

Why I Live a Vegan Lifestyle

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My Background

I don't remember having any conversations about food choices with my parents or anyone else when I was a young child. However, that doesn't mean that they didn't happen!

From what I recall, my Mum was always vegetarian and my Dad used to eat meat outside the home. I grew up being mostly vegetarian. I may have had meat occasionally when I was at the child minder's place or when I had school dinners.

I stopped eating eggs when my Mum cracked one open to make something for me and I heard her retch because the egg was bad

I can't pinpoint any specific cause but when I was 11 years old I decided that I didn't agree with killing animals for food so I stopped eating meat. My thoughts and behaviour

weren't aligned enough to stop using leather and at that age I didn't know enough about other industries to make any further shifts.

Compassion for Others

Looking back, I think secondary school was when I began thinking and living compassionately. I became an 'agony aunt' for other children of various ages.

I had already felt a desire to prevent or alleviate suffering when I was in primary school but I didn't have the voice or the confidence that was needed back then. However, at secondary school I became unable or unwilling to tolerate others being bullied, neglected or abused in any way. It didn't matter whether it was a child or an adult, I didn't want to be part of any type of abuse. I had an aversion towards prejudice too. It didn't matter whether it was about wealth, race, class, gender, age, ability, sexuality or faith. None of it felt right.

I believe that this was the beginning of my journey to support and defend those who needed it.

The Family Business

My family had a newsagency and as a teenager I recall listing all the things I thought we shouldn't sell and discussing this with my father. The list included anything that could cause harm to someone or something and it included cigarettes and non-vegetarian foods.

Love for Non-Human Animals

In early 2008, I saw a video by PETA, India. Until then, I hadn't heard of PETA but I went dairy-free after watching the video and began living a vegan lifestyle within the year. The film gave me the information I needed to make the initial shift and it spurred me to research other industries. I discovered that even though practices varied across the globe, they all had theft, entrapment, violence and death in common. I couldn't be part of it.

Loving the Planet

I'm not sure when my sense of fairness kicked in but I recall thinking it was really important to turn the lights off when I was at University even though the rent covered whatever our usage was. It didn't feel right or fair to leave them on. In my mind, it was a waste and bad for the environment.

When it came to saving fuel, I enjoyed walking and would often encourage others to travel on foot instead of taking the car. And In May of 2023 I published an article about the many things I do, both large and small, to try and minimise the harm I cause to the environment. (See <https://plantshift.com/blog/environmentally-considerate>)

Animal Welfare

I've often felt uneasy when going to a place where living beings were in some sort of captivity, whether their purpose was for us to be able to, for example, watch them, sit on them or use them to move cargo. It didn't sit right with me and I believe that going vegan helped me feel more aligned, harmonious and true to myself.



Jainism

I like Jainism, as it is a spiritual tradition that is rich and full of guidance about how we should live and why we should or should not do specific things. Four Jain principles stand out for me. They are *Maitri*, *Ahimsa*, *Karuna* and *Abhaydaan*.

Maitri means universal friendship. If I saw all living beings in this way, would I ever want to cause them harm?

Ahimsa means non-violence. With this in mind, I try to live in a way in which my thoughts, speech and behaviour are non-violent.

Karuna refers to compassion. How can one not have compassion for all living beings if we've imbibed ourselves with *Maitri* and *Ahimsa*?

Finally, *Abhaydaan*. This refers to the fact that nobody should have fear because of me. How could I live with myself if I made someone feel fearful?

I believe that living a vegan lifestyle and striving to cultivate the qualities above helps me express a greater and expanding, love and consideration for the planet and all living beings.

As an ambassador of veganism, Heena Modi, who is a qualified school teacher, and nutrition practitioner helps people facilitate the shift to a plant-based diet, vegan lifestyle or both. She brings compassion and practical insight into the topic of going vegan and staying vegan in terms of diet, as well as taking her clients beyond food and towards a vegan lifestyle.

Heena's website, PlantShift.com, covers vegan options everywhere, nutritional well-being, recipes, tips, holiday experiences as a vegan, and interviews with exciting new vegan businesses. She has published a recipe book which shows how easy it is to make vegan desserts from scratch and includes recipes from all over the globe.