Non-Religious Vegan Voices

Here are eight statements by vegans who answered our 2021-2022 questionnaire telling us they are non-religious. We have included any photos we were sent for the first of these. They are in no particular order.

The views expressed here are those of the individuals themselves and are intended as stimuli for deep thinking, discussion and debate in RE lessons.

Fijii, 18 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 3-5 years

Fijii describes herself as 'not religious at all' and as having 'no religion'

We rescued some chickens to keep as pets and realising what loving, cuddly creatures they are I couldn't believe that I was eating these animals and contributing to their suffering. As a young child (6 or 7) I remember vividly that I was under the impression that they were dumb, somebody must've said it to me at a young age and it had stuck, but it dawned on me that day that this was most certainly false. Chickens are the most loving pets; they adore cuddles and are incredibly loyal. It clicked within me that day that I was in fact eating animals with feelings, and not just 'meat' or food as society deems it, so I decided I would no longer contribute to their suffering.

I am still very much vegan for the animals, however with the climate crisis I do now strive to be as eco-friendly as possible, and this is very much a driving factor in my motivations for being vegan as well.

Being vegan means to not do anything which will cause another being's suffering.

To not eat animals nor any animal derivatives that have caused their inevitable suffering. This would include leather and animal skins, as well as cosmetics that are tested on animals. I would also say that as a vegan it is important to, where possible, avoid any companies that invest in animal cruelty or testing and to support fellow vegans' companies where possible.

Veganism determines my everyday activities and is almost like a religion to me, whilst obviously not one. It is however something which is incredibly important to me and that I feel very strongly about. I struggle to understand or relate to those who choose not to follow a vegan lifestyle as I do not understand why anyone would feel content whilst aware of the suffering they contribute to.

The best thing about being vegan is knowing that you are saving animals every day! Watching the percentage of vegans rise each year online is also very rewarding though, it makes it worthwhile being vegan knowing that the world is gradually changing. Knowing that my actions have not caused an animal suffering. Also being with a group of like-minded people that understand. Being a vegan in 2022 is so much easier now that it's a recognized way of life and is supported by many in the public eye. The choice of food is quite incredible now too.

I think that children should learn where their food comes from and how it actually gets to their plates. As a child I was not aware that an animal was actually killed in an awful manner just to be put on my plate. I was also under the impression that if I did not eat meat that I would be malnourished, which is false. Some may argue it to be traumatic to learn about the meat industry but if learning how food reaches your plate is traumatic, perhaps we should not be treating our 'food' in such a manner (slaughter). I think that if I was educated better in school about veganism that I would have transitioned at an earlier age. I am shocked that so many people do not know, for example, that for cows to produce milk that they have to have a baby, let alone the fact that thousands of male cows are killed at birth. it is vital that children who are being raised to contribute to such suffering are aware of the actual processes that happen to these animals before they end up on our plates.

RE Today Services

John, 30 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for less than 1 year

John is Atheist and not at all religious

I am vegan out of concern for animal suffering. I read Peter Singer's book, *Animal Liberation*, and it convinced me it was the ethical thing to do. Concern for the environment and for public health also motivated me to go vegan.

First and foremost, I think non human animals deserve to be treated with respect, and should not be used for our pleasure (e.g a 30-minutes meal), when they endure potentially a lifetime of suffering and a horrific slaughtering process. Further to that point, our consumption of animals increases public health issues, mainly increased antibiotic resistance would be a catastrophe for humanity, and zoological diseases, some of which we have already seen (swine flu, bird flu etc). Finally going vegan helps to reduce our environmental impact as consumers.

Veganism to me is the reduction of animal suffering as much as is possible and practicable.

I'm not sure if I can name a best thing about being vegan yet, the choice to become vegan wasn't about reward for me and means I will sacrifice flavours I used to enjoy!

The most challenging thing about being vegan is learning how to discuss a highly emotive topic in as rational a way as possible.

Margherita, 33 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 3-5 years

Margherita is Agnostic and describes herself as 'spiritual but not religious'

I didn't 'want', rationally, to go vegan: I was living in deep conditioning. But as I worked in a dairy farm (organic, humane, cruelty free, etc) at a certain point I was physically unable to consume animals or animals' milk. What we were doing to the animals, while actually deeply caring for them, was making me live in constant stress. And confusion. But I was sure I needed meat and dairy and there was nothing to be ashamed of in the whole production process. At the farm we all loved the animals very deeply. But they had to be used and killed. It was the 'circle of life', and the farm wouldn't have financially survived without this exploitation. There was one moment in particular when I realized we don't NEED to do all that: it was lambing season and I couldn't take it anymore. Many lambs were dying alone, after being removed from their mothers. Also a baby cow died under my care in that period, because she was brought to us just at a few days old and she didn't survive the stress. She was bought with another young calf to add new genetics to the herd. All of this suddenly made me want to vomit, but in my head I was very confused. I didn't want to go vegan. After a few weeks I left the farm and started calling myself vegan, and now (4 years later) I'm an activist too. I cannot forgive myself for not being able to protect the animals I helped exploit. The farm still exist and my former colleagues are still there. This breaks my heart because I know they're good people.

I see veganism as a necessary social justice movement, just like any other movement that promotes inclusivity. I want to push towards a society where everyone can feel safe and respected. Veganism is compassion, awareness, integrity, initiative, positive revolution.

The best thing about being vegan is doing something positive for everybody on this planet.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is the capitalistic society is keeping change from happening, and too many people (even smart, nice people) are still not willing to take responsibility for their actions.

Maegan, 23 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 3-5 years

Maegan is a Humanist and describes herself as 'spiritual, but not religious'
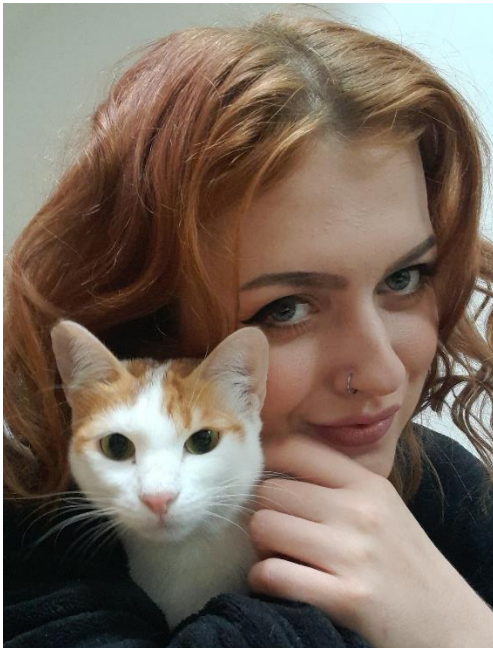
I was always vegetarian and noticed the hypocrisy of that when I became aware of the immense suffering caused to animals in the dairy and egg industries. I educated myself and realised I could no longer fund these industries, and felt I had to make reparations and big changes to make up for the fact I had been doing so.

Veganism is central to every part of my life, guiding and informing all of my choices.

The best thing about being vegan is knowing you're doing the best you can not to harm people, animals and the planet, and making the best choice for your body.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is people you care about not understanding or the way others don't see animals as beings worthy of love and a happy life. People's distance from their own choices and impacts aggravates me, and I get very down sometimes thinking about all the horrors animals all around me and all around the globe are being subjected to at this moment.

I think children should learn about veganism at school as everyone has a right to know what they are putting in their bodies. This right extends to children. Not to discuss the emergent science and research on nutrition and the many benefits of plant-based diets would be negligent and shameful at worst and certainly ignorant and untruthful. We have to rectify myths about diet that have been perpetuated across society for decades and schools are one of the best places to start conversations in families and put power in the hands of young people.

As well as learning about the processes behind meat and dairy, children should learn to cook tasty and nutritious vegan food. They should learn how to have a helpful conversation and debate about these issues.

Maddy, 30 years old, from the UK, vegan for 6-9 years

Maddy is a Humanist and not at all religious

I am vegan due to concern for environment, animal suffering, personal health and philosophical/ethical reasons

I believe that our personal choices about consumption (whether food, media, or anything else) say a lot about who we are and the values we live by. It is part of who we are as human beings that we can exercise our imagination and our empathy in considering other creatures and can make choices - even sacrifices - to show that we care about them. We do not need to eat meat or consume animal products to survive, certainly not in the quantities we do as western nations, so we can make decisions rooted in compassion and concern by reducing this. Fundamentally, I just think that choosing not to eat (or wear) products rooted in the suffering of other sentient beings is one of the most compassionate things we can do - for other people, and for animals.

Given the increasing awareness of climate change and its disastrous impacts (especially on the most vulnerable communities, many of whom are not the ones contributing so much to the problem), I also believe that refraining from the consumption of animal products - or limiting it - is one thing we can do as individuals to try to mitigate this. I also hope that the more people who choose to do so, and put pressure on governmental bodies and other powerful organisations, the more likely we are collectively to make a difference. On an even more basic level, I know that put in a situation where I had to personally kill an animal in order to eat it, I wouldn't, so why is it OK for someone else to do it for me? We are now so far removed from the means of production when it comes to food, that we just cannot know whether an animal suffered in life or death in order for us to eat it. To ignore this is an act of 'wilful forgetting': choosing to believe that you haven't contributed to the pain of another living thing. I just don't believe that enjoying the taste of something justifies that.

Veganism is not who I am as a person, or an identity in and of itself, but it is part of who I am, and represents something of what I believe.

The best thing about being vegan is having one way to enact what I believe on a daily basis.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is having to make a point of asking for vegan options if they aren't initially considered. I hate feeling like I'm being difficult or putting people out in some way.

Rose, 65 years old, lives in the UK, vegan 3-5 for years

She has no religion at all

I was vegetarian for about 30 years because I didn't want animals to have to suffer and die just so I could eat meat. However, gradually, over the years, as I learnt more about the impact and cruelty of dairy farming too, on the animals and the environment, I decided that the most compassionate way to live was to be vegan.

Veganism is not just a diet or a lifestyle. For me, being vegan is an ethical, moral standpoint. For me, the only thing that matters is that all living things matter and that we humans need to live with nature and the earth and not keep using and abusing it for our own comforts.

The more I learn about the farming industry and the practices involved in both meat and dairy farming the more I feel that vegan is the only kind way to live.

The best thing about being vegan is knowing that I am helping towards a changing attitude for a kinder, more compassionate world. And also, the amazing new foods and recipes that I have found!

The most challenging thing is facing the closed minds of meat eaters who refuse to even contemplate that their lifestyle might not be right. Those who close their minds to the suffering and pain of billions upon billions of animals yet call themselves animal lovers because they have a pet.

Rachel, 52 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 1-2 years

Rachel is a Humanist and not at all religious

My daughter was my main influence. Once I started reading up more about how animals are exploited and the fact that I never even questioned it, it became inevitable that I would become a vegan. Animal suffering and exploitation are definitely my main motivators, but more recently the environmental aspect has also reinforced that I'm doing the right thing for all sentient animals, the environment and for me.

Veganism is the way that I fulfil my humanist outlook on life. You can't claim to be compassionate and kind if that excludes animals. It's now fundamentally part of who I am, and I wish I had taken the step years ago.

The best thing about being vegan is knowing that I don't participate in any way to the exploitation of animals and how much my cooking skills have improved!

The most challenging thing about being vegan is other people's attitudes and the cognitive dissonance that exists in so many. I rarely bring it up, but I often have someone asking me an annoying question such as, if you were on a desert island and there was no food would you eat meat. Seriously! That contrary to popular believe, vegans aren't extremists!

Cognitive dissonance means believing one thing but acting in a way that goes against that belief. An example many vegans would give is someone saying that they love all kinds of animals and don't agree with animals being harmed or killed, but still consuming meat.