

"You have just dined, and however scrupulously the
slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful
distance of miles, there is complicity."

----- Ralph Waldo Emerson

A Short Story

It is almost 17 years to the day (a day that changed my life) when I had to go to a lifting machine breakdown at a place I had never been. After losing my way several times, I finally found the place and drove in, parked. Upon getting out of the car the most putrid stench hit me, the stench of something rotten left far too long in the sun. Wondering what on earth could be responsible, I glanced around the yard and noticed piles of animal manure, a few dilapidated pieces of machinery but nothing that would account for a smell of that degree. No one seemed to be about, so off I went in search of the office. I came around a corner to see a man dragging something down a ramp with a winch. As I drew closer I could see it was calf being dragged, besmeared in faeces and what I could only hazard guess was the afterbirth, to the distressed cries of the mother at the sight of her dead calf (or at least I hoped dead).

A cold chill crept up my spine whilst a sense of revulsion swept over me that I was in some sort of abattoir (slaughterhouse). A place that I didn't want to think about, let alone be in.

For a moment, which seemed an eternity, I didn't know whether to turn, run and get the hell out of the place or whatever. The winch stopped and the man asked me what I was doing. Snapped out of my confusion I mumbled that I'd come about a piece of faulty lifting equipment. I was then led into the slaughter area itself, which had finished the days killing but had yet to deal with all the kills. Animal remains seemed, to the uninitiated, to be randomly strewn about, a head here, intestinal track and other innards there. Carcasses hung in mid stream torn free of skin and in various other stages of disembowelment and dismemberment. I had located the earlier stench and now seemed fill every possible space. The sight more than the smell made me retch and at that moment a question flashed across my mind *"Why is this happening?"* The answer boomed back, *"Because you want to eat meat!"* I now truly understood the statement 'feeling sick to one's core.' What the machinery's fault was that I came about I no longer recall

Within the year I left the company, after finally following my inner conviction to become vegetarian and that eating meat is antithesis of peace and compassion and contrary to true human nature. My journey in to food myth, misinformation, contradiction and control had begun.

The day I announced to my family and friends of my decision, dire warnings issued forth from the ludicrous to the genuinely concerned. I was warned I would soon die, was told God put the creatures here for food, I'll never meet my protein, calcium or iron requirements, you'll have no strength, you're weird and it will pass. Not once did anyone offer encouragement or facts to support their grievances, it was basically all verbatim, regurgitated myth, pedalled by the milk and meat industries and accepted without question.

Vegetarianism, A brief History

Knowing no more than 'don't eat meat' and nothing else about what it entails to be vegetarian I began reading all and everything on the subject. Two of the most helpful supports and sources for information were the UK Vegetarian Society and the UK Vegan Society. The Vegetarian Society was formed in 1847 in London out of the conviction that the killing of living, feeling creatures was neither biologically necessary nor morally acceptable for human survival and well being. Though vegetarianism is by no means new, the word "vegetarian" was coined at the founding of the Vegetarian Society. Until that time, people who abstained from eating meat were known as "Pythagoreans." Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher some 500 ~600 years BC, taught the kinship of all life and the concept of the transmigration of the soul from one body to another, though not necessarily human. He warned, 'you who dine on the flesh of the creatures could well be dining upon a dearly departed one!'

Nearly a hundreds years on a new movement came into to being in England in 1944 formed by Donald Watson. Along with several other members of the Vegetarian Society in Leicester, he decided to take vegetarianism further and hoped to form an affiliated group of non-dairy vegetarians within the Vegetarian Society. When their proposal was rejected, the decision was made to create their own independent society. The society was to be known as "The Vegan Society ". The word was taken from the first three and last two letters of the word vegetarian, as Donald Watson explained 'veganism starts with vegetarianism and carries it through to its logical conclusion.' The Vegan Society was established, advocating a totally plant-based diet excluding flesh, fish, fowl, all dairy, eggs, honey, and encouraging the manufacture and use of alternatives to animal

commodities, including clothing and shoes. The group believed that the elimination of exploitation of any kind was necessary in order to bring about a more reasonable and humane society. From its inception, veganism was defined as a "philosophy" and "way of living." It was never intended to be merely a diet and, still today, adheres to a lifestyle and belief system that revolves around a reverence for life.

The vegetarian diet has been advocated, even before records were kept, by various cultures and religions, and today many religions still advocate a fleshless diet. In the Old Testament from Genesis God clearly counselled Adam & Eve on what is to be their food.

And God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the Earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be meat.

Genesis 29.1

Definitions

At the time of adopting vegetarian diet I was totally unaware that, yearly, thousands were also adopting it. The reasons can be attributed to any number of things but seems to basically stem from three concerns; the conditions animals face in factory farms (truly monstrous) and the effect of a meat based diet on health and the environment. Other reasons for following a vegetarian diet are as varied as the diets that attach the name to it ranging from the logical to the misplaced, and some such diets are most certainly not vegetarian. Defining vegetarianism by what is not eaten is both confusing and misrepresentative of what it ideally is. The reasons stated at the founding of the vegetarian movement are as relevant today as they were then. This is even more so when you bear in mind that back then factory farming had yet to be invented. Chickens pecked away in open barnyards, cows had not yet been genetically engineered to have grotesquely distorted udders, pigs were not confined to steel and concrete pens, the veal crate of today was unknown and factory fishing fleets didn't plunder the oceans swallowing all and everything in their vast nets. There was no genetic engineering, no hormones, no massive doses of antibiotics, no battery cages of egg-laying hens, no "processing plants" for the assembly line slaughter of chickens, no epidemic salmonella & campylobacter in eggs and poultry, no Mad Cow disease, no Bovine Growth Hormone. If ever such movement were needed it is today!

Vegetarianism was then and is now, simply the rejection of all flesh foods no more and no less. It has always meant and continues to mean "a person who does not eat meat, fish, or fowl, and who may or may not eat dairy products or eggs.

Modern Day Outline to Vegetarianism

Here are the most commonly known forms of vegetarianism that exist today bearing in mind that in 1847 the simple rejection of all meat, be it red or white, is what defined a vegetarian and is still upheld today. *The last two are not vegetarian in the true sense, as both include fish or fowl or both, white meat. However, I often hear people describe themselves as such, no doubt in part due to the healthy positive connotation the word now carries (times have indeed changed). I feel it would be helpful to include these because it may well save misunderstanding if you are ever served fish or chicken as I experienced America. You can be sure modern day vegetarianism has a thousand variables even on this small selection, from the raw foodist to the macrobian.

Fruitarian: A diet based on Fruits, Nuts & Seeds. Predominantly raw & sun ripened fruit. Fruit is seen as not taken but received, giving freely by the tree at the time of ripeness. Excludes animal products in all forms. Will not eat that which would kill the whole plant itself.

Vegan: A philosophy and diet based on Ahimsa. Solely fruit & vegetables, grains and legumes. Excludes all forms of animal products and derivatives, i.e. leather wear, honey, etc.

Lacto Vegetarian: A diet based on fruit & vegetables and grains that include dairy products, may include honey but excludes eggs and all forms of red or white meat.

Lacto/Ovo Vegetarian: A diet based on fruit & vegetables and grains that includes dairy & eggs but excludes all forms of red or white meat

***Pesce-Vegetarian:** A diet based on fruit & vegetables and grains that includes fish and may also include dairy and eggs but excludes red meat.

***Semi-Vegetarian:** A diet based on fruit & vegetables and grains that includes dairy, eggs, fish & fowl, excludes all red meat.

NB: There is one category that could be squeezed amongst any on the list apart from the first. This is the '*Junk Food Vegetarian*'. It is a person who may follow any of the above but tends to live on highly processed foods, vegetarian TV dinners, quick fix snacks high in sugars, hydrogenated oils, and sugared beverages. Like any food junkie, they are generally nutritionally undernourished, addicted to sugars and fats and on the way to constipation, haemorrhoids, obesity, diabetes, anaemia etc.

Trials, Tribulations & Transitions

I knew absolutely nothing about cooking or preparing a vegetarian meal (unless you class a bowl of chopped up lettuce as a meal) and even less on how to go about it. Herein began an adventure into food and nutrition and, like any adventure was fraught with disasters of burnt offerings and inedible concoctions. However, little by little you do learn. The adjustment period also took time, experimenting with new foods, herbs & spices. The body also needed time to adjust to the new foods, smells and flavours. Foods I first found simply unpalatable to begin with I now find quite the opposite.

Often it is not just simply a case of saying no meat from today. For most it is a transition. Certainly there are people who have adopted a vegetarian diet and from day one have never looked back, though a lot do struggle. By making the transition slowly over a few months (some even take years) gives the body time to adjust to new foods and will be gentler on you and your body. Maintaining the diet, too, can depend on the reasons why one became a vegetarian in the first place and plays major part as to whether the diet is continued or not. I've found those that make the change for ethical reasons very rarely, if ever, return to old eating habits. Health, on the other hand, has mixed results with most of the people I know have more or less returned to their old diets

As for cravings, I happily never experienced any for meat, dairy or eggs. In main it was an ethical choice for me and in part my physical needs were changing. However, that is not the case for everyone. Many people have told me they did and still do experience cravings, especially dairy for those who were brought up on a Western type diet and fish for those brought up on a Japanese diet. Paul Pitchford '*Healing with Wholefoods*' attributes this to the type of diet eaten over generations that have for hundreds, if not thousands, of years been based on or contained in part animal protein. Understanding that we have been sustained by such, it is only natural we possess psychological and physical attachments, some real some not, to meat, dairy and eggs. One of the most deep-rooted fears to contend with for many is that of protein -- 'the fear of not getting enough.' So much so people can and willingly do often exceed their protein requirements two to three times or more than actually bodily needs. Society is obsessed continuous growth and equates animal protein with such, as well as strength, power, health, quality, and sexuality.

Another learning process that came out of all this for myself, was that of allowing others to be. Like most newly converted I assimilated all and anything about my newly found cause, which at times spilt over into an overzealous desire to help, or in many instances, convert others. This was certainly fuelled by the fact that often I found myself on the receiving end of many food jokes and even aggression. My response was to fight back that only further widened the divide.

Looking back now and up until the time I became vegetarian no one in my immediate world had ever experienced someone saying no to meat. Meat was the considered norm. By refusing meat I was in fact challenging and rejecting the accepted status quo of the day. My diet clearly ruffled peoples' feathers by showing it was unnecessary, and also, to a degree, pricked peoples' conscience. Because no matter how much we keep our heads firmly buried in the sand, we do know how wrong, horribly cruel and inhuman the factory farm system is. The disturbingly macabre scenes of hundreds of thousands of animal being shot and burned in Britain during the Foot & Mouth outbreak is testimony to this since, as a result, hundreds of thousand of people made the transition to a meatless diet. A country such as the UK, or any country come to that, could easily adopt more compassionate alternatives and is most definitely not case of *no* other choice.

Finally to all you omnivores, semi-vegetarians, vegetarians, vegan, fruitarians, or whatever, patience and understanding please, compassion is not exclusive but inclusive, encompassing all!

References: Ethical Vegetarianism, K. .S Walters & L. Portness --/-- Vegan, New Ethics of Eating, E. Marcus --/-- Healing with Wholefoods, P. Pitchford.

Websites of interest: www.ivu.org --/-- www.vegansociety.com --/-- www.vegan.com --/-- www.vegsoc.org --/-- www.vegsource.com --/-- www.fruitarian.com --/-- www.pcrm.org --/-- www.peta-online.org
