

What Has Dr. Shook Been Reading?

Being Vegan, Living with Conscience, Conviction, and Compassion.

By Joanne Stepaniak, M.S.Ed.

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I started out seeking information on how to best combine beans and grains as a healthful alternative to meat, fish, dairy and eggs. Ideally I would find a tidy chart that I could tape to the refrigerator. I said to myself “Vegans are vegetarians who do not eat eggs and dairy so I’ll find a book on being vegan”. What I did not know until I read *Being Vegan* is that that “vegan” describes more than what a person eats. Vegan describes an individual who is committed to revering all life. To be vegan is to live with compassion and assume that every living creature values their own life. A vegetarian eats a diet that is plant based. One of the ways a vegan will manifest their reverence for all life is by choosing a vegetarian diet. “Vegetarian” is about food and diet. “Vegan” is about philosophy, ethics, morals and lifestyle.

Being Vegan is presented in a question and answer format. The questions revolved around the challenges and frustrations of living, working and participating in a society that, for the most part, eats meat and incorporates animal by-products into just about everything.

The answers revolved around clarifying vegan principles, taking responsibility for one’s own actions and living a life of compassion for all animals including humans and oneself. Stepaniak’s advice to the frustrated teen whose mom will not allow them to “go vegan”: Do the dietary research, find the recipes, help with the shopping, get into the kitchen, apply yourself to your studies and show mom that you can be a responsible, healthy, respectful vegan kid. To the office worker whose co-workers order in burgers for office gatherings: Get involved in the food ordering process, suggest alternatives, pack a vegan snack and remember that the office is not a smart place to preach “the vegan gospel”.

Stepaniak reminds everyone how unlikely it is that, within their lifetime, they will see the world transformed into a vegan paradise. That in our present-day society it is not really possible to live a 100% pure vegan life and still participate in the culture at large. Rather than making themselves crazy over animal by-products in ink, get involved in educating others about vegan principles, teach a vegan cooking class and help to slow and hopefully one day eliminate the vast supply of animal by-products that are the consequence of eating meat.

By the definitions of animal exploitation as described in *Being Vegan*, I am not a vegan and I’m not likely to be one in the future. Even IF I were to become a vegetarian I would probably continue to use horse poop in my yard and honey to sweeten my tea.

Being Vegan was a very thought provoking book that inspired me to look closer at my life and the consequences of my actions. However, I did not find that tidy chart for my refrigerator.

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