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The Vegan Metamorphosis

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This essay is excerpted from the forthcoming book, [*Carbon Yoga: The Vegan Metamorphosis*](#)

Veganism is a way of living where we seek to never deliberately hurt an innocent animal unnecessarily¹. It is a way of living that almost everyone aspires to. Think about it:

“Would you ever deliberately hurt an innocent animal unnecessarily?”

So far, among the thousands of people that I have asked this simple question to, not a single person has come forward to say, “Yes.” Of course, I have probably never spoken to trophy hunters like Donald Trump, Jr., who famously cuts off an elephant’s tail and poses with it after shooting the elephant dead. Or perhaps, the trophy hunters among my responders were ashamed of their hobby. In either case, this goes to show that compassion for all life is coded into every fiber of our being.

That’s who we really are. But we are ensconced in a system that is based upon consumption as an organizing value and competition as an organizing principle. We are each bombarded with 3,500 ads a day, persuading us to consume one unnecessary product or another. We constantly compete against each other to determine who is better at one activity or another. The social hierarchy so created greases this ritualistic consumption.

¹ The [official definition of the Vegan Society](#) is as follows: “Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose,” but it is a wordier version of the definition I use.

This system is incompatible with Veganism. When taken to its logical conclusion, Veganism necessitates conscious simplicity since any unnecessary consumption uses natural resources that impacts wild animals somewhere. This is why going vegan is a process that doesn't stop with our dinner plates. This is also why "vegan consumerism" is an oxymoron and why it frightens the elites in the current system that more and more people are going vegan. Hence the widespread "Cowspiracy" that has infected institutions everywhere, especially in the developed world².

But the vegan metamorphosis is inexorable and just as in Nature, the Caterpillar has no choice but to become a Butterfly. In the US, as of 2010, according to a Hartman Group Research report, 12% of Millennials, 4% of Gen X-ers and 1% of Baby Boomers were vegan. Since then, interest in Veganism has **tripled** according to Google trends. The interest is especially strong in the developed countries of the world, which augurs well for Veganism's continued exponential growth³.

There are health, ethical, environmental, as well as spiritual reasons for embracing Veganism:

The toxic pollutants that we pump into the atmosphere in our industrial societies through burning fossil fuels and through our chemical processes eventually come down in the rain. Plants absorb these pollutants, storing them in their trunks, branches and stalks. Farm animals eat the vegetation and accumulate these toxic pollutants in their fat tissues as they grow. When people consume animal foods, they ingest a concentrated dose of these pollutants, which they accumulate and store in their fat tissues as well. Thus, animal foods have become a source of numerous chronic diseases in affluent communities, since they effectively recycle our industrial pollutants back to us.

The USDA estimates that 95% of the dioxins in our bodies, which are some of the strongest carcinogens known to man, come from the foods we eat. Dioxins are released into the atmosphere whenever chlorine reacts with hydrocarbons and this happens, for instance, when we bleach wood pulp. The four main food sources of these dioxins are fish, eggs, cheese and meat, in that order⁴.

The ethical reasons for embracing Veganism are obvious to anyone who has seen videos of animals in factory farms and slaughterhouses. There are plenty of such videos on the internet, including Virtual Reality (VR) clips that position the viewer on the slaughterhouse floor as well as the full-length documentary, [Earthlings](#).

² In the 2014 documentary, "[Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret](#)," government officials and mainstream environmental organizations are seen deliberately obfuscating the crucial role of animal agriculture in our global environmental crises.

³ The trend is highest in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom, in that order.

⁴ Please see video on dioxins in the food supply and references cited therein: <http://nutritionfacts.org/video/dioxins-in-the-food-supply/>.

As for the environmental reasons for embracing Veganism, I circulated the following question to land carbon experts around the world last year:

How much carbon can be sequestered in recovering forests if the whole world goes vegan?

Prof. Atul Jain at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, a land carbon expert with the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and his graduate student, Shijie Shu, ran the Integrated Science Assessment Model (ISAM) to answer this question. 35% of the ice-free land area of the planet is currently used as grazing land for animal agriculture. ISAM showed that if that land were returned back to the native forests that used to exist in 1800, this step alone would sequester an additional 265 Giga tons of Carbon (GtC) at forest maturity, using just 41% of that land. This is more than the 240 GtC that human activities have added to the atmosphere since 1750! We presented this stunning result at the Annual Fall Meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU), the largest annual gathering of climate scientists, in December of 2015⁵.

But, in my opinion, the most compelling reason for embracing veganism is the spiritual one: Veganism is in perfect alignment with who we are. True, Veganism requires transforming our civilization around compassion, not consumption, as the organizing value, and cooperation, not competition, as the organizing principle. But is that such an onerous transformation to contemplate? Surely, we are truly lucky to be alive at this incredibly significant moment in human history!

Onward with the metamorphosis!

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In 2006, he switched careers and became deeply immersed, full-time, in the spiritual and environmental crises affecting humanity. He is the author of the 2011 book, [Carbon Dharma: The Occupation of Butterflies](#) and is currently working on the follow up book, [Carbon Yoga: The Vegan Metamorphosis](#).

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MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/vegan-metamorphosis/>

⁵ Rao, Sailesh, Jain, Atul K., and Shu, Shijie, "The Lifestyle Carbon Dividend: Assessment of the Carbon Sequestration Potential of Grasslands and Pasturelands Reverted to Native Forests," Paper no. GC13E-1206, AGU Fall Meeting, Dec 2015. <https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm15/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/67429>