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Tasty and Earth-friendly eating

Carol Meyer | Feb. 9, 2011 Eco Catholic

Being a vegetarian or a vegan is no longer a ?fringe? concept, but fast becoming mainstream. As people learn more about it and how it can help the planet, it is becoming more common. However, I find it is still difficult to get even the most avid environmentalists to switch to this kind of diet. They can learn that it is the single most effective eco-action they can take, and yet not be willing to do it.

I?ve wrestled with why this is for a long time, and have come to several conclusions. The pleasure of eating is near and dear to our hearts. It is loaded with emotional overtones and a lifetime of cultural conditioning. Altering eating habits seems like a sacrifice too great to bear. Negative thoughts bombard us: ?All the joy will be gone from eating. I don?t know how to cook without meat. My family and friends will consider me crazy. There goes my social life and eating out. I need meat to be healthy.?

As a vegetarian for over 20 years and a vegan for 10, let me assure you that your greatest fears will never come to pass. It is a wonderful, life-giving, satisfying path that far outweighs the enjoyment of eating meat. Will Tuttle, author of *The World Peace Diet*, says that on the surface it may seem like a vegan diet is a big NO and full of deprivation, but in reality it is a big YES to higher, more spiritual values. I teach classes on vegetarian/vegan cooking, and always share the many ways I?ve experienced new joy, freedom, and spiritual growth through this choice. And the food is delicious! What?s not to love about something that is enjoyable, better for our health, the planet, the animals, and the world?s poor and starving?

Whether to be a carnivore or vegetarian is not a choice between two goods, one just slightly better than the other. If you choose to eat meat and animal products, you choose more heart disease and cancer. You choose to participate in cruelty to factory farm animals. You choose to degrade the Earth by the many disastrous effects of the animal industry. You choose to ignore the starving multitudes that could be fed the grain that went into producing your hamburger. Who knew this was so several decades ago? We were blithely eating meat in good conscience. Not so any more. Things have changed. We know too much, and God calls us to change our eating habits. It is a moral imperative.

I?ll give specifics about how a meat diet harms the earth in another blog. Right now I want to focus on the taste of vegetarian/vegan food, because that is probably the main issue for folks. I never had any trouble giving up meat and I?ve never been tempted to eat it. Now a piece of pie, that?s another story. But meat, eggs, milk, cheese, etc. -- no. It?s almost like a switch went off in my brain and those foods didn?t even exist. I?m so used to preparing colorful, zesty, unusual vegan dishes that the normal American diet seems bland by comparison. I have little desire to eat out, as I always think my food tastes better. It?s real food, wholesome and yummy, not dead processed food brought to life and edibility only with additives, fat, salt, and sugar.

Don?t think that cooking without meat and animal products is impossible or too daunting. Vegetarian cooking classes abound. So do good cookbooks. And we are fortunate to have many meat alternatives, so you hardly know you?ve made the switch. You can get non-meat bacon, patties, sausages, cold cuts, and more. You can get vegan mayonnaise, cheese, sour cream, butter, cream cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. You can drink rice, soy,

almond, and hemp milk. The only thing you can?t do is make an omelet. Oh well. Small price to pay.

If you want to contact me, I can email you some of my class handouts: favorite recipes, what to stock in your kitchen, sample menus, health and earth reasons for a plant-based diet, and a resource list. My email is wisdomways@planetkc.com. My support and prayers are with you as you move to a plant-based diet!

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