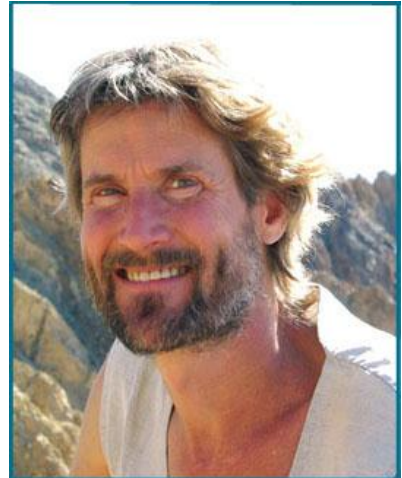


Spiritual People Moving Toward Veganism?

By Will Tuttle, PhD

Question: In the last couple of decades, how much of a change do you think there's been in the perspective of spiritual people about the human relationship to nonhuman animals?



Overall, I've seen a gradually increasing tempo of change among "spiritual people" about our routine mistreatment of animals in the 3 decades I've been a vegan and activist, and I'd say that while the percentages are still small, they are making an increasing impact on the consciousness and behavior of our culture.

For example, for the past 20 years I have been traveling full-time presenting lectures and workshops to people in progressive churches virtually every Sunday, and while it's constantly frustrating on one level, I have to say that today the general consciousness—and level of conscience—is vastly different from what it was, say, 20 years ago.

Veganism is on the map and recognized, and, I'd have to say, respected and seen as a noble (if somewhat unattainable) ideal by many people. Curiosity and confusion are rampant, as is fear of change, clinging to past habits, and a reactive pushing back against what I believe is an ongoing awakening of human consciousness.

This is to be expected, and is natural, but the awakening is happening, I feel, and it will bring us ever onward, at an accelerating pace, toward vegan living (or our extinction or utter enslavement if we continue the trajectory of conventional Western eating/living/thinking).

I'm actually able to give lectures blatantly promoting veganism and critiquing our current animal enslavement system in increasing numbers of Unity churches and Unitarian Universalist churches. The entire UU denomination, in fact, has taken "Ethical Eating" as its study-action issue for the period 2008-2012, and so there is active gnashing of teeth and squirming about going on occasionally in these congregations, as they

peek behind the curtain, which is I believe, a wonderful and necessary thing.

There is also the Hallelujah Acres movement which is booming, and bringing a 100% plant-based diet to the awareness of hundreds of thousands of people who are conservative Christians. The fact that veganism is being espoused by Ellen DeGeneres and other celebrities is also making a huge difference among people who consider themselves progressive and spiritual.

I've also been actively involved in Buddhist groups, and it's heartening to see that Thich Nhat Hanh, who has enormous influence, now requires all his monks and nuns to eat a vegan (not just vegetarian) diet, and lay students to not eat meat. Even the Karmapa, head of the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, mandates that all monks be vegetarian, which was unthinkable 20 years ago, and the Dalai Lama continues to maintain Dharamsala as a meat-free zone.

We also have Supreme Master Ching Hai and her community making tremendous strides in bringing the vegan and spiritual message to the world through their worldwide vegan chain of restaurants, now over 200 strong. This was unthinkable just 5 or 10 years ago! And also through their SupremeMasterTV internet television program, they bring the spiritually-oriented vegan message 24/7 by broadcasting vegan-advocating programming with cooking classes, interviews, and constructive news in over 20 languages.

PCRM is offering vegan cooking classes in communities throughout North America, and this is percolating into local churches, as well as the ideas in The China Study, which is growing every year. Food not Bombs often works directly or indirectly through local churches in using their kitchens, etc., to distribute free vegan food to the needy and this is also helping to bring the vegan message to spiritually-oriented people. The large organizations, like HSUS and PETA also have outreach programs to churches and church leaders, and the Christian Vegetarian Association is doing continuous outreach to Christian communities through their literature and internet presence. ISKCON continues to promote vegetarianism (and increasingly veganism) around the world, and the Food For Life program delivers millions of vegan meals annually.

As another example, we have created the internet-based Worldwide Prayer Circle For Animals, with members from around the world who join in consciousness every day at noon to hold all animals in our hearts and minds with love and compassion and mentally repeat this prayer: “Compassion encircles the Earth for all beings everywhere.” This circle of spiritually-committed people continues to grow.

In addition, we see the booming yoga movement awakening to the ancient teaching of ahimsa, which is the essence of veganism, and increasing numbers of yoga studios, like Jivamukti, are encouraging their students to be vegan, and in the case of Jivamukti Yoga, The World Peace Diet is a required text for all instructors in training. We also now have the first national ongoing conference that explicitly brings together spirituality and veganism, the World Peace and Yoga Jubilee that is held every October in the Cincinnati area. The Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center in Arizona is a vegan healing center that explicitly combines spirituality in its modalities as well.

So from the perspectives of health, environment, and compassion for animals, as well as spirituality, I see people awakening very quickly, especially in the last five years, and it’s happening much more quickly than the mainstream media is letting on, from my perspective. A lot of the change is subterranean, and I think it’s the result of grassroots vegan activism and that it’s absolutely essential that all of us continue to urgently advocate veganism in our communities throughout the world in whatever ways we can – there is literally nothing more benevolent or vital that we can do, in my opinion.

At its core, veganism is a spiritual movement, based on the ancient wisdom teaching of the interconnectedness of all life, and founded on the compassionate yearning within all of us to bless our world and to celebrate our lives creatively and joyfully on this magnificent Earth. Thank you for living this message in your daily lives, and for bringing it, in whatever ways resonate for you, to our world and to help uplift human consciousness to the truth that compassion and health are two sides of the same coin.

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