



One of my first yoga teachers told me a long time ago that somewhere along my yoga journey, I would stop eating meat. I thought that was funny. As a good Southern girl, chicken was a regular staple in my diet, and nothing made me happier than a thick, juicy steak, rare. I thought that hell would freeze over before I even considered becoming a vegetarian.

The devil must be cold. On January 1, 2012, I cut out meat and all other animal products from my diet.

I am a vegan (although because I am not protesting with PETA or making all of my own clothes out of hemp, some might call me a strict vegetarian).

My intention was to go into 2012 on a mostly organic, locally sourced diet. I planned to cut out meat, but keep seafood. I had no intention of giving up dairy.

But then I was inspired by my friend Paige Elenson and her “Lose to Win” challenge. Paige is giving up all animal products in an effort to make herself healthier, her community more peaceful, and to transform the world. I immediately knew that if instead of thinking of all of the things I would be giving up, I could successfully and radically change my diet if I thought of all of the things that could be gained.

I gain a lot of satisfaction knowing that no animal had to die to feed me. By eating locally sourced fruits and vegetables, and sticking with whole grains, I can rest assured that I am putting whole, healthy and life-giving foods in my body, and not adding toxins from hormones or additives.

And so far so good. My typical day starts with a Super Green Smoothie or a bowl of Overnight Oats. By mid-morning, I'm finishing the morning smoothie or having an apple. Lunch consists of a salad or a wrap or maybe a soup. Dinner is typically a soup or stew, or maybe Meatless Tacos, a delicious concoction of walnuts and spices that could almost convince you that it's a taco! I find myself eating a lot of lentils, quinoa, and couscous, all of which can be varied to suit your mood.

I've replaced dairy milk with coconut, hemp or almond milk (on the advice of a friend, I alternate) and honey with agave nectar. I'm using nutritional yeast in place of cheese in some dishes, and I've learned to cook with tofu.

I've discovered that Thai restaurants are great places to eat if you are vegan or vegetarian. I have found out that food tastes better that it used to. I am learning how to make fruits and vegetables take center stage, instead of loading my plate with protein.

And I feel pretty good. I don't know if I will always adhere to the stringent vegan diet, but I do know that I will always eat with a conscience. I want to know where my food comes from, and that it is not only healthy, but good for the community and the world at large. I want foods free of pesticides that were grown and harvested in a Fair Trade environment. I want no people or animals harmed in the production of my food. What are you willing to give up to gain a healthier lifestyle? A more conscious, peaceful environment? If you think you want to take the plunge on any level, I am happy to talk you through it.

For recipes and photos, go to www.EatingWithConscience.wordpress.com

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