

# an EVEN exclusive interview – with

## Dr. Michael Klaper

Physician, Speaker,  
Educator



*Michael A. Klaper, M.D. is a graduate of the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago. He received postgraduate training in internal medicine, surgery, orthopedics and anesthesiology at the University of British Columbia Hospitals in Vancouver and obstetrics at the University of California at San Francisco. Dr. Klaper has practiced acute care medicine in Hawaii, Canada, California, Florida and New Zealand.*

*Far more fulfilling to him is his current practice, focusing on health-promoting food and lifestyle choices to help people stay out of hospitals and off of operating tables. He has authored numerous articles on plant-based nutrition and is authoring a book on using plant-based medicine in the clinical setting to arrest and reverse disease.*

*A long-time radio host and a pilot, Dr. Klaper has served as nutrition advisor to NASA's programs for space colonists on the Moon and Mars and on the Nutrition Task Force of the American Medical Students Association.*

He makes the latest information on health and nutrition available through his website, [DoctorKlaper.com](http://DoctorKlaper.com), where visitors can find the latest nutrition information through his numerous articles and videos, subscribe to his free newsletter, "Medicine Capsule," and support his "Moving Medicine Forward" Initiative to get applied nutrition taught in medical schools.

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**A vegan lifestyle adds a feeling of balance and rightness, and there is also a glimmer of hope attached to veganism that there'll be a better day tomorrow.**

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**EVEN recently had an interesting and fun conversation with Dr. Klaper and we are pleased and excited to share his wisdom and insightful answers with you.**

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

**MK:** I became vegan in 1981, and at that time there were two forces that became undeniable in my awareness. I was doing a residency in anesthesiology in Vancouver and I was on the cardiovascular anesthesia service. Day after day, I was putting people to sleep and watching surgeons open patients' arteries and pull this yellow, slithery material out of their arteries (called atherosclerosis) which was clogging their blood flow and leading to heart attacks and strokes.

One day a surgeon pulled a yellow, particularly slithery piece of fatty material out of the artery wall, and I thought to myself, *My! That stuff looks like chicken fat.* And the little voice on my shoulder said, "...the reason why that looks like chicken fat, Doctor, is that it **is** chicken fat!" And cow fat and pig fat and the fat of other slow animals this man had been eating.

My dad was already showing signs of clogged arteries and there were by now studies in the medical journals saying that a plant-based diet will reverse this artery clogging. So, I was already getting the message from my work in the operating room to stop eating animals

Now, during my last year of medical school, I spent my Saturday nights in the trauma unit at Cook County Hospital in Chicago. Every Saturday night I saw the worst of what humans inflict on each other, violence in every imaginable form, and I would leave there every Sunday morning shaking to my core.

I vowed to at least get the violence out of my own life. So I started reading about Gandhi's approach to life, about the Indian saints, and about the life of non-violence. It sounded good to me and I decided to adopt such a lifestyle.

One night in Vancouver I was out to dinner with a friend and pontificating to him about living a non-violent life while I was finishing off a porterhouse steak at the local Keg and Cleaver. He looked at me with great compassion and said, "That's all very nice, Michael, but if you want to get the violence out of your life, you might start with that piece of meat on your plate, for in satisfying the desire for the taste of flesh in your mouth, you are paying for the death of that animal and for the next one in line at the slaughterhouse."

As soon as he said that, all the old rationales came into my mind--*-the animal's already dead...that's what they're raised for---*but before the words could pass my lips, the little voice on my shoulder said, "*You know, he's right. He's right.*"

And when I went up to pay for the steak dinner, I felt complicit in a violent act. I knew my meat-eating days were coming to an end.

And finally, after I stopped eating animal flesh, a few weeks later I saw pictures of the lampshades made of the skins of the Jews. I had been raised in a Jewish household after World War II, so, the images of all those horrors were sharp in my mind. I looked down at my leather shoes and my leather belt, and they started looking ghoulish to me and cadaverous. I knew I didn't want to wear them on my body. I went to the back of the house and dug a hole, and put my leather shoes and my leather belt and my leather wallet into the hole. I filled up the hole, stepped back, and I apologized to the animals. When you don't know, you don't know, but once you know, you know. I bought my hemp wallet and my non-leather shoes and that was the end of it. Or so I thought.

A couple weeks later, I was mentioning to a friend of mine about the evolution I had gone through, and she said, "Oh, you've become a vegan." I had never heard the word, but I said, "OK, I guess I am!"

So, when you ask me how did veganism become a part of my life, that was the process. The messages were just undeniable. They say once you look behind the curtain you can't pretend you don't know what's there; you've seen it.

The curtain had been pulled back for me, and there was no going back at this point because the animals are always looking. If I care about their existence, I have to report back to them, too. **All life is precious.**

**EVEN:** That sounds like quite an illumination for you during that period, as each piece fell into place.

**MK:** Yes, the Universe was not subtle. They say that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

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

**MK:** When I read Gandhi's life, there was no question, and he was not subtle about it, especially when I started getting into the vegetarian literature. *"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."* When I read that, I thought, "He is right!"

And Lincoln, *"I care not much for a man's religion whose dog and cat are not the better for it."*

Gandhi and Lincoln. They are two shining lights that validate this remarkable change in my life at the time.

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

**MK:** That vegans are skinny and scrawny and deprived of nutrition and enjoyment of life. That image of the pale skinny guy in the corner eating lettuce and raisins and missing out on the good life.

Most the vegans that I know sure enjoy their food and don't think they are missing out on any bit of life at all.

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

**MK:** The easy answer is to say “society,” the culture around us. We are a flesh-eating society. We’ve become that in the space of my lifetime. Throughout our country’s history---until the early 20th century---most Americans lived on farms and did not eat that much meat. You may have had pot roast on Sunday and fish on Friday, but that was about it. No one had meat on the table three times a day, and you sure didn’t kill your chickens every night for Buffalo wings because you would have run out of chickens pretty quickly!

This flesh-based diet that we have developed only since World War II has permeated every aspect of our diet, so that everyone thinks when they look at their plate, “*Where’s my protein? Gotta’ have protein every meal!*”---and so we center our entire diet upon animal flesh. The food companies have stepped up and have become positively artistic in their synthesis of hyper-palatable foods that deliver salt and sugar and saturated fats to our tongues, so that they really grab us by the taste buds.

I had a patient who said to me, “Doctor, if you were a drug addict and trying to get off drugs, and the signs in the windows as you drove down the street read: ‘Heroin!’ ‘Cocaine!’ ‘Methamphetamine!’, how hard would it be to get off the drugs? Yet, look at what the signs on every commercial street are flashing—‘Pizza!’ ‘Chicken!’ ‘Burgers!’ The message is constantly in our faces to eat these.”

The key to health is to adopt a whole-food, plant-based diet and, eventually, eating the unhealthy stuff becomes not an issue. But the transition can be a challenge because the stimuli coming into our eyes—from the media, the commercials, the internet—tempt us with old seductive tastes and textures 24/7.

And then there is the lack of support among our peers, friends and family members. They say things like, “*Oh, are you really going to eat that rabbit food?...Where are you going to get your protein?...and, I knew a vegan once. They found him in the corner shriveled up and dead.*”

There’s so little social support that some people think it’s easier just to have a little bit of chicken and not make a fuss at a restaurant. They go along to get along---and, let me be clear, that eating meat once or twice a week is far better than two or three times *a day*. But if you are vegan in your heart, or if you have a heck of a health scare---angina, a mini-stroke, a breast lump, etc. ---then you know that every meal counts, and that is what motivates you. You know that “your body is *never* not looking”---and neither are the animals.

Eventually, your heart speaks to you and you know that it all matters. The animals in those sheds matter and we are causing them suffering; the Earth matters, the kids matter, everything you order in a restaurant does matter. Until that really sinks in, then people frequently fall away from a vegan diet - and that means that we have more work to do to make this truth even more evident.

**EVEN: It’s Madison Avenue...I’m dumfounded when I hear commercials and their rationale, yet we buy into it.**

**MK:** Yes, telling mothers that their kids need these sugary snackerdoodles in their cereal every morning for a complete breakfast is brilliant marketing, but it’s sad. It shows what happens when their bottom line becomes your bottom line.



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

**MK:** I wish I could have seen the preciousness of all life earlier on. Bion, a Greek philosopher, said that *boys throw stones at the frogs in jest, but the frogs die in earnest*. I killed my share of frogs on the farm and crushed crickets with my boots and I did those violent things as a boy, and I always felt bad, but no one sat me down and helped me understand the gravity of the issues. I'm not blaming anyone; I saw others doing it. I just assumed that that's what boys do, what we humans get to do. We get to kill things because we have the power to do so.

I wish the older me could have grabbed the younger me as I was about to crush my first cricket, and talked to me about how life looks from the cricket's point of view. Told me how amazing and wonderful crickets are, and how they deserve to be appreciated and allowed to go on and live their life without me snuffing it out. That's not a small matter.

That's something from my childhood that I wish I could have changed, but you learn the lesson when you learn the lesson. We have to assume the universe is unfolding as it should.

**EVEN: Children are blank slates and need guidance. The fact that you eventually saw that all life deserves appreciation is a credit to you. So many of us see it, but don't make the connection.**

**MK:** Fortunately, more and more people are opening their minds to these important issues when they read words that speak to their hearts. That's why we're doing this interview.





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

**MK:** Two things that are needed immediately that I would supply are **recognition** and **acknowledgement**. To recognize that young girl or that young boy for not ignoring the feeling, the knowing, the understanding that suddenly crystallized in their mind and their heart---but not in those of their friends. Are they out of step? Are

they going to get laughed at? There can be confusion around it.

I would reach out and say, *“Welcome to the world of those with awakened, open hearts,”* and say, *“You’re not crazy. This is what humans are supposed to feel, and it is a wonderful awareness that you have come into.”*

I would acknowledge them and encourage them, and let them know how important their example is---even if they are six years old. They might not be able to attend a county council meeting, although nowadays they can do their own podcast, like Vegan Evan, who’s eight years old and very articulate!

Most of all, they can set an example. For every meal they eat, their friends watch, their family watches, just the strength of who they are is important. That who they are and what they do and say matters.

They are now becoming teachers - and by being an exemplar, they really are helping the animals; they are helping the Earth.

For every vegan meal they choose, for every vegan statement they make, as Gandhi said, they will become the change we wish to see in the world.

Veganism lets you do that.

It is the gift of the adult-mentor to acknowledge the rightness of what they've come to and emphasize the importance of everything they do because of the statement it makes. It is also important to acknowledge the hour is late and the sooner they want to join with others who have awakened to the same vision of reverence for Life, the better.

We need to let them know that there are so many other people coming to the same realization, the same level of awakening. They need to know that they are not alone. Fortunately, through the wonders of the internet, they can reach out to millions of others and, indeed, help change the world for the better.

In every country there are people coming to this vegan realization, connecting with others around the planet and working to help birth an era of vegan awareness across the globe.

**EVEN: How inspirational an answer you have offered! People have a tendency to criticize a child who behaves differently, instead of reinforcing what a great thing they are doing and encouraging them. Great answer!**

**MK:** Thank you.

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

**MK:** First of all, **get educated**. It is so important these days. The hour is late, but don't be an alarmist like Chicken Little. The sky's not falling, but it is getting hotter. You have to have the ring of truth in what you are saying, so educate yourself. Know what you are talking about. Get books like Dr. Richard Oppenlander's wonderful, *Comfortably Unaware*. Read that book, and read the United Nations Report on livestock, *Livestock's Long Shadow*.

Educate yourself so you know what you're talking about.

Google vegan environmental organizations and get yourself fortified from all the other people who are stepping forward and understanding that a vegan diet and lifestyle is the way to environmental salvation for our species.

Then work in an area that is needed but manageable. In other words, be conversant with all the enviro groups, but the folks who really need it are the environmental groups who *don't* get the plant-based message. Join the Sierra Club and agitate for a plant-based message on their website. Join Greenpeace. Get these folks stepping forward promoting the importance of a vegan diet and lifestyle.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "*Do what you can, where you are, with what you have.*" I say, yes, and **do it with a vegan twist to it!**

Looking through the vegan lens, do what you can, where you are, with what you got---and you've got a lot these days. It starts with the importance of understanding the environmental aspects of vegan diets and lifestyles.

The vegan diet and lifestyle is the way to salvation  
for our species.

**EVEN:** If we all did that, it would go a long way. We've experienced that with environmentalists. Veganism seems to be a chip that they're missing. Save the whales, and the salmon, and the lakes, and the rivers, and the trees, and the forest, all of which are a very noble and worthy focus, but it seems to end there. When they leave our *[information]* table, they go over to KFC to eat and I wonder if they heard anything at all that was said.

**MK:** Right, they have a lot more to understand, because no matter what they are into whether it's the water, or the soil, or the air, or global warming, our industrial production and consumption of animal flesh is driving *every single one* of those future-threatening environmental destructive forces. And they need to see that. Why the forests are disappearing is to make grazing and crop land for beef. Most of the water in North America is going to irrigate alfalfa, corn, and soybean fields for animal fodder. Most water is polluted by manure from CAFOs and pesticides and herbicides running off from corn and soybean fields. Most soil erosion is coming off from those same fodder-fields.

And the fossil fuels! Saying that fossil fuels are polluting more than the animal agriculture is such a false dichotomy.

Understand that on this planet we raise and slaughter 80 billion animals every year, and every one of them is breathing out carbon dioxide, and most are belching out methane and eating grains raised with ammonia fertilizers that put heat-trapping nitrous oxide in the air.

Now, if you think the millions of trucks on the road burning diesel fuel are a separate issue, ask yourself one question: What's *in* the trucks? The entire agriculture industry is in those trucks; the entire farming industry is in those trucks; the entire restaurant industry is in those trucks. They are full of fuel and fertilizer and tractor parts and cattle---and everything needed to keep that mega-wasteful, flesh-production machine churning out steaks, chops, and Buffalo wings.

So much of the fuel being burned every day on this planet is because of animal industries creating meat. Think of all the fuel being burned every day to generate electricity to keep meat cold in millions of freezers and refrigerators. You don't have to refrigerate barley.

Meat-eating has its tentacles into all this fossil fuel burning. You can't tease it out---the trucks versus the cows. The cows are *in* the trucks! Our flesh production and consumption unbalances most every natural system on the planet today. People can't ignore or isolate these issues and call themselves true environmentalists.

**EVEN: It boggles the mind when we see how inter-related it all is.**

**MK:** Exactly. The time has come for us to get off the flesh-eating train. It's taking us to destruction on every level---on the personal level, and on the species level.

If you want to clean out your arteries and save your own life, become a plant eater. If you want to save the natural world, become a plant-eater. If you want to a make a livable planet for your kids, become a plant eater.



We are being called upon as individuals and as a species to evolve to a plant-based diet.

Everybody needs to see and heed these flashing alarm lights that are becoming ever more evident---especially the environmental organization folks.

**EVEN:** *Get off the flesh-eating train.* Love it.

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

**MK:** My wife's in the kitchen now making dinner. She's probably going to do a Buddha Bowl. I'm a big fan of quinoa and greens. She'll line the bottom of the wooden bowl with a couple layers of quinoa, then add a whole layer of steamed veggies, her special tahini sauce, and covered with slivered almonds, a little tamari sauce, and I'm a happy guy. Green and yellow veggies and quinoa in some form or other. That's a full meal for me.



It's fruit season now—so, we'll have corn on the cob and peaches for dessert---it's going to be a wonderful dinner. Basically, we eat things that grow out of the garden and it's certainly what my body likes. So, I'll just summarize my choice for my favorite as a really delicious Buddha Bowl.

**EVEN: Buddha Bowls are very versatile.**

**MK:** Yes, they are!

**EVEN: You can add all your favorites. Whatever you like, you can put in there and make it different every time.**

**MK:** Yes, for dinners and lunches, I eat more of those than anything---and I feel more satisfied. At the end of the meal, my tummy is quite full and I'm through eating---although I *could* go back for seconds, if I wish. It's guilt free eating!

**EVEN: You've covered so much ground here and I know you have great compassion for the animals and the non-violence approach, which I agree with. Is there one thing in particular that makes veganism really work for you?**

**MK:** The feeling of rightness. At the end of the day, lying in bed, before I go to sleep, I know that I haven't killed anything, at least not intentionally. I've lived in harmony on this planet. I think of the deer walking through the forest, it doesn't hurt anything. He might step on a beetle, but he didn't intentionally go out of his way to do that. He didn't get on a bulldozer and knock down a bunch of trees. I would hope I didn't cause any intentional death or suffering during my day, and veganism lets you do that when it comes time to order dinner in the restaurant or go shopping.



However, it's more than that. It's the spider that I put a cup over and slide a paper under and scoot out the door. It's a vegan act. And it's the acknowledgement that I belong in this life and that I'm responsible for being on this planet that I haven't caused suffering to any sentient being intentionally. That feeling is worth everything to me - and just before I close my eyes - a vegan lifestyle allows me to have that feeling.

It adds a feeling of balance and rightness, and there is also a glimmer of hope attached to veganism that there'll be a better day tomorrow.

So those feelings, as I close my eyes every night, make veganism worthwhile.

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

**MK:** In 1986 I read John Robbins' book, *Diet for a New America*, and it so moved me that I picked up the phone and called him and asked if he needed any help in his work - and he said, "Yes!" I moved out to Santa Cruz, California and the two of us founded an organization called EarthSave. We began going around the country, and into Canada, talking about the importance of a plant-based diet, about veganism, for the sake of health and for the animals and the planet. It was 1986, people weren't that concerned too much about the planet.

Then in the nineties I started reading some really disturbing predictions---that we've got 10 years before some dire effects start showing up and so I started incorporating that into my talk.

I said, *Listen, 10 years is 120 months. That's 120 months to really change our fuels, change our diets, change everything,* and people said, "Yeh, yeh, Doc - but meanwhile, 'How about them Giants?'" And the world just rolled right on and no one listened and those words that I spoke were not heeded...Now the ice caps are melting and the seas are rising...

In Greek mythology there is the story of Cassandra who had the gift of prophecy, but her curse was that no one would believe her. So I felt a bit like Cassandra.

Now here we are 2019 and it's all more true than ever. You ask me the question, if I have an insight on the future of veganism in today's world? It's more dire than ever!

We can't put solar panels on everybody's house tomorrow, we can't give everybody electric cars tomorrow - but, tomorrow, **everybody** could order the bean chili instead of the beef chili. That's the "huge sacrifice" we're asking people to make. It's the one thing that everyone *can* do and it doesn't cost a penny!

Everybody could stop eating animal flesh and the world would begin to heal: the forests would return, the soils would stabilize, the water would run pure again, the people would be fed, greenhouse gases would be sequestered---and all this industrial death that we inflict on the billions of innocent animals every year would fade into a bad memory.

It would change everything; it would fix everything.

An evolution to a vegan diet would save the planet for our great-grandchildren from whom we are borrowing our water and our food.

Veganism has become the Great Hope, whether or not people want to hear it. No matter how you look at it, all the scientists are saying it: *the evolution to a plant-based diet is the single most effective thing we can do to save ourselves and our future.*

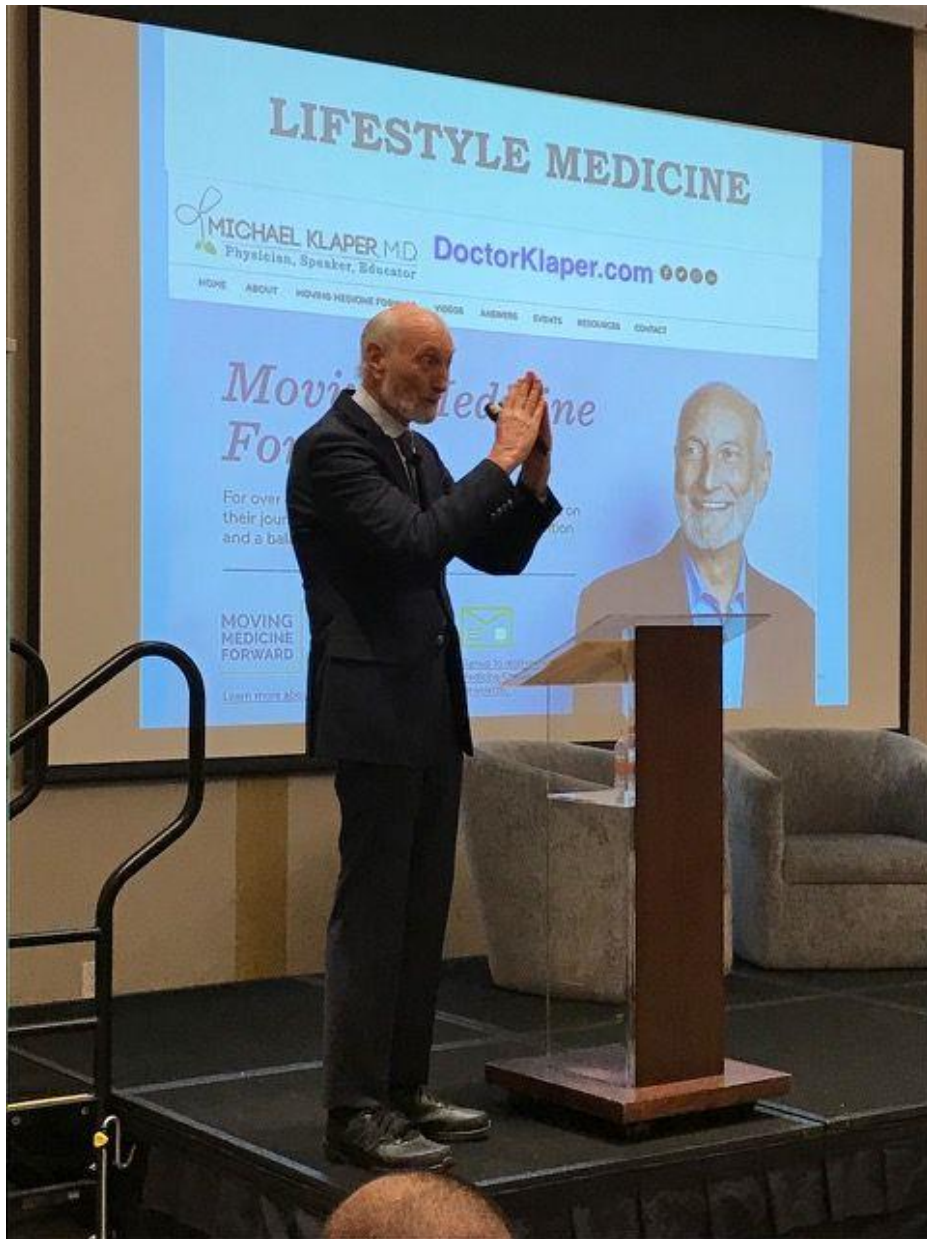
So now a plant-based diet is the road to salvation. I hold it higher than ever in my esteem and in the hopes that I have for the future.

I just hope we have enough time for people to finally come to the realization that a truly non-violent, truly loving life is the key to answering every environmental and social problem we face on this planet - for people, animals, and planet alike.

**EVEN:** It's nice to hear hopeful statements like yours when we view the world condition. How wonderful that you continue to share your hopeful vision in your presentations. You give the gift of hope! And it's so darn easy to order the bean chili!

**MK:** Really! Really, *[laughing]* it's not that big a sacrifice! That's for sure.

As Gandhi said, "My religion is kindness." --- and veganism is the ultimate kindness. If people would just adopt that one simple approach to life, everything would get better. The ultimate kindness is the vegan approach to Life.



[\*\*Moving Medicine Forward\*\*](#), a Dr. Klaper and PlantPure Communities Medical School Nutrition Education Initiative, will change the way future doctors treat their patients, which will improve the health of future generations.

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