included in *Unbound Project*, "a multimedia and book project that celebrates the inspiring women who have been at the forefront of animal advocacy around the globe."



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EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Joanne: My husband and I first became vegetarian over 30 years ago when we read the book *Animal Factories* by Jim Mason and Peter Singer. It opened our eyes to the system of mass cruelty and violence that is a part of our food production systems. Frankly, it was something that we had never thought about even though, while college students at the University of Oregon, we knew or occasionally met vegans and vegetarians. After reading the book, the very next day we vowed to leave animals off our plates forever. Once we had become aware, the decision was a very easy one to make, as was becoming vegan.

I feel that veganism is the path by which we all re-discover the core qualities that are the most beautiful gifts we can give to other beings --- our sensitivity, empathy, kindness and compassion.

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

Joanne: There was no particular person who specifically led me to veganism, but rather the growing awareness that our food choices *do* make a difference, and that as individuals we have more power than we think, to change the world. Everything is energy, and the collective compassion of vegans is gradually, but surely, turning the tide of public awareness. In my vegan journey and work as an advocate, I am inspired by so many individuals and organizations who are acting on behalf of animals (like EVEN!). I truly believe that someday, society will look back on us, and see that this was a period of vital transformation where we planted the seeds for a new, elevated compassionate awareness. Veganism will be the path that moves and evolves our culture to a new era of peace and compassion.



Joanne Kong presenting The Power of Veganism to EVEN

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

Joanne: There is, of course, the pervasive misunderstanding that plant-based eating doesn't provide enough protein. This shows the great degree to which our meat-eating culture has indoctrinated the public to falsely believe that meat, dairy and eggs are primary and necessary sources of protein.

People who know little about veganism also tend to see veganism as a specialized diet or the newest eating fad, when in truth, it is so much more than that; at its core it's about embracing the fact that we can get all the nutrition we need without inflicting harm and suffering upon others and damaging the environment. Once they see this, they begin to realize that veganism is not about deprivation or restriction, but about expanding our awareness and especially our hearts. I often remind beginning vegans that a lot of the foods (fruits, veggies, grains, nuts and seeds) they have already been eating are vegan anyway!

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

Joanne: Earlier this Summer [2018] I visited India on a 3-week vegan speaking tour, and one audience member stood up and rather defiantly said, "Going veganism takes tremendous willpower."



Joanne Kong on tour lecturing in Pune India

To me, that pointed out how our eating habits, what we came to enjoy while growing up --- the tastes, smells and textures of meat --- are so deeply ingrained in our lifestyle, reinforced in the over 1000 meals we eat every year. It can also be awkward or difficult if one is in a family or social situation where others are not supportive. Individuals sometimes put a lot of pressure on themselves, that it's an all or nothing thing, as if you're going to be judged on how quickly you make the transition.

I encourage people by reminding them that veganism is a journey, not a destination. They should celebrate all the choices they make to create a more positive and loving world, and it begins on our plates, one meal at a time. Through veganism they can discover *new* tastes and culinary flavors that are just as satisfying, even more so because they were created without inflicting harm.



Joanne and Olive

While I know that veganism *can* be hard for some people, those who are doing it for ethical concerns tend to have a much more grounded reason and motivation to *stay* vegan.

It's not a lifestyle decision that we make only for our appetites; it's something that we embrace with our minds, hearts, and spirits.

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

Joanne: I definitely wish I had awoken to the cruelty committed against animals. I always point out to audiences that the consumption and exploitation of animals is something that is so deeply entrenched in our culture, and that I myself am an example of how our society is so distanced from that reality. I grew up in an animal-eating family and I never once thought about the innocent animal that I was eating. In fact, I feel very ashamed that I was so blind to the cruelty.

In essence, most of us simply were born, through no fault of our own, into a culture perpetuated by social-economic-cultural-industrial systems that maintain animal consumption as a reality, as the status quo.

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

Joanne: I would give them as much encouragement as possible, pointing out the power of the choice they have made. It's easy in our society to be swayed by the cultural norms that are thrown at us every day; just think of all the incessant advertising about fast food and restaurants, and the social pressures to "be like others." We vegans are in a way some of the most courageous members of our society because we see the harm and violence that underlies our everyday lives, and we have chosen to do something about it. Newbies can realize that veganism is truly about living your values, no matter what others think. It's about standing up for animals who have no voice. I would also point out that self-care is important. It's very easy to become sad, angry or depressed about the state of the world, but we need to remain focused on the good that is happening, as veganism is becoming more and more mainstream.

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

Joanne: My first piece of advice would be to become as knowledgeable as possible about the many aspects of veganism; there is so much information out there and I am constantly learning! (Since I do a lot of public presentations, I actually keep a log of the most common questions and concerns that people bring up!). I strongly believe that the most important way that vegans can be advocates is by being a model of energy and radiant health!

There are so many ways to spread the positive message of veganism -- volunteering for your local vegfest, engaging others in positive conversations about how plant-based eating has made a difference in your life, starting a website or blog, donating to or volunteering at an animal sanctuary, encouraging restaurants to increase vegan options, posting flyers in public, writing in the editorial section of your local newspaper, wearing vegan T-shirts, buttons or hats to bring about conversations, posting about veganism through social media, and getting involved in various organizations like Anonymous for the Voiceless or Direct Action Everywhere which bring advocacy directly to the public.

Beginning advocates should think about what type of activity best fits their unique skills and personality, and what they are most comfortable with. It could be speaking, writing, organizing, community leadership, or any other activities where they feel they can be most effective.

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

Joanne: That's a hard one to answer! I love making green smoothies - I blend a bunch of leafy greens and fruit in a Vitamix, make several jars, freeze them, and take out one a day. Super healthy! That gives me a week's supply of quick and nutritious drinks, and it's fun to experiment with different combinations. I also do stir-fries, and lots of salads. I love kale and broccoli and it's so easy to just eat them raw as a side dish.

I strongly believe that the most important way that vegans can be advocates is by being a model of energy and radiant health!

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Joanne: To me, the most important thing about being vegan is that I'm living the values of lessening suffering, advocating for animals who truly are the most innocent and vulnerable among us, and embracing kindness and compassion. It's about recognizing that we all hold the *same* life energy as our non-human friends, who are just as much individuals as we are.

Our human society needs to move away from an egocentric view that places man as a superior being, to one of tolerance, respect, inclusivity and peace where all beings live as equals.

Vegans are changing the world, and we are doing the most important and vital work on the planet!

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

Joanne: Veganism is powerful and spreading around the world! Its strength comes from the fact that it touches so many aspects of our lives and the sustainability of the planet and all living beings. It's not just your latest diet or fad; veganism is going mainstream and it's here to stay!

The movement has gained amazing momentum, just in the past 5 years - look at the explosion of plant-based foods and meat alternatives as more and more people leave animals off their plates. There's growing interest in the health benefits of plant-based nutrition with wonderful advocacy by amazing physicians like Michael Greger, Neal Barnard, Michael Klaper, Kim Williams and others, growth of all-vegan restaurants and veggie fests all around the world, increased activism especially among young people, and terrific documentaries that are educating the public about plant-based health benefits and opening people's eyes to the horrors of factory farms and animal exploitation.

To me, the most important thing about being vegan is that I'm living the values of lessening suffering, advocating for animals who truly are the most innocent and vulnerable among us, and embracing kindness and compassion.

Veganism will be the path that moves and evolves our culture to a new era of peace and compassion.

Joanne's Website: <https://www.vegansmakeadifference.com/>

Joanne's TEDx talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZWzNfOpbCQ>

Joanne's Presentation at EVEN in Eugene 3/10/18:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0siG_m100Ko&feature=youtu.be

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