



A vegan lifestyle with Anaïs

03:50: let us jump into it and start. Tell me, how did you get into a vegan lifestyle?

Anaïs: “So, that was like 3-4 years ago. Four years ago, I starting thinking about going into a vegan lifestyle. It was always something I had on my mind. Let’s say for example, as soon as I started knowing everything that was used in hair products and make-up, etc. I started using only natural products, even before becoming vegetarian or vegan.

Back then I was living with my mom. And you know, it is difficult when you don’t cook or do the groceries for yourself. And also, I didn’t really know if being vegan was good or bad. In my house we always ate a lot of vegetables and fresh fish so I decided to keep that diet. Then my boyfriend and I went to live in the Caribbean. And I think, that was the moment it changed for us. Because we lived in an all-inclusive hotel we saw so many food that was wasted. Like huge amounts of food, in a country that isn’t really a ‘first developed’ country. So, you see a lot of inequality between the life in the hotel and the life outside.

I started reading about it and, in the beginning, it wasn’t that much for the animals but more the ethical part that made me think. Like, the Amazon that gets burned to have soy or palm trees just to provide food for the animals in what is called the ‘first world’. So I felt like we take advantage of parts of the world because they have less money or because of political or economic reasons and in the end it is little farmers and small families that suffer from it. And I no longer wanted to be a part of that. So, the first thing I did was totally quit eating meat. After a few months not eating meat, I was doing fine. Because I knew why I was doing it, it was in my heart that I felt I had to do it so it didn’t feel like an effort for me. I didn’t see meat as something I missed, I didn’t even really think about meat.”

06:50: So, you immediately made a click that when you would eat meat that actually you are not only harming the animal, but also nature and yourself?

“Yes, it was like I kind of wanted to protect the world from this overconsumption and overproduction. We don’t really treat animals like animals anymore but just like robots. When you go to the supermarket and you see chicken, you just see some cute up pieces. You know it is chicken because the package says “chicken”. You don’t really think of the little chicken you see or the little cow. So, you don’t really feel any empathy for the animals anymore. You just see them like they are created for you. You know what I mean? We don’t see it as an animal anymore.

But then I was thinking, owkay but if I don’t want to hurt animals anymore, I also don’t want to hurt people anymore because so many people are getting hurt by this overconsumption. In Brazil, for example, there are so many fights about this: human, planet Earth... In the end it is a global thing. It is not only the animals, it is humans, the earth, the trees... So, it may start with 1 reason but by reading more one thing leads to another and I don’t see any reason anymore to still eat meat in the world we are living in now.”



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08:30: Ookay, we'll go a bit further into this later on but I remember you told me that you started to read a lot about it, right? You read a lot of books. Was that because you felt like you were being misinformed in general, in the culture we live in? Did you feel like something wasn't adding up?

“Yes. I realized that the milk industry and farming is purely economics. And that it is political. So, you hear the information like ‘you have to drink milk for your calcium’ or ‘you need meat for your anemia’. But they never tell you the other options. People do not know the other options. So, this overproduction of meat and dairy products was created not longer than 100 years ago. And we all think that it is the good and the only option. It is not the only option. So, I started reading a lot because, you know, once you start to read about it you kind of start to feel stupid at the same time because what you realize that what you always thought, is actually not the truth. I am not saying that certain kind of products do not give you certain kinds of benefits but the point is: it is not the only option. Why weren't we taught the other options? Is it because it is not interesting enough for political and economic reasons? Today you have blogs, podcasts, books... Nowadays it is much easier to learn. Or via Instagram. Here in Spain we have a lot of good Instagrammers that give you bits of information. Of course, you also have people that go to extremes but it is not necessary to take it extremely. And I don't believe that these extreme ways are good for the vegan movement. But I guess, extremes are always there.

So, like, after 6 months more or less of not eating meat, something else changed. You know, you start reading and back then I taught like fish and salmon were the best thing, right but then by reading more I realized also there is this overconsumption happening. I ate salmon every day but I learned that within this overproduction, same as with meat, they overfeed and then give antibiotics also to fish to be able to keep up with the consumption levels. So, at the end: the salmon you get or the salmon I get is not a fresh salmon. When I was living in Jamaica I only ate the fish fresh from the sea from the fishermen. Because then at least I knew it was a fresh fish. But then you discover about these plastics and again, everything is connected, so than you realize that even the fresh fish are not healthy because they have plastic. The bigger the fish, the more plastic it has. So, then I also stopped eating fish. That was a little bit harder. But what kept me going was that I didn't want to have my body full of plastics or antibiotics. I wanted to have the healthiest body. They say: medicine is what you eat and I really want to live by that. Even in a world where it was quite difficult. For example: I don't have my own garden to grow my own vegetables but in all the options I have, locally bought vegetables are the best options. Or at least the less harming option.”

13:10: When I was still drinking cow milk, I often felt heavy, not well and I never linked it to the cow milk. It was only when I switched to plant-based milk, I felt the difference and I realized WOW, it was because of the cow milk. Was the health impact one of the main reasons you didn't want to take anymore animal-based products?

“It wasn't the first reason but once I learned about these plastics in the fish we eat, the health reasons become stronger. Because I was thinking like: so, something we throw into the bin we are not putting into our bodies?! Even when we talk about miniscule parts, we



still take it in and it adds up. You cannot do anything about that, like even the freshest fish from the sea has got plastics inside them because there is so many plastics in our seas. So, with that awareness, it was not that difficult for me to stop eating fish too.

Then eggs, I stopped eating eggs too. Back then it was the only animal protein I was still having because when I was living in Jamaica, it was not easy to find any alternatives or plant-based options.”

15:50: What was the biggest challenge you faced with becoming vegan?

“Yeah. In Jamaica I couldn’t quit 100% to have a complete plant-based diet because I still needed my proteins and I didn’t find plant-based alternatives there. And remember, I was living in a hotel so I had to eat from the options that were served. Some days, because there is a lot of Hindu tradition in Jamaica, we had tofu. But that was only some days. And I could not just have once a week tofu and the rest only vegetables because proteins are really important. So, I ate cottage cheese and eggs while I was living in Jamaica. As soon as we left, I stopped completely. And I only ate animal-based products for health reason because I know I needed this kind of food.”

16:50: What do you mean by that? Because I would think: I only eat vegetables and then I’ll be healthy because I only eat vegetables. No?

“A vegan diet is not only eating vegetables. We need a balanced diet with vegan options. Most of us only know: it is green, it is a vegetable so it’s vegan. But I am talking about proteins. And then when you talk about your carbs, you can have rice, you can have bread, you can have any kind of flour also. But when we talk about proteins, a lot of people that become vegan start to have problems with their energy level or starting to have a lack of proteins in their body because they do not take the proteins they need. Certainly for a person like me – I was doing a lot of sports, was very active – so, I needed those proteins. And I was also anemic. I didn’t want to think that it would be a vegan diet that would give me health problems because I wanted it to be a part of my life forever so I was 100% sure that I wanted to do it correctly. So, for me a good amount of proteins was very important. I am talking about me, some people will not need so many proteins in their life. But in general a balanced diet always needs fats, carbs and proteins.”

18:30: So, where did you find your proteins then in a vegan lifestyle?

“The easiest and what most people know (but don’t realize that it are proteins) are legumes like peas, chick peas, beans. Well, proteins are quite complex. So, it is made of amino-acids in a chain and you need all these amino-acids to enter your body. Animal proteins are 100% complete in these amino-acids. Plant-based proteins are not. You need to mix them. Let’s say legumes with some cereal or rice, that would make 100% protein complete with amino-acids. You need proteins. You cannot live only with carbs and fats. You can do for a short time but then your body will respond.”

19:40: How did you find this information? That was from all the books?



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“Yes. In so many books you would see a plate and it would be divided. Like, half would be vegetables, $\frac{1}{4}$ would be proteins and $\frac{1}{4}$ would be carbs and the like a finger would be fats, like olive oil, avocado, nuts... So, once you start to learn what products are what you know what you are eating. Now I see my plate and I know if it is complete or not. That doesn't mean that you have to do it like that in all your meals but for beginners it is much easier to start that way. For example to put on one side your veggies, than you add your proteins (it can be legumes, tofu, tempeh, seitan, chick pea protein) and you add your carbs (rice, bread, whatever you want). That way it is quite easy.”

21:00: We'll put some good book reference online because I know that starting it can be a bit overwhelming. There is so much information and to connect everything and know which information is truthful can be challenging. Like, we are so used to live in a certain routine, right. Also with food, from a child on to where you are in life today. Did you also experience that creating meals was more difficult in the beginning?

“It was more difficult because I was still in a different mindset. And here in Spain a lot of us don't know anything about nutrition. I asked my friends that are not vegetarian or vegan after they ate some pasta with some tuna or whatever if they knew what they ate and in the end of the day they didn't know if they had a nutritional balanced plate. Most do not really know what proteins, fats and carbs are. And that is like 99% of the population. I was always very interested in nutrition and wanted to give my body the best and give my body this balanced diet, even when I was not vegan. But what was different, is for example legumes we consider a protein but it also has got a big percentage of carbs, so that was really confusing to me in the beginning. That was when I started introducing other plant-based products that were higher in protein, like: tofu, tempeh or seitan or anything from soy. But I would say for beginners: don't make it too complicated to start. Nowadays it much easier. You can find almost anything in the supermarket.”

23:15: You feel that compared to a couple of years ago when you started becoming vegan and now it already has shifted a lot when we talk about the possibilities?

“Yes, now in the supermarket you can find good quality tofu or plant-based burgers. I always read the nutritional information.”

23:30: That is an interesting point. I remember starting out I just replaced the meat or fish by a plant-based substitute but then I found out that often those are stuffed with salt, sugar, or again nothing nutritional. How do you know if what you buy is good?

“I don't buy any products if I don't understand the ingredients. That makes it much easier. And you know what, I love the cook and I think it is important that when you change your lifestyle, or at least your diet, the food you take in, that you reconnect with that food. That you taste it, touch it, smell it. We need to do that. It is the same as the conversation we had about the meat. People often buy the breast of a chicken, they cut it and fry it. I remember my grand-mother she used to have chickens and she killed them to eat them. But she at least knew what the chicken ate, where this animal was living so she knows what she was having on her plate. It is the same when I cook. I love to cook and I am very organized too.”



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That is another important point in today's world. You see, I take about 3 hours in the kitchen to prep my meals for the coming week. I prepare my schedule every Sunday so I know what to buy in the supermarket, so I don't go crazy doing groceries. And that also gives me a clear view on the variety of my food. It makes life easier for me because I don't always have the time to cook good and nice every day, like 99% of the people. Once per week, I go into the kitchen and prepare my veggies in the oven, and make my veggieburgers and I prepare everything so it is ready for the week. So, I just have to mix them or put them into a salad but the 90% of the job is already done."

26:55: That is such a valuable lesson because what we see around us is that most people live a very stressful live, going from one thing to the other. And until that has shifted our diet also suffers from it. Because then we don't have time to cook so we quickly prepare something, lacking the actual nutritional parts.

"Yes! I have so many friends that after 8 or 9 hours of work during the day, they go home and if they don't have something ready in the fridge, they just eat a bowl of cereal with milk. What is that?! That is not what our body needs after so many hours of work or stress. And of course that also connects to your body, your mind, your sleep..."

And a small preparation is the solution. But it also has to become a habit. Once you get into that routine it doesn't require that much work anymore.

So, I am 3 hours in the kitchen but let's say you are cooking something that requires a lot of time, I don't see the difference in preparing 1, 2 or 3 portions. You prepare it in the same time but it will give food for more days."

28:15: What surprised you the most of become a vegan? Like, what was the biggest eye-opener for you?

"For me it was that I thought I would be in lack of everything becoming vegan. That I wouldn't have enough energy or vitamins. I told you, I was anemic since age 16 or so and I always had to take some pills. I studied so much because I was so afraid of what would happen to my body. And after a few months, I actually was not anemic anymore. That was a big surprise to me. I discussed this with my doctor, who is also my best friend, and she was also very surprised. We did blood test every 6 months because she was worried and told me: you know you are anemic and folic and what not. But nothing, I focused on a well-balanced diet. And also, I had cholesterol, not from the food I ate but my own body produced it. Doctors told me: 'well, you will have to take a pill for your entire life for this'. And I don't like pills when they are not necessary. I am not against pills but when it is not necessary I don't want to take time. So, I said that I would first try to make some changes in my diet and if nothing changes only then will I take the pills. That was in the beginning of my transition to a vegan lifestyle. And the cholesterol also went away."

30:00: Wow, I am also so shocked when I hear these stories because it makes me realize also that actually I know so little of the influence of the food I take in and what it does to my body and my own responsibility about this topic. Just to see how your health situation



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changes simply by which food you take in. I think most of us are so unaware of that power.

“Yes, I think we are a society that just wants things quick and with no effort. Of course, it is much easier to just take a pill. The question is: what can I do for my body? Even when it takes longer, it will be forever. So, what can I do for my body so my own body can heal? That is what a vegan lifestyle gave me. I am trying to heal my own body. I never got sick since I shifted to a vegan lifestyle. For the last 3-4 years I didn’t get sick anymore, and I travelled all around the world. Also my weight has stayed stable since I became vegan. Today, being vegan is a part of my life. And it is more than just food. It is trying to heal & listen to my body. For example when I have my period or when I have a headache, I try to take let’s say ginger. If it is really necessary, I can also take an ibuprofen, I am not against pills but my point is that I want to do things better for my body. My body is giving me a sign and when your body is telling you something, you have to listen to it. It is giving you a sign, listen to your body. If you have overweight, listen to your body, don’t just take a pill. Stand up and walk. You don’t have to be athletic, just stand up and walk 30 or 40 minutes. And you will feel the change. Practice some yoga, change your lifestyle and quit sugar. I don’t eat sugar anymore. I don’t use sugar anymore. I don’t eat processed food. Do this and you will see a change. Even if people don’t go vegan, they need to make changes in their diet. We need to do that, we are overeating.”

32:50: It is linked to the way we live our lives. Food has become a substitute, another distraction in our lives. When you stuff yourself full of food, you don’t listen to your body and soul anymore. It is such a valid point that you make to listen. Listen to what is happening and go feel what you are feeling and react to that, instead of pushing it away. It is scary.

“Yes, we are so used of having everything we want immediately. We don’t even want to wait 2 seconds. Even now with the lockdown, we call UBER EAT or whatever and we have it on our door quickly. You know, in fact, we don’t really have to make that big of an effort. That is something I learned when I was travelling, especially last year in Asia. When you see people living this ‘slow life’, that is the life my grand-parents lived, like not more than 100 years ago. I’m not talking about 1000 years ago. It is for the last 100 years basically that everything changes dramatically.”

34:10: So, you just said that you don’t use sugar anymore. And for me, when I speak with you about food, I always get hungry because the dishes you talk about are always full of flavor. But I can image that when people hear that you don’t use sugar and you don’t use this and that, that people might worry that the meals would be bland. Which I know is not true so can you tell us what like a typical meal day looks like for you and how you make it yummie?

“Owokay, so I’ll tell you what is always a success when I cook for my friends, vegan or non-vegan. I love having veggies in the oven: potatoes – especially sweet potato, it is like my best friend ever, I love it. I use a lot of spices. Does not mean that it has to be spicy but just use spices like rosemary and so on. So, I put some veggies I like in the oven with some spices



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and then I prepare hummus. And I prepare hummus from everything. The other day I prepared the traditional hummus that is with chickpeas and tahin. Then I made another one with dried tomatoes. And it was like kind of pizza style, you know. And then I prepared one with garlic. And a tapenade with black olives. And we ate that with the veggies and everybody loved it. And mostly it is so easy!”

And so that meal would be a balanced meal?

“Yes, because you have the chickpea’s which is part of the proteins. The tahin would be the fats. And I had it with some vegetables and some bread. So, that is a balanced meal. And you know, here in Spain we love these tapas and sharing the food so that meal is all about sharing. And also I love preparing any kind of curry. And dhal, which is the most typical dish in India. In India they always prepare it with rice so it is balanced: you have the lentils and you have the rice. Proteins and cereal. Which is a complete meal. You also add vegetables to the curry or with the dhal. Or if you don’t want to do that, you can have a salad on the side. For the winter I prepare a lot of soup and then I cut up some tofu (instead of chicken for example). I also love to add ginger and lemon grass because I love those flavors. Because you need to realize that when you change into a vegan lifestyle, you are going to miss certain flavors. So, your spices should be your best friend. Your taste will change. And you’ll realize what you really like as flavors. For me I love curry and lemon-grass and ginger. My sister, also changing to a vegan lifestyle, she prefers more the tomato sauce-flavors, rosemary... If you like these kind of spices, make sure you add them enough. That way you’ll feel less like you are missing animal products. And that is why it is important that you cook yourself.”

40:00: It will be a new discovery. There are so many flavors we forgot or just don’t know yet.

“Yesterday I had a cookie that I loved, it is a vegan cookie from a café here. I loved it, I really did but it had sugar and I was feeling so bad for my tummy after. Because I don’t use sugar. I prepare a lot of desserts and cookies and banana bread but everything without sugar. I use dates, (very ripe) bananas or chocolate. You see, the chocolate already has a percentage of sugar. I only use chocolate with minimum 75% so it has less sugar but it will still add some sugar to your dish. For example, my sister is a real sweet tooth. And when she went vegan, she didn’t like the vegan desserts without sugar. So, when she made desserts, she still used milk and sugar. She used cane sugar. And now she is quitting that too. She uses no more animal milk, or sugar. I wanted her to be more conscious of what she was eating. Because you see, my sister didn’t really like cooking. Now she starts to love it. She sends me pictures saying: ‘Look, what do you think. Do you think this will be good with that?’ She is connecting with the food and she starts to feel good when cooking. And mostly she knows what she is eating. I tell you, if my sister can make that change. Anyone can do it! She was that girl that was every week at McDonalds or Burger King.”

41:40: Yeah, and I think it is important to mention that it is important to be gentle on yourself. When you make these kind of changes, you do not need to go extreme. Also in



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this part of life, try to find a balance that works for you, go gentle and be kind to yourself. When I started, I still ate chicken because I love my chicken in the oven with some lemon etc. But overtime it evolved because after a while I could distinct the animal in the package from the actual chicken and I didn't want it anymore. So, be gentle, go step by step.

“Everyone needs their own rhythm and do things in their own pace. I told my sister too: when the time comes, you will go 100% because it will no longer make sense to you to not do it. When you want to do everything in 1 day, most people after a while go back because they do it for the wrong reasons. You must take little steps but be 100% behind that step you take. Also, becoming vegan can in the beginning be quite difficult when you have digestive problems. Your body has to adapt too to the new products you put into your body. For my sister it took longer because when she started her body could not manage all these fresh legumes and vegetables. She constantly felt bloated because some products create more gas in your body. So, I told her to take it easier, that she has to go little by little. And feel which vegetables you digest well and which you don't. And then take does you react well too. Not all vegetables will be good for you at any time. It is a transition and it is not only your mindset that has to adapt. You have to allow your body to rework and how it can digest these new products you take. The first 3 weeks or something, I felt like a balloon. And then my body started to adapt. For my sister it took longer. Somebody else might have nothing. Or maybe you cannot manage all these legumes and you need more tofu or a different kind of proteins. Everybody is different. You don't have to completely go into a vegan lifestyle if your body is telling you it is not ready for it. Maybe you can just already become vegetarian or quit some kind of products.”

45:35: Can you tell us more about supplements?

“The only one that is 100% necessary is B12. This comes from the grass an animal eats. So, when you eat that animal, you also get the B12 from the grass it ate. You really need B12 because you can have a lot of health problems without it so it is important to take your B12. Vitamin D is also very important. Everybody should take that, vegan or not. It also comes from the sun and I read a lot about it and also with this COVID, having your Vitamin D is very important.”

47:45: Two questions to end our beautiful talk with. First of all: what is a conscious lifestyle for you?

“For me, first of all it is living according to the way you think. Align what you think and what you do. Try not to be harmful first of all to yourself. I think this is very important to make sure you are not being harmful for yourself, your body, your mind. That you are conscious with yourself. And then you should try to be open towards other people. It sounds very easy but I don't think that nowadays we are conscious about ourselves. I don't think we are at peace with ourselves and I don't think we are being good people to ourselves. And I think that if you want to live consciously and try to help others, that first you need to love yourself and take care of yourself. It is not easy. It is something that requires work. People sometimes tell me: ‘you look so positive and relaxed. Your voice is so calm.’ I am a yoga



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teacher so I have to work with it. I cannot bring my bad, or PITA-energy (your inner fire) into my class when I want my students to feel relaxed. I need to calm down myself first, do some breathing, Pranayama, some meditation and only then I do the class. Because that hour I give to people is that hour for them to disconnect from the rest and little by little completely connect with themselves. I guess, if everybody would be connected with themselves a little bit more, we would be more conscious with everyone. I see it with this COVID-crisis too, we can be so selfish. I saw the best and I saw the worst of humans in the last months here in Spain. I saw so many selfish people and I saw so many to give their best to others. So, we need to find our inner balance and then everything comes. When you really are in balance, you are conscious with the nature, you are conscious with others, you are conscious with your relationships because you are in balance. When you have toxic people around you, you can put a screen, create (emotional) distance. When people don't give you anything, there is no point to have them in your life. It does not mean they are bad people, it just means they are not people for you."

50:55: Owkay and by doing so, how do you do that without it being selfish?

"I am still working on it. ☺ Luckily, I don't have many toxic people around me because I always have been very selective with the people I have around me. That is something I always have tried to do for me. When I have 2 hours free in the day, I don't want to waste it on people that don't give me energy. I mean this in a mental way. I don't want to be sitting at a table for two hours when I could have been reading or practicing yoga or looking at the stars. For me it is something I am working on. What I try to do when I have toxic people around me or toxic moments, I try to write down how it felt, how it made me feel. And by doing that it creates emotional distance. I am practicing a lot of Pranayama at this moment and I write everything down. Sometimes you cannot create physical distance so then I try to do it mentally. For example toxic people at your job or where your kids go to school, you cannot then say that you are not going so then try to create mental distance from it."

53:00: An important nuance is that being respectful to yourself and being selfish are two completely different things. And it doesn't mean that when you feel that someone is not being constructive for you, is not giving you energy that you have to villainize the other person or blame them.

"No, not all. You can just be in different parts of life and that is ok. I feel that the more you keep growing and get older, you change your mindset and you feel like you want other people around you. That doesn't mean that the people you used to have around you are bad people. It is just that you don't have that connection with them anymore or you don't feel interested to share with these people."