

A VEGAN BY ANY OTHER NAME

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I don't know why, but I don't like the name "vegan," even worse if I am becoming one. The reason why is that probably, as a sometimes vegetarian, for years vegan marked the line between yummy and not-so-yummy. There is a little story here, so I might as well tell it. It is early in the morning and it is cold outside. There is snow on the ground that had to be plowed. If the sun shines today I will try to walk outside. If there are gray skies, probably I will hunker down, chicken that I am. That says it all.

I have been on and off vegetarian for years, sometimes decades at a time. I will spare you the details... for now.

I guess I should back up just a bit and talk about sugar. Now I grew up liking sugar. Way back then I was eating those little Hostess cherry pies and all of the smorgasbord of cheap candy folks grew up with in the 1950s. And I love ice cream. But there was a problem in recent years. Every time I would get a sugar high on, like a big bowl of ice cream, my body would go into some kind of stasis. No, nothing that needed to rush me to the hospital, but just an hour or two when I could feel my body struggling to absorb and overcome the shock to my system caused by all that sugar.

Since I am a slow learner and I like it that way, especially with my bad habits, so I ignored this effect for as long as I could. Finally, at long last, I gave in and stopped ignoring the fact that I felt crummy after eating a bunch of sugar. You can be sure I tried it hundreds of times. You know, eat sugar, feel bad... not eat sugar, feel normal. When it comes to giving up what I love, I am the perfect scientist. I gave it lots of tests.

The voice of reason finally was heard and I decided to stop eating sugar, and I did – cold turkey. I still eat a little maple syrup, which really is sugar, but it is not often and not much. So there you have my sugar story, but it is just prolog to this story:

Living without sugar was one of the best things I ever did. I feel much stronger and, of course, do not go into a mini-hibernation any longer, as I did when I ate the stuff. And giving up sugar was years ago. But now, as I become increasingly aware of what food does to my body another specter raises its gnarly head.

This time it is just the results of my eating too much white flour products (pizza, pasta, etc.) and dairy, probably too much oil, and mostly just too much food. The rest of my family is more reasonable with food. They try real hard to eat healthy, organic foods if possible, and in life sustaining proportions. They eat to live, while I (too often) live to eat. Where they tend to be gourmets, I am the lone gourmand in the room. It is not quite a bad as I make it sound, but bad enough.

The long and the short of it is that, lo and behold, I recently found myself suffering a similar effect as I did to sugar, with now it was just the food I was eating and how much I ate. I was aware that after eating a bunch, I would go into a little tiny swoon of recovery that took an hour or so. It was like my body was struggling to handle the overload. This effect was not as pronounced as with sugar, but it was clear enough to me after a while. And my body could not easily eliminate all of the toxins I was ingesting, so it came out in my scalp, skin, and so on. What to do?

In the "I told you so" department, my wife Margaret had been pointing this out to me for years, but I was deaf to all her suggestions, and occasionally even hostile. But true to form, when I finally got the picture, I turned on a dime and this is what I did. I should add that the fact that I got a three-day stomach flu and was completely emptied out was a great help to making this decision.

I went to Margaret and said, I will let you tell me what to eat and in what quantities to eat it for one month, and see whether I notice any difference. Well, that month is up today and I am a free bird as far as what I can eat. And, I actually did pretty well. I did not go off the reservation.... much. Margaret was kind enough to give me a free day on one of the kid's birthdays and on Thanksgiving, otherwise there would have been problems. She was wise to do that. And now for the report:

It is all good news. I found that when I got really hungry, even that kind of crude seven-grain bread full of seeds and stuff tasted, well, great. And it was usually oatmeal for breakfast, and I was asked to make it, starting early in the morning with whole oats at a very slow boil, and all that. I have lost a bunch of weight and just feel better all over and... lighter too. I was not eating white-flour products and no dairy. No cheese, milk, and anything like that. No more Amy's frozen organic pot pies and so on. It was grains, veggies, and lots of beans. We almost always make beans from scratch and so there were garbanzos, red beans, and pinto beans all around. I like beans.

One thing I noticed is that my body stopped trying to eliminate all the stuff I was eating. My scalp cleared up and all kinds of good things like that.

So the bottom line is that, even though I am free again to eat what I like, I am staying with this new way of eating to live, and not living to eat. When I add up all that I am eating, it spells out "vegan," but I hate to think I am a vegan, but I guess I am. How did that happen? I like to think I am a vegetarian (mostly), who happens not to eat animal products and dairy, eggs, and so on. My other alternative is to learn to love the word vegan and be proud of it.

Thank you Margaret!

So there you have my story. Any thoughts?

[Photo not by me.]

