



THE INNER ART

In 1973, two events made me aware that I was a meat eater. Until then, I was an unquestioning and uninformed consumer. Suddenly, eating meat was no longer a given. I became conscious that I was making choices that were harmful to my body and to animals. At first I couldn't figure out what to do in response to what I now see was the beginnings of vegetarian consciousness. Should I change my diet? It seemed that I wanted to, and yet I did not change. The world was organized to keep me a meat eater. So, the following year I reorganized my world and became a vegetarian.

By deciding to change and then by changing, I began to experience the world in a more positive way. I learned how to make a commitment through vegetarianism, and then I learned how to *keep* a commitment. Anyone who wants to change the world or themselves can learn this too. Vegetarianism offers this to everyone.

How each of us responds to vegetarian consciousness is one of our life tasks. Often our responses teach us how great the distance is between consciousness and action. In becoming a vegetarian I learned first from what I could not change about myself. And then from not changing I learned how to change: how to align consciousness and action.

The process began in 1972. I was at Yale Divinity School, and my friend Marie told us about her physical examination at the Yale Health Center. She had made her appointment with the only woman doctor there. "What a good idea," I thought, and I made an appointment too.

At the Health Center, the doctor examined me and told me I had a growth on my thyroid. She wanted to see if it would disappear through medication and presented me with some pills to suppress the thyroid's activity. I had always had a lot of energy and was extremely restless. To my dismay, the pills heightened rather than reduced this restlessness, and the growth did not disappear. A thyroid scan was performed and I was told that the growth and half my thyroid would have to be removed.

Unnerved by this, I consulted a small booklet called *One Answer to Cancer*, given to me by chiropractor friends of mine. The booklet theorized that the ingestion of excessive protein—and the wrong kind of protein, too—caused cancer. It recommended a vegetarian diet, eating ten almonds a day, drinking carrot juice, and not eating any protein foods after 1:00 p.m. While this fascinated me, I didn't think I could do this diet. I was on the university's meal service, and the only vegetarian I knew was a former Princeton jock, who counseled me that being a vegetarian was *very, very hard*. I underwent the surgery, but I decided to explore the ideas in the booklet as well. I went about this in an uninspired if not lethargic manner and before I knew it the semester was over and I was back at my parents' house in upstate New York.

As I was unpacking, I heard a furious knocking at the door. When I opened it, an agitated neighbor greeted me: "Someone has just shot your horse!" he exclaimed. Scarcely believing this possible, I ran with him to the back pasture on our property. There, on the ground, lay Jimmy, a pony given to my sisters and me when I was in the sixth grade. Next to him was Nicky, another pony. Nicky was whinnying and neighing, snorting and shaking his head, and he would not leave Jimmy's side. But the guns sounded close in the nearby woods, and we had to take Nicky to safety. I ran to the barn, got a halter for him, and led him to his stall. There, he continued to sigh and agitatedly nod his head, pace, and paw the floor.

When the village policeman came, he looked Jimmy's body over. A small amount of blood had gathered in a pool by Jimmy's mouth. The policeman, however, could not find an entrance wound for the bullet. "I don't think he was shot," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "He probably heard the guns and died of a heart attack." While I didn't have much faith

in this policeman, since he could have missed the bullet wound in his cursory examination of the body, I accepted that perhaps Jimmy had not been shot. Nevertheless, it still meant that, even if the guns had not killed him, they had played a role: Jimmy had died of fear.

That evening, still distraught over my pony's death, I bit into a hamburger. I stopped in mid-bite as a thought struck me. I was thinking about one dead animal but eating another. What was the difference, I thought, between this dead cow and the dead pony whom I would be burying the next day? The hamburger showed me what a hypocrite I was.

At that moment, vegetarian consciousness was awakened within me. In 1973, however, I did not know what to do with that consciousness. I had considered changing my diet after my thyroid operation, yet I hadn't felt any deep compulsion to do so. Now, I knew I had to if I wanted to live a life with any kind of integrity. But, a few days after I buried Jimmy, I flew to London to work at the Westminster Abbey Bookstore. Though I earned a weekly paycheck, I had very little money left over from lodging costs to cover living expenses, books, entertainment, and transportation. Because I bought books and went to the theatre, I felt hungry much of the time.

I walked the forty-five minutes' distance between my room and Westminster Abbey. Each restaurant on the way posted its menu in the window and I often daydreamed of eating the daily specials at one or the other restaurants. These daily specials taunted my hunger, each restaurant in its own way announcing: "Not for you." Though I thought about the night when Jimmy died and I knew I was eating dead bodies, when it came time to eat I could not, and would not, discriminate between "food" and "vegetarian food." I longed to eat and eat.

When I returned to the United States, I moved into a house with some other students. As we all paid into a communal food budget, for me to become a vegetarian would have meant that I'd be subsidizing foods I wouldn't be eating—something that seemed inconceivable to me. At that point, I couldn't *not* eat what everyone was eating, so I lived for nine months wanting to eat differently and yet having no inner resources to act on that desire. From this year of failure I learned something very important: if I was going to be a vegetarian, I needed to live among vegetarians.

The following year, I moved to a new city (Cambridge, Massachusetts) and into a vegetarian-feminist household. I was excited about this; yet I knew myself well enough to know that I needed some reference point, a demarcation, to help me embrace a vegetarian diet. I fasted on fruit juices for a week and decided that this would mark the “old” me from the “new” me. I also believed that, after having no food for a week, vegetarianism wouldn’t seem so radical. I wouldn’t be reducing the range of food I could eat; I’d be expanding it! I also knew that my mind, plentiful with excuses, wouldn’t let go of meat eating as quickly as my body. So, my fasting gave it a different reference point, something else to measure food choices by rather than simply not having meat.

And that was it. Something shifted inside and I never turned back.

Honoring vegetarian consciousness integrated thought, belief, commitment, and practice. It ignited a positive energy in me that is still pulsating. It has led me in directions I didn’t know I would go. Indeed, without it I wouldn’t have known *how* to go. Because of vegetarianism, I became a writer. Because of vegetarianism, I became a cook, and then a better cook. Because of vegetarianism, I became a meditator; I had something within to nurture.

When we integrate something desired, like vegetarianism, yoga practice, meditation, or ritual into our lives, we communicate with that part of the self that desires wholeness. In integrating, we create an internal shift. We open an inner door and reveal that there is more to the self than we had thought. We discover inner resources we didn’t know we had. It has been vegetarianism that taught me that. Through vegetarianism, I have learned how to listen to my body. My body knows how to be vegetarian and my mind has had to learn the wisdom of not holding to the permanence of old identities. When I make mistakes and reproach myself for some failure, my vegetarianism affirms me. When I have self-doubts, false starts, and misdirected energy, vegetarianism grounds me.

The outer world is often one of suffering, exploitation, and thoughtlessness. As an individual, that world alarms me. As an activist, I challenge it. As a vegetarian, I know that with each meal I reject that world, and instead create a sanctuary that supports my sense that the world can be otherwise—loving, thoughtful, and nonviolent.

In any day, I may move through turmoil and stress, sadness and conflict, whether internal or external. But when I eat my vegetarian meal, I am brought into the present. Wherever I go, I know that vegetarian food will bid me welcome—even if I carry it in my backpack as insurance.

I have been a dilettante in some matters, and, as my vegetarian story shows, I have mightily resisted some paths that clearly were my next step. But now vegetarianism is always with me, reminding me how to embrace what seems foreign, how to be conscientious despite the attractions of being otherwise. Vegetarianism enables me to connect to myself.

Like many travelers, I did not get here overnight, or by myself. I followed signs. I was embraced by loving vegetarians who helped me. I learned from vegetarian cookbook writers who chronicled their spiritual journey in and through their recipes. Animals helped me too. The Czech writer Franz Kafka said it best: “Now I can look at you in peace,” he said to fishes. “I don’t eat you anymore.”

The English poet William Blake wrote about seeing the world in a grain of sand.

In the beak of the finch, naturalist Charles Darwin perceived a world of evolution.

Yogis see the universe in the body.

The universe is in this peach before me. This peach contains the sun, the rain, the dirt, the labor, the harvest. Biting into this mushroom, eating this plum. Right now, I am bringing that world within.

Yes, eat the peach. Restore the universe.

To be a vegetarian is to be a witness: I will do the least harm possible.

To be a vegetarian is to celebrate good food from the earth.

To be a vegetarian is to experience grace, and on this grace I feed.

SPIRITUALITY AND VEGETARIANISM

This book is not only about vegetarianism, it is also about spirituality. How vegetarian consciousness works within us is one aspect of our spiritual practice. While this book is written for vegetarians desiring a deeper appreciation of the spirituality of their vegetarianism or interested in other spiritual practices to enhance their life, it is also for spiritual seekers inter-

ested in practicing vegetarianism. As I hope to show, both spirituality and vegetarianism are profoundly transforming—individually and when practiced together.

Yet, sadly, there is often indifference or hostility between nonvegetarian spiritual seekers and vegetarians without a spiritual practice. This book offers ways to overcome this indifference or hostility and suggests ways both of us can deepen our relationships. However, we need to be honest about how vegetarians and nonvegetarians too often view each other.

We vegetarians are often experienced as rigid, inflexible, and unyielding. We are seen by some spiritual teachers as the antithesis of the spiritual values of openness and grace. Likewise, vegetarians may become embittered by their experience of exclusion from spirituality movements that appear either to actively protect meat eating or passively accept it. Vegetarians question the trustworthiness of the spiritual practice if it has not addressed people's attachment to consuming animals and animal products. Spiritual resources that would deepen vegetarians' lives may not be accessed because vegetarians may distrust those who are offering plentiful excuses in their resistance to vegetarianism.

Becoming a vegetarian often involves thinking very literally. For instance, meat is not "meat"; it is *muscle* from a *corpse*. For vegetarians, milk involves the enslavement of cows and the robbing of nourishment from their own calves. Eggs are reproductive secretions. While literal thinking is important in understanding the world, especially when the issue is animal exploitation, literal thinking can also trip all of us up—including vegetarians. Not every aspect of life should be taken only literally.

Vegetarians may also be literal if we accept physical reality as we experience it as the *only* or "real" world. We often manifest this by being clock-oriented, seeing time as a prison or as a prism through which we determine priorities. As a result, those of us who are vegetarians and animal activists sometimes make life more material than spiritual. We may believe that thinking about spirituality takes attention away from the physical suffering of the animals and the earth. The result is that vegetarians may not develop alternative ways of viewing the world or themselves. Our method may become our trap. Literal thinking alone will not successfully unite the con-

scious and the unconscious, one aspect of spiritual practice.

We vegetarians also “socialize” problems. That is, we identify all the changes that have to occur in the larger culture. It is true, there *are* a lot of problems generated by society at large and that require activism to challenge them. But by “socializing” all problems, we fail to experience that we, ourselves, can participate in change by going within. Because we socialize problems, and are acutely aware of the costs to the earth and the animals of our eating meat, we may think we don’t have enough time to take care of ourselves. “The animals and the earth need me,” vegetarians and animal activists say. “I can’t slow down. There is so much suffering! I am needed, right now!” It is true. There is much suffering, incalculable suffering. However, we suffer too. Our own animal bodies matter.

A sense of unworthiness may be the motivation for staying hooked to the demands of the outer world: to measure oneself through what one has produced rather than through who one is. The person without a spiritual practice may fear there is nothing beyond the external world; or, more specifically, that there is nothing worthy in the internal world. But, as I hope to show, so much exists inside. The need for inner work leaks out in our confrontations with others if we do not consciously allow time for ourselves. Inner work is not passive. One’s inner life is just as worthy, just as important, as the outside life. Balancing both is the activist’s dilemma.

Vegetarians and other activists may resist encountering spiritual practices, but that is not the only resistance at work. There is also resistance in the way spiritual practitioners may approach vegetarianism.

Meat eating is considered normal practice in our culture. We absorb this fact in childhood and an identity is formed that includes a relationship with meat eating. This identity dictates decisions long into adulthood. Sometimes spirituality movements infuse this cultural standard with spiritual interpretations, adding their own explanations for meat eating.

How is meat eating *spiritualized*? As I pointed out, some spiritual practitioners see vegetarians as too literal, too outer directed, too concerned about this world. They also see vegetarianism as too linear, following a too-rigid model of cause and effect: “You have to do *this* to achieve *that*” (i.e.,

eat healthy to be healthy). They see vegetarians as clinging to the illusion of permanence by investing so much energy in the issue of what they eat. Further, spiritual seekers may consider vegetarians judgmental. Nonvegetarian spiritual seekers are against the methodology of narrowing meaning, which they perceive as orthodoxy, as requiring a certain behavior. Vegetarianism is seen as part of a fundamentalist worldview that reduces the world to too simple an explanation. “It is not *what* we eat,” nonvegetarians say. “It is the energy and consciousness we bring to it that is important.” In this way, vegetarianism is de-spiritualized and meat eating becomes spiritualized.

Nonvegetarians argue that nature is carnivorous, inhabited by lions, tigers, and wolves who confirm the food chain. They say we can eat animals because we ourselves will become food for worms and microorganisms. Vegetarians, say nonvegetarians, are rigid and unrealistic in refusing to accept the basic fact of nature: everything is eaten. Indeed, as a nonvegetarian once said to me at a meeting of the American Academy of Religion, vegetarians are “simply afraid of tragedy,” afraid of death.

Yet it may be nonvegetarians who express a fear of death—at least the death of factory-farmed animals. Vegetarians might argue that four-fifths of nonhuman animals are not carnivorous, and that the worms who eat us could also eat the animals we eat instead. But any serious dialogue too rarely takes place. Many nonvegetarians don’t want to be told about what happens to the vast majority of farm animals, believing they somehow live natural lives and die natural deaths rather than the confined and mechanized way they actually do live and die. In this denial, nonvegetarians become the ones afraid of tragedy, and afraid to recognize their role in it.

People who may have cast off the rituals of the dominant religion of their childhood, especially those who have moved from Christianity to Asian spiritual practices, may still be following its theological apologies for eating meat. Not realizing that this is how they were conditioned to think, nonvegetarian spiritual seekers splice these ideas onto the new spirituality that interests them.

For instance, the honoring of Native American hunting practices may arise more from the “sacrifice” notions of Christianity than from an actual encounter with those Native American cultures that are engaged in hunting. Many nonvegetarians have told me they believe that when an animal is

killed with a respectful attitude, nothing is amiss. Although few people actually get their food from hunting, the ideal of the hunt protects nonvegetarians from the ordinary tragedies of animals living in factory farms, given that hunting could never replace factory farms in providing the majority of animals needed for people to consume.

I read an interview once with a woman who defended hunting as a spiritual experience. She referred to the lunch she and the interviewer had shared, and mentioned that actually she should not have eaten the chicken salad. Hunting to her was an authentic experience and an honest relationship with animals. Eating chicken-salad sandwiches in a restaurant rebuked such a relationship because she knew about factory farming. Yet she ate the sandwich anyway. A few years ago I would probably have felt anger and only anger with her and the interview. But now I feel compassion for her as well. Her spiritual practice could not inform her daily life outside of the hunt. She could not bring this desire for authenticity into the day-to-day requirements of any life—how to order at a restaurant. While I did not agree with her about hunting, I felt it was sad to see that hunting could not inform her life in a transformative and continuing way. The hollowness of her claims were contained in that chicken-salad sandwich.

Vegetarians and nonvegetarians committed to spirituality are on either side of the chicken-salad sandwich. Both are judging the other and everything the other does is viewed as a sham. Once this happens, it seems as though vegetarianism and spirituality are speaking different languages. My own story at the beginning of this book shows that I too didn't know how to listen to my body or act upon my concerns immediately. In order for my vegetarianism to grow and take root, I had to place it within a larger context—my feminism, my spirituality, my concern for the lives of nonhuman animals—and to create a loving and supportive environment within which to practice it. Now, nearly thirty years later, as a fighter for fair housing, campaigner against violence against women, yoga practitioner, longtime journal keeper, meditator, cook, author, parent, and partner, I would like to offer another way beyond the impasse. It is the way of this book: spiritual vegetarianism.

Figure 1: What Is Spiritual Vegetarianism?

Spiritual vegetarianism—the practice of living from a diet composed wholly of vegetables, grains, fruits, nuts, and seeds—arises from a desire for wholeness.

Spiritual vegetarianism is animal-free. It makes the following promise to all animals, those who are eaten, those used to produce milk and eggs, and honeybees: I will not take from you to feed myself.

Spiritual vegetarianism is a spiritual practice that links us to the rest of nature and the rest of our own nature.

Spiritual vegetarianism acknowledges the interconnectedness of all beings and enacts compassion toward them. It acts on the understanding that we express ourselves through relationships and that these relationships include the other animals.

Spiritual vegetarianism is a living *ahimsā*, the absence of violence.

Spiritual vegetarianism is a tangible spiritual practice. Because you eat, your day helps to shape it; if you have made the commitment to it, your day pulls you forward into it.

Spiritual vegetarianism is meditation in action: it involves placing your attention and actively engaging with being here now.

Spiritual vegetarianism is being grounded within oneself.

Vegetarians and Other Spiritual Practices

If you are a vegetarian, you can adopt other spiritual practices:

☞ You know how to cultivate vegetarian consciousness; you can cultivate spiritual consciousness in the same way.

☞ You know how to bring attention to your meal; you can bring it to other parts of your day as well.

☞ You value wholeness in your food; you resist separation and divided consciousness. This wholeness invites you to bring wholeness even more fully into your life.

☞ You have begun the process of noting your daily life: you have the beginnings of a journal in your shopping lists and marked-up recipes.

☞ You may have noticed vegetarian themes in your dreams. What are they teaching you?

Vegetarians can consciously apply the process of being a vegetarian, and the rituals associated with it, to other aspects of our lives. We can look, smell, touch, choose, and be in tune with a rhythm of life. Other spiritual practices will then deepen the rhythms and rituals of a vegetarian life.

Spiritual Practitioners and Vegetarianism

If you have other spiritual practices, you can adopt vegetarianism:

☞ If you meditate, you can be a vegetarian, bringing centeredness and consciousness to an eating practice. You practice the art of nonattachment: you can stop before you bite.

☞ If you keep a journal, you can be a vegetarian. You know the value of the self-examined life, and can extend it to the self-examined meal. You can become aware of your desires, and not suffer the confusion of desire for meat.

☞ If you pray, you can be a vegetarian. Prayer is a conversation with God or the divine. Vegetarianism brings animals and plants into the conversation. We pray with our hands as we prepare, serve, and eat healthy vegetarian meals.

☞ If you work with your dreams, you can be a vegetarian. Let your dreams guide you. Animals are not only symbols of various qualities in your dreams, they may represent a part of yourself that is making a connection your conscious mind has not yet acknowledged.

☞ If you are a pagan, you can be a vegetarian. You believe in the connectedness of all life. We don't eat the goddess in her animals.

☞ If you perform rituals, you can be a vegetarian. Each day, you perform the ritual of food preparation from the plant world.

☞ If you practice yoga, tai-chi, or another meditative body practice, you can be a vegetarian. Just as oxygenated blood enhances a body, food that is radiant with life enhances it.

☛ If you are an environmentalist and social activist, you can be a vegetarian. You know the importance of actively working against injustice and the value of individual efforts at boycotting products derived from the suffering of others.

A vegetarian practice extends and enacts spiritual connections. The same process is at work.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH MY LIFE?

We are each on a spiritual path. Even though we may feel confused or alienated, even though we may be so deeply involved with issues that we have not recognized the spirituality in our actions, we are on a spiritual path.

We may be on a spiritual path and not know how to balance the demands of the “real” world with our own inner needs. We may be firmly settled into a spiritual practice and yet resisting some aspects of change—perhaps vegetarianism.

When I talk about spirituality, I am talking about *energy*. The spiritual path consists of how we channel our energy and where or why we block it. Our spiritual task is to understand the quality of the energy and find out where it wants to go. Even if we can't follow it all the time, we can be aware of it. We manifest energy or we can block it.

You may be following a spiritual path within a specific religious tradition, or perhaps you are not. Whether you are inside or outside an organized religion, one way to think about spirituality is that it addresses the question “What will I do with my life?” Spirituality answers that question. It answers the question “What shall I do with my day?” Even more specifically, it answers the question “What am I doing now?” The spiritual path is the one we follow as we integrate these questions within our daily life. Within the context of the very direct question “What shall I do with my life?” vegetarian spirituality asks: “What shall I do with this consciousness about vegetarianism? Do I incorporate it into my life or do I ignore it?”

In answering these questions, we have to understand our unconscious as well as conscious desires. Often we move through a day without attentiveness to the drives that are determining so much of the day. Unconscious

patterns are present in unexamined activities. An unexamined activity is in some way “dead”—we move through it without awareness. We do it, but it does not touch us. We bring no “life” to it, no consciousness. Consciousness and action become one when we bring the unconscious patterns that influence our actions to consciousness; examine them, and determine whether or not they are in tune with what we want to do with our lives, our days, our moments.

Spiritual practices provide a bridge to the unconscious aspects of our lives, and allow us to integrate them. They awaken or enliven our daily lives. Through a spiritual practice we experience the radical notion that we are each good and worthy of care. We begin with ourselves, discovering the goodness of creation and the goodness of each of us. We then desire to extend the good.

The tragedy of the unfulfilled life is that it is a life that did not encounter the true self. Instead, it settled for living with confusion, superficiality, and lack of clarity. To continue without inner work is to miss the true and deep self.

Figure 2: Guiding Principles Concerning Spiritual Practices

Each of us desires wholeness. Wholeness is a process, not a product. Wholeness unfolds through spiritual practice.

My spirituality is a commitment and a statement: “I am awake to interconnections.”

Spiritual practices heal the separations we experience in the world and in ourselves.

Spiritual practices bring unexamined parts of our life to consciousness. They help to melt the defenses we construct against self-knowledge, uniting us with the denied or feared part of ourselves.

Spiritual practices cannot be forced. Instead, they require compassion for ourselves and others.

Spiritual practices create inner openness. This inner openness enables the adoption of vegetarianism.

Spiritual practice makes a difference.

If you do not have a spiritual practice, you may feel worried about starting one. In fact, starting may help release your worries. If spirituality involves trusting the process, spiritual practice requires *touching the process*. This means you make a commitment to practice, and by the very act of keeping that commitment you begin to experience transformation. In the act of practicing, whether it be yoga, meditation, keeping a journal, or vegetarianism, the practice itself begins to work within you. The process of keeping a commitment will touch you in many wonderful and unexpected ways.

This book provides ways for you to touch the process and to let the process touch you. It is completed through your participation. Throughout the book, I will describe specific practices and exercises. (More are available in *The Inner Art of Vegetarianism Workbook*.) They invite you into the gentle yet profound process of change. Reorienting your life does not require some absolute conversion experience, though this is possible. It can be a gradual and liberating unfolding, one step following another.

EXPLORING THE MINDFIELD

What keeps us from taking the first step? Or the next? What halts our best intentions? I grew up reciting a confession I found achingly true as well as beautiful: “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.” Different spiritual traditions give different labels to that part of us that resists change. There is no generic word we all share that encapsulates the part of us that resists. It’s not the “ego”; the ego is good and necessary. The Christian tradition offers us the idea of our sinful nature, but

such a concept alienates as many people as it addresses and does not necessarily lead us to look inside ourselves.

The part of us that resists is the part that prefers the way things have always been done. It prefers to do what it has been conditioned to do. In this book, I will use the phrase “the mind” to represent that part of us. It is a term I have encountered in writings by contemporary Buddhists. In this context, “the mind” refers to “the conditioned mind” or “the clinging mind”—the roaming, flitting, judging, anxious, and impatient mind that squeezes out the room to discover any other way of thinking and being. At times, I may refer to “the self,” or even “the ego,” because sometimes it feels as though it is the part of us that is outer-oriented and needy that is motivating our resistance. I’m not using the phrases here as technical terms. Together all these terms are shorthand for that part of us conditioned to believe in and act upon dualism—that convenient way we make divisions of experience and objects into separate and opposite things.

The conditioned mind identifies with a constant, unchanging, and independent self. It accepts as true that there is mind and there is body, or mind and soul. It believes its role is to think and, in thinking, to plan, and in planning, to divide. The conditioned mind thinks we are separate, and sees us as separate selves. In bringing a spiritual practice into your life you develop the ability not to identify with the mind’s activity when it pursues its dualistic methods.

The “mindfield” is that area within us that can open to energy or block it. It can fear emotions or trust them. It can force our bodies or it can allow itself to be united with the body.

There are two ways you can read this book—one, as a description of one person’s experience in the mindfield and how I have tried to move through it. In this first reading, my description of my spiritual practices, including my vegetarianism, illuminates a life and describes how change can happen. If you read this way, you will experience a book that believes in change, and you may find “Opening Our Doors to the Source of Our Being” the least interesting section. Feel free to skip it and other places where the reader is encouraged to interact with the text.

The other way to read this book is to participate with it. In this second reading, my descriptions invite you into a process of change; they can then illuminate *your* life. If you wish to give the second reading a try, you should know that it asks you to write. Reading can often be a passive experience; we read rather than engage with ourselves, telling ourselves we have one more book to learn from before we can start down the path of change. Or we read to convince ourselves we cannot do what that author has done. I believe you can do what I'm describing and I want to challenge the basic dualism of writer on one side and reader on the other by providing opportunities for you to write and engage with yourself. Writing is not the only practice it invites you to participate in, but it is a central one.

While the theme of vegetarianism is the explicit focus of this book, the main concern is the nature of spiritual practice. Many of the spiritual practices offered here do not focus on vegetarianism, although none of them is offered as a substitute for vegetarianism. But each of them is potentially transformative, enabling a person to move toward wholeness. Whether you are or are not a vegetarian, whether you eat dairy products and eggs or not, this book does not wish to judge. I offer these practices to help you create a foundation from which wholeness can evolve. Obviously, I believe that vegetarianism is embedded within this wholeness; equally true, however, is that this belief cannot be imposed from outside. The practice of vegetarianism is an unfolding that honors the spontaneous and the good we discover within ourselves.

“Growing Vegetarian Roots” is a series of exercises throughout the book to aid nonvegetarians to begin a process. It is easier to grow when one has roots. The more grounded one becomes in a practice, the easier it is to bring it to other parts of one's life. Similarly, the other practices I offer in this book emphasize beginning or deepening a spiritual practice. When we feel rooted in something, we feel at home and empowered, and act from a sense of abundance rather than from a sense of loss or limitation.

THE NEXT STEP

In his famous children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak depicts a young boy who has been sent to his room. A tree and an ocean and a boat appear, and he travels to where the Wild Things are. The Wild Things are marvelous, big beings. When someone asked Sendak how he knew these wild things would not scare little children, he replied: "Because they do not scare me." He knew himself that well. The examples I give in the following pages from my own life are offered so that perhaps when you encounter the wild things of your unconscious, they won't scare you. You can recognize them for what they are, a part of the spiritual path.

I have tried to distill in a meaningful way one example of vegetarian spirituality. You should know that I am doing in my life what I talk about in this book. But sharing these insights does not mean that my solutions are your solutions. I am trying to capture that elusive process of change. If we both accept that I am suggesting a pattern, a possibility, an approach, a gesturing toward transformation itself and *not* a dogma or a command, we can both relax into the process of discovery.

My life has rested on a foundation of social activism, vegetarianism, spiritual questioning, writing, partnering, and parenting. Balancing them is the art of living, and that is the path I have been on. This book addresses the spiritual practices of keeping a journal, meditation, yoga, dreamwork, and vegetarianism. There are other spiritual practices that could have been included. The ones I chose to highlight are ones I practice, and I wanted to speak from my own experience. They also bring together purpose and action, belief and actualization.

In "Coming to Ground," I describe how moments in my life have cultivated my own process of change. "Touch the Process" focuses on the basic spiritual discipline of *attention*, how it interacts with our mindfields, and the benefits that arise from a spiritual practice. As I said above, "Opening Our Doors to the Source of Our Being" distills several central practices through exercises you can undertake. "Breath Awareness" describes the nondualistic approach to the world of which vegetarianism is a part. "On

“Not Dragging a Stone” explores the ways we resist change through excuses and other defense mechanisms, and suggests ways to change. “Compassion and Nonviolence” asserts that we can and we must love ourselves—its focus is nonviolence toward ourselves and others and nonviolent methods for changing ourselves and the world. “The Habit of Practice” offers very specific steps for bringing a practice into your life. “Vegetarian Cooking as Meditation/A Vegetarian Cooking Meditation” is my affirmation of the spiritual act of connecting to the plant world through preparing food.

I wrote this book because I believe our relationships with animals touch a very deep place within ourselves. When we close off our relationship with that very deep place—either because it is too painful to go near or because we don’t give it the time—we are closing off the possibility of wholeness for ourselves. If we eat meat, we may close off our relationship with that deep place, and may not be able to go near it because doing so would mean we would have to become aware of what we do to animals. But, even if we become vegetarians, we may not have reclaimed the skills to enable us to live wholly. We need other spiritual practices, too.

To be committed to the spiritual life is to say: “I believe in the invisible world.” Vegetarians affirm this too. They acknowledge the hidden world where animals are alive and aren’t just bodies processing plant protein for us. They have qualities that may seem invisible to us—consciousness and how they experience life. We not only believe in the invisible, we hold on to the invisible in the presence of sensuous temptations of the visible, the smells, tastes, memories, and demands on our time or our conscience. Spiritual practice includes the invisible within our daily schedule.

This is a book about process, by a person in process. It is an attempt to capture a sense of what it might mean to be whole and to celebrate it. I invite you into this process of dramatically changing the way we experience the world and ourselves. I invite you into this process of self-discovery and expansion of the self. I invite you into this process of healing the broken heart within and healing the broken world without.

Spirituality is a commitment to live deeply enough within yourself to be present to what is happening now and open to what the next step is. It does not require the final step, only the readiness for the next one, and the next. That is how I became a spiritual practitioner and how I became a vegetarian. The next step: that is your spiritual path.





To be present in our body is a form of awareness, and it is a first step toward being kind to ourselves and others. In coming into our body we become connected to our greater home, the earth; we become a part of the earth and she a part of us. We are received into her, and she into us; we grow through and from her support and nourishment, and we express her qualities through our very being. She is our ground.

—Linda Hartley, *Wisdom of the Body Moving*

