



LESSON 18: "FRIENDS OR FOOD"

"The problem is that humans have victimized animals to such a degree that they are not even considered victims. They are not even considered at all. They are nothing. They don't count; they don't matter; they're commodities like TV sets and cell phones. We have actually turned animals into inanimate objects – sandwiches and shoes."

– Gary Yourofsky, activist

Are animals “friends” or “food”? Seems like such simple and yet somehow absurd question, doesn’t it? Most meat-eaters and even vegetarians would probably argue that they can be (and often are) both. What makes people give up an entire set of beliefs and traditions that they spent their whole lives being so attached to in sometimes as little as one moment? I myself went vegan overnight, but I know many people who needed a little more time (which is absolutely OK). Either way, there seems to be a level of reconnecting that is only strengthened with time. Even though I was fully vegan from the very beginning, I had a hard time resisting cheese and even meat at first. Now, these “foods” don’t even interest me anymore. It’s as if it just clicked and ever since, it’s been continuing to click over and over again. I remember thinking to myself that yes, animals’ lives are just as important as human lives, but then cliché questions like *“Who’d you rather save, a human baby or a puppy?”* made me wonder. Because if I was being completely honest with myself, I did value human lives more and if given that kind of choice, I’d have chosen the human being. Then one day, I heard a radio interview with animals rights activist Gary Yourofsky. He was asked the same question and his reply triggered one of those clicks, or “aha” moments in me. He said that that was a horrible question to even ask and that it was comparable to asking someone whether they would save a white or a black child and that he’d obviously always try to save both.

Whether or not one agrees with Gary’s statement, it made me realize that there is no need to choose, no need to proclaim that one is more important than the other. Obviously, animals and humans are different. Veganism isn’t about turning animals into human beings, it’s about realizing that “different” doesn’t mean “lesser” and that we don’t need to use them to survive, thrive or be happy and that they therefore deserve to be left alone.

Before going vegan, I didn't take vegetarians or vegans all too seriously and I also didn't feel particularly connected to animals. The short version of how I went vegan is that several years ago, I came across a passage from the book *Slaughterhouse* by Gail Eisnitz and that that passage changed my life forever. For the first time, I was able to imagine what it would be like to be in the animal's skin. The actual passage is quite graphic, so I won't include it here, but I have quoted it on my Instagram account before, so feel free **to click here to read it**.

I had never seen farm animals as more than food and even though I knew they were really living beings, I was too disconnected to empathize. That moment, I knew that I had to go vegan. I didn't know anyone who was vegan and had no clue what I was doing, but I knew that I would spend the rest of my life trying to help people make that same connection. I have since learned that everyone's reaction is different and that just because I went vegan overnight, that doesn't mean everyone has to. Sometimes, making the connection takes a little more time and as mentioned above, that's OK.

I'd like to share some of the questions I wish I had asked myself when I still ate meat, dairy and eggs. If you are not vegan yet, please know that none of this is supposed to make you feel bad. For me, it's all about sharing the knowledge and information I wish someone had shared with me much sooner. What you do with that information, is ultimately up to you, but I hope it may help you see things in a different way.



[image source: Skool of Vegan]

Here are a few questions I wish I would have asked myself years ago:

- Why is it OK to eat a cow, but unacceptable to eat a giraffe?
- Why do we treat our pets with love and affection, yet we have no problem eating other animals that really aren't all that different from them?
- Why is the world outraged when a dentist kills Cecil the lion while no one cares about billions of other animals killed for food?
- If there's nothing wrong with killing animals, why are slaughterhouses and factory farms so secluded from the outside world?
- Why are "because that's the way things are" and "because it's always been like that" considered good enough answers?
- Why do we think that just because we are human, our lives have more value?

I want to share a short text I wrote a while back and a few more quotes with you in this lesson. The text emphasizes why this "Friends Or Food" topic is so close to my heart and the quotes are all statements that helped me understand the connection between humans and animals on a deeper level and/or that made me look at things differently.

The text:

I used to eat meat. I used to love it. My favorite dish when I was 10 were pork chops with butter and white bread. I used to drink a liter of cow's milk at night because the only nutrient I ever cared about was protein. I used to feel so proud knowing that my bags and shoes were made of real leather. I often wonder why I was so disconnected. I don't want to talk about cute piglets and baby cows and how I do not get how anyone could eat them because I do get it. Because I ate them myself for so many years.

Sometimes, when I talk about animals and how they're actually not so different from us, I hear my old self in my head, laughing at the comparison. Not too long ago, my friend's dog sat down next to me and looked me straight in the eyes. I got goosebumps because for a second it felt like a person was looking at me. Comparing animals to humans is not about lessening the worth of humans, it's about realizing that there's no need for a hierarchy of the worth of our lives in the first place.

My great grandmother Lusiyah was legally considered property by white men (and women) because of the color of her skin. They colonized her country and with it, her body and her freedom. I think most people would agree that that's outrageous

nowadays. But back then, less than 100 years ago, it was considered normal, legal, just the way things are.

Comparing two systems of oppression does not mean you're comparing the victims of these systems, I want to make that very clear because I know how sensitive of a topic it is, even though I myself see no offense in it. My point is, I do not make this comparison to point out the similarities between the oppressed groups, but rather to underline the similarities between the indifference and disconnect of the oppressing groups. Whenever I see an animal, I just want to tell him/her that I'm here, I'm fighting for them. It may not be much, but I'm trying. That doesn't make me any better than other people, it just makes me a little less disconnected than I used to be.

I wish I could make others see, make them understand what it is I didn't know before but realize now...

Just because my skin is whiter than hers, I have more rights than my great grandmother and even my grandmother and mother did. Just because I'm human, I have more rights than animals do. I have a voice. It's not fair and I don't understand it, but I can use that voice to point it out and to offer an alternative to those who are open to it.

QUOTES

"We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate for having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein do we err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with the extension of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings: they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth."

- Henry Beston

"Isn't man an amazing animal? He kills wildlife – birds, kangaroos, deer, all kinds of cats, coyotes, beavers, groundhogs, mice, foxes and dingoes – by the million in order to protect his domestic animals and their feed. Then he kills domestic animals by the billion and eats them. This in turn kills man by the million, because eating all those animals leads to degenerative – and fatal– health conditions like heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer. So then man tortures and kills millions more animals to look for cures for these diseases. Elsewhere, millions of other human beings are being killed by hunger and malnutrition because food they could eat is being used to fatten domestic animals. Meanwhile, some people are dying of sad laughter at the absurdity of man, who kills so easily and so violently, and once a year, sends out cards praying for Peace on Earth."

- C. David Coats

"150 years ago, they would have thought you were absurd if you advocated for the end of slavery. 100 years ago, they would have laughed at you for suggesting that women should have the right to vote. 50 years ago, they would object to the idea of African Americans receiving equal rights under the law. 25 years ago they would have called you a pervert if you advocated for gay rights. They laugh at us now for suggesting that animal slavery be ended. Some day they won't be laughing."

- Gary Smith

"Perhaps in the back of our minds we already understand, without all the science I've discussed, that something terribly wrong is happening. Our sustenance now comes from misery. We know that if someone offers to show us a film on how our meat is produced, it will be a horror film. We perhaps know more than we care to admit, keeping it down in the dark places of our memory-- disavowed. When we eat factory-farmed meat we live, literally, on tortured flesh. Increasingly, that tortured flesh is becoming our own."

- Jonathan Safran Foer

"Poor animals, how jealously they guard their bodies, for to us is merely an evening's meal, but to them is life itself."

- T. Casey Brennan

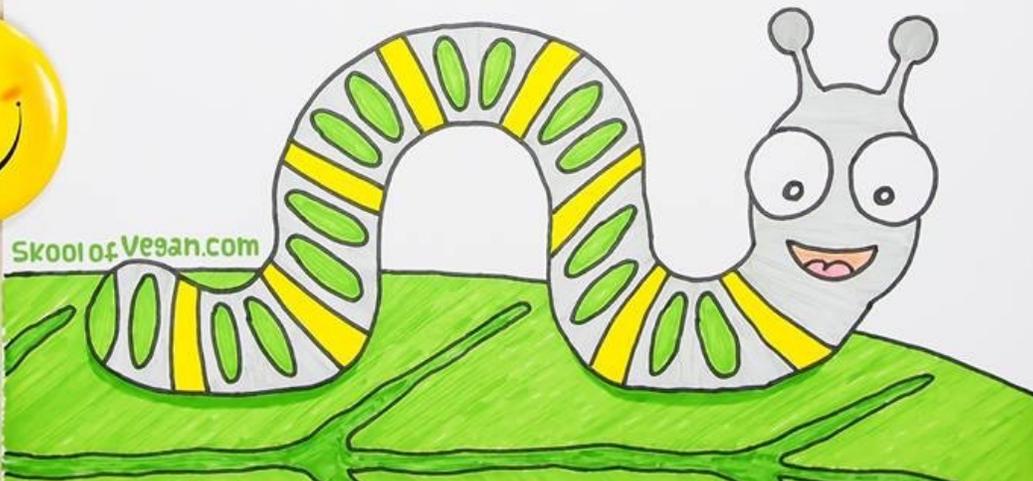
LAST BUT NOT LEAST...

For those of you who want to find out more about what animals have to endure in order to become our food, our clothes and our source of entertainment, you can [click here](#) to watch the documentary Earthlings, narrated by vegan actor Joaquin Phoenix. The images may be a bit difficult to watch, but remember that whatever you may feel or endure for 90 minutes while watching is nothing compared to what they go through every single day.



"TEACHING A CHILD
NOT TO STEP ON
A CATERPILLAR IS AS
VALUABLE TO THE
CHILD AS IT IS TO
THE CATERPILLAR."

-BRADLEY MILLER



[Image source: Skool of Vegan]