



Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters

Melanie Joy

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Vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters can feel like they're living in different worlds. Many vegans and vegetarians struggle to feel understood and respected in a meat-eating culture, where some of their most pressing concerns and cherished beliefs are invisible, and where they are often met with defensiveness when they try to talk about the issue. They can become frustrated and struggle to feel connected with meat eaters. And meat eaters can feel disconnected from vegans and vegetarians whose beliefs they don't fully understand and whose frustration may spill over into their interactions. The good news is that relationship and communication breakdown among vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters is not inevitable, and it is reversible. With the right tools, healthy connections can be cultivated, repaired, and even strengthened.

In *Beyond Beliefs*, internationally recognized food psychology expert and longtime relationship coach Dr. Melanie Joy provides easy-to-understand, actionable advice so you can:

- Learn the principles and tools for creating healthy relationships
- Understand how to communicate about even the most challenging topics effectively
- Recognize how the psychology of being vegan/vegetarian or of being a meat eater affects your relationships with others, and with yourself

Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters Details

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From Reader Review Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters for online ebook

Bobby says

Unlike Dr. Melanie Joy's book *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*, I did not find *Beyond Beliefs* to be a fast read. It was a bit more work but well worth the effort. *Beyond Beliefs* is an insightful and constructive read geared especially for vegans who struggle to some degree in how to be in a relationship with a non-vegan. That said, it's also a book based on the doctor's thorough understanding of psychology and the principles found in this book could be helpful to nearly anyone.

Andrea says

This may be the greatest book on psychology, relationships and communication I ever read. It is not only a very important book for every vegan and vegetarian and those who are in relationships with them but for everyone who is interested in improving their relationships and their lives. It helped me a lot to understand and accept the people around me and my past-self and it encourages me to continue working on my interactions and arguments with others. Especially the appendix is so helpful and has a lot of practical tips that everyone can implement. But my personal highlight is the "Letter to a non-vegan" that could help so many people to understand what veganism is about without feeling judged and offended and so being able to read it with an open mind and heart.

I am really grateful for this book and can really highly recommend it.

Klaudia Rocze? says

Learned a lot about how our differences when it comes to dietary choices affects our relationships, how to overcome it and feel even more connected. Awesome!

Hailey says

I wish this book had been available many years ago while I was going through STS. I had no idea that was what I had until I read her book now. I drifted away from the animal rights circle after working as a full-time activist for 5 years because even though I saw my organization and I making progress and gaining victories, I wasn't happy with my state of being at the time and the way I saw many fellow vegans communicate the cause. To me, violence is violence and it doesn't matter if it's to animals, to other human beings, or to ourselves. Instead of judging and fighting, I wanted to advance the cause by inspiring. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to bring more compassion to the world.

Gill says

Thought provoking

I would recommend this book to everyone. Especially people that are in a relationship with only one person being vegan. I understand perspective from both sides now more clearly

Cora says

Practical frameworks and concrete examples using real-life situations. Applicable to all types of relationships - from your partner, to coworkers, to parents or siblings, to a stranger in line or on the bus. Applicable to any value-based ethic or ideology, not just veganism, to promote respectful understanding as the goal in discussions and interactions with people unfamiliar with the values behind the outward choice or stance. Found multiple kernels of wisdom to take with me.

Victor Alcazar Lopez says

Literally changed my life. Thank you, Mel!

Miriam says

A great guide to compassionate communication, primarily aimed at vegans and their loved ones.

Kelsey S. Hock says

Meh. Felt like any kind of relationship advice book and the specifically vegan parts could have been condensed a lot more. dnf. Her ted talk is 10/10 amazing though and worth seeing

Jinx:The:Poet {the Literary Masochist, Ink Ninja & Word Roamer} says

****OBTAINED: Goodreads Giveaway****

"Vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters can feel like they're living in different worlds. Many vegans and vegetarians struggle to feel understood and respected in a meat-eating culture, where some of their most pressing concerns and cherished beliefs are invisible, and where they are often met with defensiveness when they try to talk about the issue. They can become frustrated and struggle to feel connected with meat eaters. And meat eaters can feel disconnected from vegans and vegetarians whose beliefs they don't fully understand and whose frustration may spill over into their interactions. The good news is that relationship and communication breakdown among vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters is not inevitable, and it is

reversible. With the right tools, healthy connections can be cultivated, repaired, and even strengthened..." - Book Blurb

This was a really brilliant, compelling read. It was highly educational and deeply informative. The author, Dr. Melanie Joy, food psychologist and relationship coach, is really a wonderfully talented writer, which makes the vast amount of information in this book far easier to process and enjoyable to read. I do not say that lightly. This book is a very fascinating read, great for Vegans, Vegetarians and Meat-eaters alike, as the titles states. I would especially recommend this book to those involved in Vegan/Vegetarian and Meat-eater personal relationships, especially partner/spousal or intimate relationships, as there was plenty of useful information on communication for both parties.

"Only with awareness of carnism can we reclaim our freedom of choice; without awareness, there is no free choice."

Joy's writing style was very socially driven and psychologically enlightening. She sheds objective light on the many perspectives that surrounds this complicated and diverse lifestyle and how it effects those around them, who perhaps have limited understanding of Veganism, or those who reject its ideology altogether. However, it is a very unique book because it does not only seek to relate to Vegans and Vegetarians but rather seeks to bridge in the gaps between them all, to offer lessons in communicating with people with different beliefs than your own. Therefore, it would seem a good book for Meat-eaters to read as well, especially if they have Vegan loved ones. As a longterm Vegetarian myself, I found this book very useful and had much to ponder on afterwards. This was indeed a good read and will be a definite reread for me. I would recommend this book to Vegans/Vegetarians who can feel overwhelmed in their lifestyle in a predominately carnivorous world.

[OFFICIAL RATING: 4.5 STARS]

Peacegal says

Are veg*ns and their meat-eating partners, family members, and friends destined for hurt feelings and clashes over mealtime, or is there a way for everyone to navigate this fork in the road? Melanie Joy writes with authority and compassion to both audiences in BEYOND BELIEFS.

Joy draws heavily from various approaches to relationship psychology and also the sociological ideas she presented in her earlier and better-known work, WHY WE LOVE DOGS, EAT PIGS, AND WEAR COWS.

The natural audience for BEYOND BELIEFS is the veg*n who is in a committed relationship with an omnivore. That's not my situation. My spouse is vegetarian. [I do share my house with multiple carnivores—the kind with fur and claws. No, I do not expect any one of them to improve their communication skills or become more empathetic. ("Cats, when you woke me up by killing a bat in my living room, I felt you were being highly disrespectful...")] But while not all veg*ns live with omnis, every veg*n has omni friends, family, and acquaintances...and this book will help bridge the gap and improve relationships with those folks, too.

While I personally still prefer Carol J. Adams's LIVING AMONG MEAT EATERS (possibly because it's

the first book of its kind I ever encountered), I still liked this book a great deal, and I found myself slowing down to really digest what I was reading. What I truly appreciated was Joy's ability to put wide-ranging, abstract concepts into concrete and understandable terms. That's a gift.

While Joy is vegan, her purpose with this book isn't to convert anyone or instruct readers on how to do so. Rather, she speaks to both sides of the dinner table, encouraging mutual respect and asking each to walk a mile in the other's shoes. And both values systems will be shaken up a little.

To the vegan, Joy speaks with the reminder of just how entrenched the animal-use system—the system she has dubbed “carnism”—truly is, and that we're all caught up in it to some degree or another. Indeed, most veg*ns were at one point meat-eaters. Even though we may now find the choice to eat animals cruel and selfish,

Carnism is institutionalized, meaning that it's supported and promoted by all major social institutions, including medicine, law, education, and business. In other words, carnism is built into the very structure of society, shaping norms, laws, traditions, and our way of life. When a system is institutionalized, its beliefs and practices are promoted as facts rather than opinions and are accepted unquestioningly.

She reminds readers that even though plant-based eating is easier than ever for most people in the industrialized world, veg*ns are still very much going against the grain—something that remains mentally difficult for many people. We are living in a world where we are socialized by both culture and family that some types of animals are edible, and that we need to accept treatment of them that we'd never accept for say, pets or charismatic wildlife.

Because this paradoxical mentality is shared by virtually everyone in society, it's considered normal, so we rarely, if ever, stop to reflect on it. And we're not encouraged to reflect on it: when we're growing up, nobody asks us whether we want to eat animals, how we feel about eating animals, whether we believe in eating animals—even though this daily practice has profound ethical dimensions and personal implications. Eating animals is just “the way things are.”

Some vegans, Joy explains, develop a viewpoint that sees the world as being made up solely of victims, perpetrators, and heroes. (We see this with vegans who argue that any act, no matter how damaging, is OK if it's done “for the animals,” and so forth.) But people can and usually do inhabit multiple roles at once. For example, our economy is structured in such a way that most clothing and other consumer products are made in third-world countries, under pay and conditions we would never accept in the first world. What about the activist who is writing some wrong in America, while wearing shoes made in sweatshops in Asia? Is this person a perpetrator or hero? Suddenly the lines become more blurred.

Joy also patiently and rationally responds to “abolitionist” vegans who compare meat-eating to other atrocities and claim that we should no more accept or tolerate it than we would something such as domestic violence. Yet for the most part, people are not taught and socialized into believing that violence toward innocent human victims is normal, natural, and necessary, as they are in attitudes toward farmed animals.

To omnivores, Joy offers a guided tour into the mindset of the vegan. In short, we see the world far differently than you, and what you may see as innocent joking or fun, we experience as hurtful. Fifteen, twenty years on, I can still recall with painful clarity times when I was ganged up on with mockery, aggressive questioning, and graphic animal killing stories at mealtimes and in classrooms—things the perpetrators probably forgot an hour later, but which I still carry.

Nonvegans, who are often simply expressing the convictions and conditioning of the belief system they grew up in, are rarely aware of such defensiveness....Disparaging humor toward vegans is extremely common, but the phenomenon is largely invisible. Otherwise well-mannered people often make unkind jokes about vegans—usually right in front of vegans—even though they would consider similar jokes about members of other non-dominant groups totally inappropriate.

Reading these passages, I was reflecting back to a person who I consider to be very compassionate and sensitive in other contexts, bursting out with the old “People Eating Tasty Animals” joke, or the fact that nearly every Thanksgiving, I have someone ask me if my household’s vegan meal resembles the highly unappetizing “tofu turkey” played for gags on an *Everybody Loves Raymond* episode. (It doesn’t.)

Are these people intentionally trying to be mean to me? No, I doubt it. Anti-vegan attitudes are almost a given in our culture. As the book points out, if a vegan catches a cold, many carnists are quick to blame the diet, but if a person who has eaten the Standard American Diet all of their life has a heart attack, it’s “bad genes.”

And even though the meat, dairy, and egg industries quite literally control our legislatures and dominate our airwaves, vegans are almost universally depicted as pushy and aggressive. Writes Joy,

No matter how vegans present their ideas, they often still end up being seen as controlling.... Parents who raise their children vegan are seen as imposing their veganism on their children, while non-vegans are never seen as imposing their carnism on their children. Of course, we usually appreciate the fact that parents naturally raise their children according to their own beliefs, which is why we don’t expect Christians to raise their children as atheists, or Democrats to raise their children as Republicans.

An especially valuable section of this book discusses the way in which so many veg*ns accept these stereotypes as true and bend over backwards to try to defy them, sometimes to the detriment of their own mental health. I’ve done this myself plenty of times.

Vegans, too, have internalized some negative vegan stereotypes and can react to these stereotypes in a way that causes problems in their relationships. ... Vegans can feel ashamed of their sensitivity to animal suffering and therefore hide or downplay their emotions.

So true! But here’s the thing. Factory farming *is* an atrocity, and emotions such as sadness and outrage are not only OK, they are perfectly healthy reactions to what’s going on. Indeed, most people would have these reactions to factory farming if society and omnis themselves didn’t put up so many mental and physical barriers to seeing what’s happening.

Vegans can remain true to ourselves and our truths without putting down or disrespecting others, the author emphasizes. We can still advocate on behalf of animals and ending the ugly system that causes so much cruelty and killing.

Joy makes valuable inroads with omnis, asking them to become allies with their veg*n friends and loved ones, even if they never plan to become veg*n themselves. The “Letter from a Vegan” at the book’s conclusion is highly valuable and welcomed. No, it’s not a trend or a lose-weight-quick plan, it’s an expression of deeply held values, and unwarranted jokes and attacks are just as hurtful as if a friend or partner mocked your most innate beliefs.

There were parts of the book I disagreed with. For example, I do not believe that everyone cares about

animals. I think that a significant percentage of people do, indeed, like animals and don't wish to see them hurt. However, I also think there's a decent-sized minority who feel no empathy or bond with other species and are unconcerned by their treatment. Nor do I think all children are born feeling compassion for animals. I think empathy levels are one of those things that are hardwired, and some children, just like some adults, just naturally experience more of it than others.

I also don't think some of the over-analytical approaches to arguments would work. While there is some truly good advice here, I don't think that responding to an angry loved one with lines such as "I am feeling triggered by this" or "I need to reflect on this for a bit so we can discuss it later" is going to cause anything more than an escalation of rage on the part of the other person, especially as terms such as these have become a source of mockery in today's culture.

But overall, BEYOND BELIEFS is a needed and necessary book. As plant-based diets and animal ethics become higher-profile concerns in our culture, better ways of navigating these discussions need to be found. In addition, finding peace with friends and family is essential in encouraging people to both become and stay veg*n, as lack of social support is a major reason people go back to eating animals.

Amy says

I've been a vegan for 14 years and was vegetarian for a long time before that. I've never dated another vegan. I did date a vegetarian which made things easier. The last two guys I dated weren't all that respectful of my veganism. Yes, they ate the vegan meals I prepared and ate vegetarian when we went out but they weren't at all interested in learning about veganism or in exploring anything. I'm not sure I have the capabilities to date someone so closed-minded in the future. I will likely not date seriously ever again. She provides plenty of useful information on relationships and communication, and not just for the vegan/non-vegan relationships. I'm pretty sure I have an anxious attachment style.

some quotes I liked:

"The moral values that guide a relationship (and life) of integrity are compassion, curiosity, justice, honesty, and courage."

"We feel connected-- or emotionally connected as psychologists sometimes say-- when the other says and does things that we experience as validating, when they communicate that we are worthy and that we matter."

"To be emotionally connected with another, especially in a close relationship, we must have the courage to be vulnerable, to share our truth-- our authentic thoughts and feelings-- and be willing to hear the other."

"Vegans often feel invisible, misunderstood, and compelled to hide the parts of themselves that won't be accepted."

"To have one's inner world known and understood is a basic relationship need, and everyone has not only a right to request this but a responsibility to do so."

"Many of us may feel especially threatened by the thought that those we are close to have different values for two reasons. First, our values influence much of our lives and are generally unchanging, so compatibility

may seem difficult, if not impossible. Second, we need to respect others in order to feel connected to them, and we respect others based on whether they practice the values that matter to us."
