

I grew up in a household where the main dish at a meal was always some form of meat. Throughout junior high, high school, and college I was involved in athletics and made it a point to consume a high level of meat, dairy, and eggs because “authorities” I had read said, and I believed, that I needed a large amount of protein; these same “authorities” had also convinced me that animal source proteins were superior to plant proteins. I did not know anyone who was a vegetarian; in fact, I did not know such a thing even existed.

Some time when I was in college, around the age of 22 or 23, I was very committed to the idea that all human beings had the right to be treated with respect and not be subjected to violence unless it was necessary to ward off a violent attack on the part of another person. I had been committed to this for several years, but at this point the question came up for me: why aren’t other living beings deserving of the same consideration? We kill and eat them, but they are no threat to us and we could be well fed without eating their flesh. What gives humans the right to do this? At that point, I decided to stop eating meat.

However, I made no attempt to educate myself about providing an adequate vegetarian diet for myself. All I did was eat exactly the same way I had before, but drop all meat out of my diet. As a result, I was frequently hungry, lost weight (when I didn’t need to) and didn’t feel good. After a few weeks, I went back to eating meat and told myself it was necessary to do so in order to maintain my health.

About 4 years later (still in college!), I was a philosophy major and one of the professors offered an ethics class that was focused entirely on humans’ relationships with other species. I was intrigued, and sat in on the class for the entire term. The book we used was Peter Singer’s *Animal Rights and Human Obligations* (a collection of essays), and this was my first introduction to anyone else’s thinking on this issue. I was completely blown away by Singer’s essays “All Animals Are Equal” and “Down on the Factory Farm.” His reasoning was inescapable: we were causing enormous pain, suffering, and death for animals by our food choices, and our only basis for doing this was a taste preference that had become habit. As he put it, we were sacrificing the vital interests of nonhuman animals to satisfy a trivial interest on our part. I also read, and was very impressed with, Frances Moore Lappe’s book, *Diet For A Small Planet*, which helped to educate me regarding to how to actually eat a vegetarian diet. I stopped eating meat completely and never went back. It was a very easy choice, and easy to stay with.

However, while I stopped eating animal flesh at this point, I continued to eat dairy and eggs. I told myself that I needed the protein and calcium; this was, though, not based on any actual research or investigation. I also told myself that eggs and dairy were alright, because these products could be produced without killing the animals. This continued, I am amazed to admit, for a period of about 14 years.

At this point, my partner discovered John Robbins’ *Diet for a New America* and was so impressed with it that she asked me to read it. My rationalizations for eating dairy and eggs simply collapsed. It was clear that animals used to produce milk and eggs suffered greatly at our hands, and were ultimately killed and their flesh sold for meat when their milk or egg production fell below a

certain point. It also became clear, that getting enough protein and calcium was not a problem and that, in fact, our health suffers because of too much protein (particularly animal protein). This information was powerfully reinforced years later by Colin Campbell's book, *The China Study*. I also learned that raising animals for food does enormous environmental damage, wastes energy, contributes to world hunger, and makes war more likely due to contributing to scarcity of resources. At this point I became totally vegan (food, clothing, everything). It simply felt totally right. I can also say that it was never a struggle; I never felt deprived, or felt that what I was doing was some sort of a burden or hassle.

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