



# The Happy Vegan: A Guide to Living a Long, Healthy, and Successful Life

By Russell Simmons, Chris Morrow

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In the *New York Times* bestseller *Success Through Stillness*, Russell Simmons shared how meditation can be used as a powerful tool to access potential in all aspects of life, having seen himself how achieving inner peace led to outward success.

In *The Happy Vegan*, Simmons shares how once he started practicing yoga and meditation, he became more conscious of his choices, particularly the choices he made regarding his diet. Simmons first adopted a vegetarian and then vegan diet, and almost immediately began to experience the physical, mental, and emotional benefits of eating green and clean. He delves into research about mindful eating, the links between stress and poor eating habits, the importance of listening to your body, the well-documented problems associated with eating animal products and processed foods, along with tips on how to transition to a vegan diet.

Drawing on his own experience, the experiences of others, and science and research on the health benefits of conscious eating and veganism, *The Happy Vegan* is an accessible and inspiring guide to help others make the move toward a vegan diet and a more successful, focused, and purposeful life.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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### Editorial Review

Review

**Russell Simmons is . . .**

"[the symbol of] the hope shared by many that the vaunted American dream might be possible...In the same way he brought hip-hop to the public eye and shaped the cultural identity of a generation, he's found a heartfelt desire to bring new concepts mainstream...Simmons' desire to share the principles that have inspired him comes from a genuine desire to give back."

--*Smart CEO*

"a regular Midas man . . . He's spreading the wealth by sharing his ideas."

—*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"the original and eternal hip-hop mogul . . . one of the most innovative and influential figures in modern American business and culture."

—*New York Daily News*

the "CEO of hip-hop"

—*Businessweek*

### Praise for SUCCESS THROUGH STILLNESS

"Whether a beginner or advanced meditator, this book aims to help readers find greater clarity and focus, and become healthier in mind and body."

-Elevated Existence

"A well-written, enjoyable read for anyone who is interested in meditation, but does not know where to start."

-VeggieFans.net

"A sacred cookbook for cultivating a satisfying, stress-free life."

-Kam Williams (his review ran out as a wire piece to various outlets like Insightnews.com, AALBC.com, NewsBlaze.com, Afro.com)

## **Praise for SUPER RICH**

"In Super Rich: A Guide to Having It All, Russell defines true affluence as a higher state of consciousness. Read this book, and tap into the infinite supply of abundance in your own being."

— Deepak Chopra, author of *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* and *The Third Jesus*

"In Super Rich, the Philosophy is sound--articulated in simple prose with assistance from journalist Chris Morrow, but filled with anecdotes, humor, and raw language that are unmistakably Simmons's...like yogic philosophy, hip-hop is all about the power of vibration, the power of the word. Simmons emerges as the first influential voice to make that connection for a new generation."

— *The Washington Post*

"Simmons employs many examples from his career and personal struggles to create a platform based on sensible guidance and responsible, timeless ethics. Readers will find lots of positive, heartfelt encouragement."

— *Kirkus Reviews*

"With personal stories [Simmons] offers insight into his personal striving for peace and posterity, and offers those willing to put in the effort an opportunity to achieve that same abundance."

— *Publisher's Weekly*

"Simmons provides readers with the tools to achieve not only success but an enlightened state of mind."

— *New York Daily News*

## **Praise for DO YOU!**

"This book is Russell's truth and if you listen to what he's saying, you'll find the inspiration and the knowledge to start the journey you want to take in life, too."

— Nas

"Russell Simmons, the original and eternal Hip-Hop Mogul, is one of the most innovative and influential figures in modern American business and culture"

— *The New York Times*

"With elegant simplicity, Russell offers practical steps to living a life that is joyful, creative, and fulfilling. He ingeniously presents a way of making us remember our truth. And that is our main goal in life."

— Deepak Chopra, author of *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* and *The Third Jesus*

"Russell Simmons, who rose from the hard-scrabble streets of New York to become one of the biggest names in entertainment and fashion, is a modern-day Renaissance man."

— EbonyJet.com

"Russell Simmons is bank, a regular Midas man...He's spreading the wealth by sharing his ideas."

— *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

"Russell is the architect of what we do."

— Jay-Z

"The book communicates Mr. Simmons's ideas earnestly and without condescension. One suspects he may have produced another hit."

— *The Wall Street Journal*

"Teaches a very simple lesson--by tapping into the power inside you, you can not only get all the things you want in life, but most importantly, you can enjoy them, too."

— *The Jacksonville Free Press*

— **praise for Russell Simmons**

About the Author

**Russell Simmons** has been influential in various business and media ventures including Def Jam Recordings, Phat Farm, Baby Phat, Run Athletics, Simmons Lathan Media Group, and many more. He is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Success Through Stillness*, *Super Rich*, and *Do You!* A native New Yorker, Russell is the proud father of two daughters.

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THE HAPPY VEGAN

All of my books, at their core, have been about the same thing.

How to be happy.

In fact, that mission has been at the heart of everything I've tried to do in my career.

When I wrote *Do You!*, *Super Rich*, and *Success Through Stillness*, it was only to help readers become happier.

Just as when I made records with Def Jam, clothes with Phat Farm, and videos with my latest company, All Def Digital (ADD), it's only been to bring a little more joy into people's lives.

I'm always thrilled when someone comes up to me on the street and says, "Russell, *Do You!* helped me get through a tough time" or "Hearing Run-D.M.C. changed my life!"

It feels great to know that I've contributed, even just a tiny bit, to a positive change in someone's life. But as cool as it has been to get that sort of feedback, I'm expecting a different kind of reaction to this book.

No, *The Happy Vegan* won't just *change* your life.

It can *save* your life. Not to mention save the world as well.

That's a big claim, but it's made with a confidence that can come only from experience. Becoming a vegan hasn't only made me much happier but healthier too. It helped me disconnect from the lifestyle that was making me sick, a lifestyle that has put too many other middle-aged African American males in the ground.

Today, on the verge of my sixth decade, I feel content and centered, full of energy and appetite for all that life has to offer.

I'm in a wonderful space. And I credit much of it to my decision to stop consuming animal products.

It's a space, however, that took a long time to arrive at. As those of you familiar with my story already know, I spent much of the first half of my life abusing my body with various toxins. From weed to coke to angel dust, there wasn't a drug I didn't get high off of. Just as there wasn't a kind of meat or dairy I didn't consume. Products that were, in many ways, just as bad for me as drugs.

I finally got sober at the age of thirty. In my late thirties I embraced the practice of yoga, which helped me leave my toxic lifestyle behind me for good. In literally my first class I experienced a sense of serenity and clarity I'd never felt before. Yoga helped me see that getting high had been nothing but a distraction. I found I preferred waking up sober to going to bed high.

Yoga in turn led me to meditation, which taught me how to further wipe the distractions out of my mind and focus on my best ideas. My personal relationships and business began to improve. Instead of walking around in a daze, I was looking at life through cleaner lenses. It was a great way to live.

Thanks to that clarity, for the first time in my life I also found myself starting to think about the food I was putting into my body. During my yoga classes, my teacher Sharon Gannon (or one of her disciples) would gently but firmly remind us not to put toxins in our bodies. Every day after class, it seemed, I'd meet someone who followed Sharon's mantra and had removed animal products from their diet. Inevitably they were in great shape and smiled a lot. I was impressed. I was also inspired by my great friend (and current head of television development at ADD) Simone Reyes, who had been a vegan for many years. Another big influence was Glen E. Friedman, my senior executive in charge of television development at Def Pictures. Through their collective examples, I felt myself inching closer toward a healthier relationship with the world.

I finally took a great leap forward on New Year's Day 1997. I was staying on the Caribbean island of St. Barts, where I loved (and still love) taking a monthlong vacation during the winter holidays. Glen, as he often does, was staying with me at a villa I'd rented by the island's clear blue ocean.

I woke up New Year's Day planning on hitting the beach, but a peek out the window at the overcast sky told me Mother Nature had other ideas. So Glen and I decided to watch a movie instead.

For months, Glen had been bugging me to watch a film called *Diet for a New America*. Once I watched it, he promised, I'd stop eating animal products and never look back. In my heart I knew he was probably right, just as in my heart I knew the yoga community was right too. I was primed to make a change.

Yet for some reason I'd been resisting watching the tape. Giving up drugs and taking up yoga and meditation had been a major transformation for me. Changing what I ate on top of all that seemed like just a little too much to think about.

Glen is nothing, however, if not determined (it's probably one of the qualities that makes him such a great photographer). He'd brought the film with him to St. Barts in case such a moment would present itself, and now that it had, he wasn't going to miss his chance.

"Russell, stop BSing and let's watch this," he said. "There's nothing else to do today—nobody is going to be on the beach, the stores are closed, and all your friends are sleeping off hangovers. Enough with the excuses. Today's the day."

I knew he was right. "Let's do it," I said.

Glen popped in the VHS tape (remember those?), and I quickly learned that *Diet for a New America* was a PBS special hosted by John Robbins, named after the best-selling book he'd written a couple years earlier. John's father had cofounded the Baskin-Robbins ice cream empire and John had grown up eating a "normal" American diet, heavy on meat and dairy. After a series of illnesses, Robbins took a closer look at his diet. After years of research he came to the conclusion that meat and dairy were actually responsible for many of his health problems. He then dedicated his life to spreading the word about the dangers of consuming animal products.

As the taped rolled, I was struck by Robbins's profiles of men in their thirties and forties who were on the verge of death because of the damage meat and dairy had done to their cardiovascular systems. Men who frankly looked a lot like *me*. A doctor spoke about how one of his patients—a man in his early thirties—dropped dead one night after eating a burger and a milk shake. His body just couldn't take the abuse anymore. That really affected me. I'd had *a lot* of burgers and milk shakes over the years.

I was also shocked to learn the degree to which the meat and dairy industries were responsible for polluting our nation's waterways and contributing to global warming.

Equally powerful were the scenes showing the horrible conditions animals are raised in and the barbaric ways they're slaughtered for their meat. I had always subscribed to the fairy tale that animals lived on farms, grazed in the sun, and ate grass. Watching chickens being thrown into grinders alive, cattle squirming on squalid floors after having their throats slit, and caged pigs desperately trying to reach their piglets, was the rudest of awakenings. After one such scene, Robbins said something that struck me to my core: "As a concerned citizen, as someone who wants my life to be a statement of compassion, when I see what's done to the animals, it makes me look at my food choices in a whole new way. I have to question, is that what I want my contribution to the world to involve?"

The tape rolled on, but Robbins's words had already led me to an epiphany:

No, I *didn't* want to be involved in the torture and slaughter of animals anymore.

No, I *didn't* want to drop dead in my forties from eating too many burgers and milk shakes.

No, I *didn't* want to contribute to the destruction of the environment.

Yes, I *did* want my life to be a statement of compassion. Which would be impossible as long as I was complicit in the torture and murder of billions of animals.

"That's it," I told Glen the moment the tape was over. "I ain't eating this shit anymore!"

Granted that's not the most articulate way to announce a major life decision, but it was how I felt then and it's how I still feel to this day:

*I. Ain't. Eating. This. Shit. Anymore!*

I hadn't woken up that morning planning on becoming a vegan, but from that moment on I was going to work at changing my life for the better. There was no turning back.

Before we go any further, however, I want to address a very simple but important question some of you might be asking: What exactly does *being a vegan* even mean?

The most basic definition of a vegan is someone who doesn't eat any meat, dairy, or fish. That means avoiding obvious products like hamburgers, chicken wings, pork chops, and scrambled eggs, as well as some that might not be so obvious at first. For instance, a plain slice of pizza isn't vegan, because cheese comes from cows (though you can get delicious vegan pizza—more on that later). Just as ice cream isn't vegan because it contains dairy. Or marshmallows aren't vegan because they contain gelatin, which is made out of the hooves and skins of horses.

This might sound like a New Age philosophy, but people have been warning against eating animals for thousands of years. The Lord Buddha said, "The eating of meat extinguishes the seed of great compassion." The Greek philosopher Plato was a vegetarian who noted that the more meat a society eats, the more doctors it needs. Leonardo da Vinci rejected eating meat, as did the great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, who wrote, "Flesh eating is simply immoral, as it involves the performance of an act, which is contrary to moral feeling: killing." Gandhi didn't eat meat either, telling his followers, "I do feel that spiritual progress does demand at some stage that we should cease to kill our fellow creatures for the satisfaction of our bodily wants."

The concept that a fully compassionate and healthy lifestyle required removing not only meat but also dairy from one's diet first gained traction in England shortly before World War II. At that time, 42 percent of Britain's cows had been found to be carrying tuberculosis. A group of concerned vegetarians decided to form an organization alerting people to the dangers of dairy. The group's founder, a woodcutter named Donald Watson, came up with the name the *Vegan Society*. "Vegan," he said, was meant to refer to both "the beginning and end of vegetarian."

Veganism picked up steam over the next few decades. Following the war, dairy production, as well as chicken, cow, and pig farms, became highly industrialized. Conditions became increasingly unsanitary and inhumane. There were more and more outbreaks of disease and mounting evidence that meat and dairy were bad for your health.

By the 1980s, groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Animal Liberation Front had been formed to help promote a cruelty-free lifestyle. In 1988, *Diet for a New America* hit the shelves. In 1990, Robbins was joined by Lisa Bonet, Raul Julia, and River Phoenix on a special edition of *The Phil Donahue Show* about veganism that was watched by millions. The vegan lifestyle was here to stay.

Today, the vegan lifestyle is more mainstream than ever. Famous vegans include Bill Clinton, Ellen DeGeneres, Alicia Silverstone, Samuel L. Jackson, Miley Cyrus, Woody Harrelson, Mike Tyson, Erykah Badu, and André 3000 of OutKast. Not to mention vegetarians like Deepak Chopra, Forest Whitaker, Prince, Angela Bassett, Omar Epps, and the author Jonathan Safran Foer. Many more celebrities, like Beyoncé, Jay Z, Jennifer Lopez, Venus Williams, and RZA from the Wu-Tang Clan have experimented with vegan diets in recent years. Oprah even had her entire staff (over three hundred people!) go on a weeklong vegan challenge.

Why are all these successful and famous people promoting what seems on the surface to be such a radical lifestyle change?

I believe it has to do with a dirty little secret about success and fame:

They don't necessarily make you happy.

Sure, playing with toys that accompany success and fame can make you happy for a minute. I won't lie, it feels great to drive a brand-new Rolls Royce off the lot. But after a few weeks of it, you realize that it's just a car. That's when you start asking yourself, "Now what?"

It's the same with new houses, exotic vacations, expensive clothes, even sex. After you experience enough of those things, you'll find yourself asking, "Now what?"

If you're being honest with yourself, the answer isn't "more of the same." That's because the truth is, the only things that are going to bring lasting happiness to your life are good health and knowledge of self, which lead to a compassionate relationship with the world.

That's it.

If your health and connection to yourself (as well as the larger world) are out of alignment, there aren't enough new cars, watches, or money in the world to make you happy.

I suspect most of the successful and famous people I just named experienced one of those "Now what?" moments, where they realized their toys weren't enough. Achievement wasn't enough. Fame wasn't enough.

If they wanted to find real happiness, they had to improve their health and their relationship with the world. And whether it was through research, the advice of a friend, or the example of someone they respected, they decided giving up animal products was the best way to do that.

What I'm asking you to do with this book is basically skip several steps in that process. Don't wait until you're having a "Now what?" moment, or even worse, a sobering talk with your doctor, to start that transformation. Start that process today.

Trust me, you won't be alone in making that move. When you go vegan, you will not be shutting yourself off from the world. Rather, you'll be joining a growing community of happy, successful, compassionate, and healthy people—a community that will welcome you with open arms.

It's also a community that grows stronger every year. In the last decade, searches for "vegan" on Google have doubled. Restaurant chains like Subway and Chipotle have introduced vegan options to their menus. Seemingly every month there's a new vegan restaurant opening or a new vegan product being added to supermarket shelves. The other day I was in New York and decided to pop in on a vegan street fair, but when I got there they were turning people away at the gates. Despite expecting thousands, the fair was already at capacity after just a couple of hours.

It's been amazing to watch this movement grow.

And now I want you to join me in it.

My argument is going to come down to three main points, the first of which is do it for health. As I'll detail, eating meat is directly linked to heart disease, the number one killer in America. It's also linked to cancer, our second-largest killer. Meat also increases your chances of developing deadly conditions like diabetes and Alzheimer's, which are the sixth and seventh leading killers in this country. No wonder studies have shown that you can add thirteen years to your life by giving up animal products. As someone on the other side of fifty, that's a very meaningful number.

Of course, giving up animal products isn't just about living longer; it's about getting the most out of your time here on earth too. When you go vegan you are likely going to lose weight (I dropped about twenty pounds). You're definitely going to feel better. Your energy level will increase and your recovery time from injuries will go down. Plus, when you become more mindful of what you put in your body every day, that mindfulness will seep into everything you do. Instead of sleepwalking through your life, you'll be more adept at living in the present moment. And the present, as I like to say, is the only place where good things can happen to you in life.

My second point will be that by giving up animal products, you won't only be potentially saving your own life. You'll help save Mother Earth too. Because, simply put, our appetite for animals is killing the planet.

I'll describe how the resources required to kill ten billion land animals a year in America alone is destroying our fields, polluting our air, and poisoning our waters. Few realize this, but livestock production contributes more to global warming than cars, planes, and trains *combined*. You can consider yourself an "environmentalist" because you drive a Prius, recycle your plastics, and take shorter showers. But at the end of the day you're just playing with yourself when you do that. Sorry, but none of those practices would help the environment as much as simply giving up animal products.

The final argument I'll present for eating a plant-based diet will center on compassion. The terror and pain we inflict on the billions of animals that are born into suffering every year is the worst karmic disaster in the history of the world. Subconsciously we all know the conditions these animals face are bad, but when you clean off your lenses and take a clear look at the facts, you will see just how revolting the situation truly is.

What I'm going to tell you about factory farming will probably gross you out. But if you eat meat, then you need to read it. You can't avoid the truth about products you are putting into your body *every single day*. Literally, nothing could affect you more directly. You owe it to yourself to confront this information head-on.

If you think I'm being judgmental toward meat eaters, I promise I'm not here to make anyone feel bad about their choices. How could I? Whatever you've put in your body, trust me, I've put worse in mine. That didn't make me a bad person then, just as it doesn't make you a bad person now.

Instead of making you feel defensive, I simply want this book to help you look at your choices differently. I want these words to cut through the noise that's been distracting you.

I can't blame you for being distracted. From childhood, you have been subjected to a billion-dollar propaganda campaign designed to distract you from the effect animal products are having on your body, your karma, and the earth. From the packaging your chicken breasts are wrapped in to the commercials you've seen on TV, you've been lied to every step of the way. I can't fault anyone for falling victim to those lies.

I do, however, firmly believe in this simple maxim:

People who *know* better *do* better.

If you've even made it this far into the introduction, then you *do* want to do better. You *do* want to know what's going on with the food you put in your body. You *do* want to know how you can feel healthier and more alive. You *do* want to know how you can strengthen your connection to the planet.

You're someone who asks questions and isn't comfortable blindly following the pack. It wasn't for a lack of effort, but the meat and dairy industries haven't been able to completely desensitize you to the suffering that's out there.

So no matter which boxes you check when you're asked to describe yourself—"vegan," "vegetarian," "black," "Christian," "woman," "carnivore," "yogi," "liberal," "conservative," "gay," "straight," or whatever—there's a part of you that does want to explore a better route through life.

Which is why I'm confident that when you do know the facts, switching to a plant-based diet will be an easy choice for you to make.

*Easy* is a word that few people associate with giving up food they've been eating their entire lives. Even if you decide you *want* to switch after reading this book, you might have real concerns about whether you *can* do it.

I want to get those concerns out of the way first, which is why I'm going to start off the book by debunking some of the most common misconceptions about being a vegan:

- Eating meat is a fundamental part of your cultural tradition.
- There's something weird or antisocial about giving up meat.
- Only rich people can afford to go vegan.
- You need to be an animal lover to be committed to a vegan lifestyle.
- You're no good at dieting.

In short, that it's just too hard.

Once those misconceptions are cleared up and I've shared all the information on why you should give up animal products, then I'm going to teach you how to do it. I'm going to show you which items need to be banished from your kitchen and which ones you need to start stocking up on. I'm going to tell you which products to start looking for at the supermarket and which ones to avoid. As well as what to order when you go out to eat with your meat-eating friends. I'm also going to share a list of websites for you to visit to help you find vegan restaurants and markets in your area as well as cookbooks that can help you start preparing delicious vegan meals on your own.

Thank you in advance for allowing me to get you started on this journey. There might be a few bumps in the road. A few frustrating moments where you wonder if you've made the right choice. Don't let those moments of doubt trip you up, or even worse, make you turn around.

As long as you stay on this path, you'll realize you truly can do anything. You can save money. You can look better. You can have more energy. You can lose weight. You can save the animals. You can save the world.

## THE MISCONCEPTIONS

### I LOVE MEAT TOO MUCH TO GIVE IT UP

“I thought, like with most diets, I would feel deprived and hate food, that I would miss out on restaurants and celebrations, that I would get headaches and be irritable, etc. I was wrong about all of that. It took a few days to adjust, but what I discovered was increased energy, better sleep, weight loss, improved digestion, clarity, and an incredible positive feeling for my actions and the effect it would have on those around me and on the environment. I couldn’t believe how much of our health we control with food.”

### —BEYONCÉ ON HER PLANT-BASED DIET

For many people, the biggest perceived barrier to becoming a vegan is simply how much they love eating meat. “Russell, you don’t get it,” they’ll tell me. “Ribbs taste soooo good. We have a special relationship. How could I give them up?”

There’s almost a perception that if you don’t eat meat, you must have *never* eaten meat. Because if you had, then you wouldn’t even *dream* of suggesting that someone else give it up.

But I have.

And I am.

Trust me, I ate meat with the best of them. I often joke that I would have eaten an elephant’s ass if someone had put it on a plate in front of me, but I’m not really kidding. I would’ve chewed it up and probably asked for seconds.

My favorite dish was my mother’s spaghetti with peppers and sausage. She used to make it with these giant sausages she’d get from a butcher on Hollis Avenue, the main drag in Hollis, Queens, where we lived. Nothing was better than coming in from a day of running around the streets and see her in the kitchen cooking a big pot of it.

My mother also made a delicious oxtail stew. She’d prepare it with potatoes and carrots and let it cook for a long time, so the beef would just be falling off the bone by the time it was done.

My father could cook too; his signature dish was pig’s feet with potato salad and collard greens. His people were from down South and he would take pride in reminding us that pig’s feet were what “real niggers” ate. Not that bougie stuff that folks up North tried to pass off as “soul food.”

I used to start my day off with meat. If I came downstairs in the morning and saw that my mother hadn’t cooked a plate of bacon and eggs, then I’d head down to Hollis Avenue and grab a sausage sandwich with jelly. Even after I’d launched Def Jam Records and had enough money to order anything I wanted for breakfast, I’d still send an intern out every morning to grab me a sausage sandwich with jelly.

When I was out on the road with rappers like Kurtis Blow, Run-D.M.C., The Beastie Boys, and LL Cool J, our go-to meal was hamburgers. My personal favorites were Burger King and Jack in the Box, though some of the guys used to prefer McDonald’s. And for the record it was Glen—yes, *that* Glen—who first put the Beasties on to Fatburger, the Los Angeles chain. That’s significant for two reasons: First, it shows that even a hard-core vegan like Glen used to love hamburgers. Second, the Beasties actually helped popularize Fatburger nationally in their song “The New Style” when they rhymed: “I chill at White Castle ’cause it’s the best / but I’m fly at Fatburger when I’m way out west.”

If we weren't eating burgers, we were probably digging into a big bucket of fried chicken. Kentucky Fried Chicken was always popular, but my personal favorite was Bojangles's fried chicken with Delta sauce and dirty rice. I used to get excited when I'd see cities like Atlanta or Savannah on our tour itinerary because I knew I'd get a chance to have some of that Bojangles's.

Once I started making some real money, I tried to expand my tastes a bit. Instead of White Castle or KFC, I liked to go out and get sushi or paella, which in the 1980s most folks in hip-hop weren't up on yet. I'd take a bunch of rappers out to dinner, and they'd want lobster and steak, but I'd insist on going to an Indian place instead and getting the chicken masala.

My mother never made chitlins when I was growing up, but I started ordering them whenever I went to a soul food place in Manhattan's West Village called the Pink Tea Cup. I used to sit there at a table filled with models and record executives and order *chitlins*. That never used to go over too well.

By now you should be getting the point: I used to enjoy eating meat. From my mother's spaghetti and sausage to a Burger King Whopper to the chitlins at the Pink Tea Cup, I loved how all those dishes tasted.

But here's the thing—I *don't miss them*.

When you give up animal products, it's not like you're also giving up delicious meals. Instead you just start eating different *kinds* of delicious meals. I'm still going out for Indian food, it's just that now I'm getting the kaali dal (black lentils) instead of the chicken masala. When I get Thai food, I'm getting the vegetable pad thai with a side of coconut curry instead of the chicken pad thai. Those dishes might not contain animal products, but they're still delicious.

If you're incredulous that I could find lentils as delicious as a lamb chop or tofu as tasty as a tuna steak, understand this: My taste buds have changed since I stopped eating animal products.

Almost every vegan I know has had a similar experience. Here's why: Most meat dishes—especially processed fast foods—contain lots of salt, fat, and sugar. Heavy flavors that dull your taste buds over time. It's why really greasy pork chops or super salty sausages *seem* to taste so good. Your taste buds have become so dulled that unless there's a ton of salt and fat in a dish, you're not going to taste anything.

But after just a few weeks of not eating animal products—and all the salt, fat, and sugar that usually accompany it—your taste buds are going to be reborn. You're going to start picking up on all the subtle but powerful flavors that are used in vegetarian dishes like curry, tahini, moles, and pestos. You're going to savor the aroma of slow-cooked onions and garlic, of braised potatoes and turnips, of potatoes roasted with rosemary. You're going to start to appreciate the texture in quinoa (a grain that's a great addition to a vegan diet), mushrooms, beans, as well as the crispness of fresh vegetables like raw peppers and cucumbers.

If you do go back to animal products, they probably won't taste as good as you remember them. You might say "BS," but if you've ever quit smoking cigarettes, you know how disgusting it can be to be around someone who's smoking, let alone smoking yourself. You might almost throw up at the thought of it. It's not much different with food. A lot of folks report that if they try meat after going without it for a while, it tastes way too greasy to them. Just as many say that if they go back to cheese, it tastes too oily and salty.

"Getting rid of the dairy was great, getting rid of the meat—I just don't miss it."

—Bill Clinton

The idea that our taste buds can change shouldn't be hard to accept. After all, don't most of our tastes change? When I was a kid, you couldn't have convinced me that there was anything greater than a Mighty Mouse cartoon. And in that moment, there wasn't. But eventually my taste in TV changed. When I was a teenager, I listened to a lot of R&B. When I was in college, I heard hip-hop and fell in love with that. My taste in music evolved. When I was fifteen I thought there weren't any clothes flyer than mock turtlenecks and AJ Lester slacks. Today I prefer argyle vests and jeans. My tastes have changed in a lot of areas as I've grown. My taste buds are no different.

A yoga teacher once told me: "A yogi steadily loses the taste for things that don't taste good," and I've found that to be true. We lose our desires for many things that aren't good for us: drugs, booze, illicit sex, and drama. But I think it's especially true of our taste for meat.

I'd always assumed I couldn't live without animal products, but both my body and my spirit were more than happy to let them go. Physically, I started feeling the difference in just a few weeks. I had more energy and slept better at night. My mind became clearer and my focus grew stronger. My taste buds stopped craving those heavy, greasy flavors and started appreciating lighter and more diverse seasonings.

"The longer we eat healthier foods, the better they taste."

—Dr. Michael Greger, Humane Society

Most important, I felt better about my relationship with the world. It's a relief to disconnect yourself from a system that's causing harm and suffering. When you cleanse yourself of that negativity, it brightens your whole outlook.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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