

## Other Vegan Voices

Here are five statements by vegans who answered our 2021-2022 questionnaire and ticked 'other' when we asked them to identify their religion. 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.*

### Aaron, 30 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 3-5 years

**Aaron describes his religion as: I embrace all walks of life as sacred and learn from all**



I awakened to the truth that every choice/action we take in our lives; has a reaction in our outside world. Becoming vegan was a step forward to expressing love and compassion for all beings, our planet and my own self. Moreover, this led me to understand how this choice in turn aids in restoring peace and harmony to our eco-systems and our societies as opposed to destroying them through separation, pain and suffering.

I am motivated to be vegan by the Law of Divine Oneness.

I ask myself the question... Is my action/choice an act of love? If not, then I will avoid. If yes, I will pursue and share.

The best thing about being vegan is expressing love to all.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is diffusing the ego and showing love, compassion and understanding to individuals/groups that oppose and challenge being vegan; a delicate balance of holding space for those who aren't quite ready to transition and guiding those who wish to elevate their consciousness.

## **Tristan, 35 years old, lives in Australia, vegan for 1-2 years**

**Tristan says he is somewhat religious, Christian by upbringing but with frustrations about the narrow scope of the lens of compassion.**



I have always struggled with the notion of death and was aware of the ongoing and needless cruelty in the name of bettering human lives. I saved ants, protected mice and spiders but I ate meat as I was an Olympic athlete who was told I needed it to be successful. The alternative was never mainstream and in the absence of the appropriate education it was too easy to selfishly not take the risk. A few years after professional sport I watched some effective activism, learned a lot more and saw footage that made it impossible to ignore what we agree to by default and I only wish I did it earlier so I could have acted as part of the education process in terms of sport.

I am mainly motivated to be vegan by concern for animals but the many other concerns about pandemic outbreaks or water shortages make an easy choice even easier.

Being vegan means to not be part of a selfish system that put the needs of oneself before those of others less able to fight for them. A frame of mind where one thinks before acting to consider the consequences for other unnamed parties, and furthermore takes joy in what the uneducated considers to be a sacrifice. It is more importantly the choice to fight for those who are trodden on and who are disregarded as they too often can't speak out themselves

In practice, this means active avoidance of any animal exploitation channels. Promotion of the values to those at school and minor involvement in actions to increase awareness. I'd love to change the way vegan food is viewed and offered in establishments like this.

The best thing about being vegan is feeling awake, even though it hurts much more to see the truth. It is still better to opt out than to concede to defeat and acceptance of cruel realities.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is seeing people unwilling to act on facts and make their own difference. Watching ads for the colossus that is the horrible nightmare we have created and watching the new generations being taught to actively add subjectivity into the word 'kindness'.

So many people are kind by nature but don't see veganism as a viable alternative. Without education, the incorrect stigma will remain and there will be no way for those people who are inherently kind to choose not to put a veil over what is objectively not a kind existence.

## **Fo, 60 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 3-5 years**

### **Fo describes herself as 'spiritual but not religious'. She says:**

**I was brought up Roman Catholic, but now have more Buddhist type beliefs. I was the RE co-ordinator in a primary school for 14 years and loved teaching the children the beliefs and practices and showing the similarities between many religions that often, sadly, fight over theirs being the right way.**



I thought it was OK to eat eggs if free range and dairy products because it didn't involve killing an animal. When I learnt more about dairy farming and the mincing of male day- old chicks, I had to re-evaluate my choices. I added omitting honey and wool for cruelty reasons too. I have become more aware of the environmental impact of the mass use and slaughter of sentient beings. I cannot be a reason it is happening.

The best thing about being vegan is 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 2021 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.

The most challenging things about being vegan are:

1. Other people's opinions and verbal attacks and ridicule. I am making a personal, kind lifestyle choice. Why does it offend you?
2. The stupid things people say like 'Oh you don't eat meat but I bet you wear leather' (no. why would I?); 'If everyone stopped eating meat, there would be no more cows' (what, like there are no pigeons, or foxes, or rats...); 'I bet you would eat meat if you were starving' (probably. What's your point? I'm not starving and there is plenty of choice);
3. Places that have no vegan option or just one, which is curry or chilli (I can't eat hot spicy food) or falafel (which I used to like until it became the only choice)

If people do not like the idea of giving up meat and dairy themselves, I would hope that they can be understanding and tolerant towards people that have made this choice. Just like understanding religious beliefs and ceremonies that are not the same as their own.

## **Barbara, 58 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 6-9 years**

### **Barbara identifies as interfaith/spiritual. She is spiritual but not religious.**



I became a vegetarian in my early twenties, giving up eating meat but not dairy, as I didn't then understand the suffering caused by the dairy industry. It wasn't until later that I became aware of the suffering caused by the dairy industry that I changed from being a vegetarian to being a vegan. This seems to be common for people of my generation.

To me, veganism is a way of living that aims to avoid causing suffering to others. It is not just a diet.

Firstly, I aim to avoid causing suffering to others. This includes avoiding any product, including food, or activity that has harmed another being. Secondly, I try to encourage other people not to harm other beings through education (the Animal Interfaith Alliance, the RSPCA). Thirdly, I campaign legally against cruelty and injustice. Fourthly I have worked and volunteered for animal protection organisations. My volunteer work has included being a trustee and treasurer of the RSPCA national society and setting up the Animal Interfaith Alliance. I have worked for Catholic Concern for Animals.

The best thing about being vegan is knowing that you have not caused harm to any other being and feeling happy and at ease with yourself.

The most challenging thing about being vegan is knowing the pain and misery that so many animals suffer at the hands of humans and not being able to help them all.

I think that children should be given the information to make their own decisions in life and to feel happy with themselves in their chosen way of living. I never knew about veganism as a child and felt I was peculiar in finding meat-eating distasteful, which led to unhappiness.

## **Ashwin, 69 years old, lives in the UK, vegan for 10+ years**

### **Ashwin is a Jain, and is 'somewhat religious'**

I first started eating a vegan diet for health reasons. I'm now vegan for religious reasons, concern for animal suffering and the environment

To me veganism means ahimsa for all living beings, being a good Jain.

The best thing about being vegan is that it is less damaging to the environment.