

A
Deeper
Look
 by Delisa Renideo

The Joyful Vegan

I get comments and questions quite often from non-vegans something to the effect: "It must be hard to be vegan. I could never do that! I enjoy eating too much." I think many people think it is a constant battle of will to take on the "serious" business of eating a plant-based diet. If I then admit that indeed, I also do not smoke or drink, they are convinced that I truly do not have any fun.

Adding to this "lack of fun," vegans often concern themselves with the welfare of animals, the health of the environment, and the plight of humans who go hungry when they turn their subsistence cropland into pasture for grazing animals who are sold for cheap burgers in the U.S. I've been told, "I don't want to think about all those things. I just want to enjoy my food and not feel guilty about it."

This is where the joyful vegan comes in.

I don't want to worry about my health. I don't want to wonder how soon I'm going to get cancer, since it seems to run in my family. I don't want to spend my money on medications and treatments for preventable, chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. I don't want to become one of the two-thirds of Americans who are overweight or obese, and constantly fighting the battle of the bulge (and usually losing the battle, not the bulge.) These things do NOT sound like fun to me!

What does sound fun is experimenting with innumerable delicious, colorful, flavorful dishes made from an almost endless variety of plants. It's fun to eat as much as I want and not gain weight. But it goes beyond having fun.

There is a deeper joy in knowing I'm nourishing my body well, providing the ingredients for optimal

health for my entire lifespan. I so appreciate getting up every morning feeling well, alert, and energetic. I love growing much of my food during the summer, tending the garden, singing to the plants, and enjoying the almost unbelievable freshness of just-picked greens.

I also feel joyful knowing that my diet helps me to be a good partner to my husband. I'm much less likely to become a burden to him -- someone he has to take care of -- because I take good care of myself. And I appreciate him taking good care of himself. "In sickness and health" is a laudable commitment, but it seems to me that we should include a vow to take as good care of ourselves as possible to maximize the health part and minimize the sickness part!

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Another joy is knowing that there really is something I can do to make the world a little gentler, kinder place for everyone to live. I'm afraid I would feel much more despairing if I saw the suffering and thought there was nothing I could do about it. I'm really grateful that my food choices support my love for animals and that I don't have to keep my love and care for animals separate from the act of eating.

Our food choices have a huge ripple effect. It may feel like our diet is purely a personal choice, but what we eat actually affects the health of our planet, the water, air, soil, animals, and humans -- so it really isn't personal at all. Just like it isn't just a personal choice to pollute other people's air by choosing to smoke, or to put others in danger by

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choosing to drink and drive.

Because of this ripple affect of our choices, I'm joyful that the diet that nourishes me best is also best for others. I don't have to suffer the pain of having to choose between what's best for me and best for others.

I know from personal experience that it causes a lot of anxiety, guilt, and pain to live a separated life -- a life where our actions aren't in alignment with our values. In order to deal with it, we usually have to

engage in a lot of denial. This drains our energy, and it certainly drains our joy. We may still "have fun" but we don't dare scratch the surface or we'll find too much pain.

So I'm a joyful vegan, as many of you are too. I'm not focused on what I "can't" eat and I never feel deprived. On the contrary, I'm grateful for having discovered the many and far-reaching benefits of a plant-based diet. And I also have an enormous amount of fun eating it!

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