

A full-page photograph of Kathy Freston, a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a bright red long-sleeved top and large gold hoop earrings. She is holding a white plate with a fork in her left hand. The plate contains a colorful meal consisting of a baked vegetable and grain stack, topped with fresh herbs, and a side salad with dark leafy greens, cherry tomatoes, and sliced mushrooms. The background is a softly blurred indoor setting with a window showing a grid pattern.

# Kathy Freston

*New York Times*  
bestselling author of  
*Quantum Wellness*

# Veganist

Lose Weight, Get Healthy,  
Change the World

# VEGANIST

LOSE WEIGHT, GET HEALTHY,  
CHANGE THE WORLD

Kathy Preston



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VEGANIST

The views expressed in this book are not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice.

I encourage you to seek the advice of a doctor (preferably one who is up on the current nutrition research) before changing how you eat, especially if you have a serious medical condition. To find a doctor, you might try contacting the American Holistic Medical Association for a referral: 216-292-6644. You can also search their database at <http://www.holisticmedicine.org/>.

# Introduction: The Big Picture

FIRST OF ALL, LET ME TELL YOU RIGHT OFF THE BAT THAT THIS book is all about the lean—leaning in to a shift in whatever way or whatever pace feels right to you. It’s about checking out some new information that could change your life, and then pushing yourself ever so gently in the direction of health. It’s not about making a radical conversion. It’s not about strict discipline. It’s more about empowering you to take your health into your hands in a practical and easy way, while at the same time arousing a broad spiritual awakening. Making profound changes in your life is never a straight path, and it shouldn’t be; it’s a gradual awakening with lots of twists and turns that happens in its own time. I am hoping that by providing you with ten life-changing promises fulfilled by *moving toward* a plant-based diet, you will find that that awakening time is at hand now (or soon!).

You don’t have to do anything at all upon hearing these promises. You can just sit with them, knowing that if you are ever ready for or desirous of change, there is a way to get

there. Or you can just nudge yourself a little, and make small changes in what you eat, so that you gradually build a momentum of healthy choices. Either way, the information in this book will open your eyes in a way you may never have considered.

The most exciting thing is that so much is possible. So much is within our power to make better. We can be healthy and happy. And we can do it so easily, simply by adjusting and tweaking our favorite meals so that they are healthier versions of the things we love. Still delicious, still hearty and satisfying. Just healthier. I promise.

Let me tell you a little about me, first of all, so you don't think that I came out of the womb a veganist. I was born in the South and grew up on chicken-fried steak and cheesy grits. I loved nothing more than a vanilla milkshake and barbecue ribs. I had an appetite for meat like anyone else, and I didn't think twice about it. I wasn't a thoughtless person; I was just enjoying my life and eating what tasted good and what I was told was good for me. It wasn't until I was in my thirties that I started considering where my food came from. When I made the shift to being vegetarian, it was gradual. I gave up eating one animal at a time. I'd come home and tell my husband, "I'm not cooking any more steak." He'd roll his eyes and say, "Whatever." And some months later, I'd be standing in the kitchen saying, "I can't put chicken on the table anymore"—he was a little more perturbed about that. Later still, when I said I couldn't bring myself to buy cheese anymore, he thought I'd lost my mind. Luckily, by then, I began hitting my stride with this lean toward a plant-based diet. I found so, so many delicious foods that were actually the

same as our favorite meals, but without the meat. Sometimes I brought home meat alternatives (vegetarian versions of chicken or ribs, etc.) and sometimes I focused more on beans, legumes, and whole grains (like black bean burritos with guacamole or lentil soup with cheesy bread and salad).

I actually began to love this food, and so did my husband. He told me, “If I thought I could have eaten this well as a vegetarian, I would have gone that way a long time ago.” There was no loss. No stringent diet or “bird food.” We simply lightened up on the animal-based foods and replaced them with plant-based fare. Before too long (it was a period of a few years, actually), we had a vegan home and were entertaining friends and family with unbelievably delicious (and nutritious) food.

Mind you, my husband is still not vegan . . . not even vegetarian (although he is certainly leaning in that direction). I am, though, and in our home we have only vegan food. I’m flexible with him (I don’t bug him when he orders fish at a restaurant) and he lets me be me. Some of our friends and family have changed their diet because they love the food and see what a difference it’s made in me, and some of our friends simply find it interesting cuisine for the time spent at our house. In all cases, I’ve been thrilled to see how people have gravitated toward and been interested in hearing more. Hence the book!

I want to shine a bright light on the whole world of positives that flow from the decision to eat a plant-based diet—positives for your health (eliminating meat leads naturally, even effortlessly, to weight loss; blood sugar balancing;



prevention, even reversal of heart disease; etc., etc., etc.) but also for your mind and your spirit, positives in terms of feeding the world and keeping the earth from deeper peril, in terms of putting money in your pocket and saving precious natural resources and deepening your sense of kinship with life.

You see, following a vegan (or vegan-ish) diet is a choice that has no downside. It's a home run, a good-for-everyone-and-everything solution. It can help you lose weight, heal your body from disease, *and* start making the world a more peaceful and livable place. And it's as delicious and inexpensive as it is good for our planet Earth.

In an effort to find a word to describe this magnificent tapestry of good that surrounds the choice to eat only food that grows on trees or from the ground, I landed on the term *veganist*. (Actually, my husband, after listening to enough of my spiels, said, "Honey, you're a veganist!" and it stuck.) I intend it as a soft word, a forgiving word. It's not about hard lines or purity or perfection but about intention and holding ideas loosely and taking steps in the direction of the kind of person you want to be, leading the kind of life you want to lead.

Okay, you say, but why would you want to call yourself a veganist? Doesn't that sound like something negative, like a racist or a sexist? No, no, and no! Just like the words "altruist" or "chemist" or "artist," a "veganist" is someone who is intensely interested in a subject and wants to go on learning more. The suffix "-ist" means "one who does." Veganists take action on what they learn—not necessarily in an "activist" way but in whatever works to make their individual

lives better while perhaps also helping to make the world a better place.

The “-ist” also refers to “one who studies.” A veganist is one who looks closely at all the implications of his or her food choices—to his or her own body, to the animals and the land it takes to raise them and the drugs introduced to keep herds alive, and so on, and then decides how to act. I like the idea of upgrading an old word that had some off-putting connotations; for many the word *vegan* calls to mind dogmatic hippies who eat nothing but granola and sprouts. No thanks on that. What I’m talking about are people who don’t mix up being passionate about getting healthy and happy with self-deprivation, and whose radiant well-being shows in everything they do.

Eating a diet of whole grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits, along with meat alternatives like veggie burgers or “chick’n” patties or soy dogs thrown in, your body will change on so many levels. Your metabolism will straighten out, enabling you to lose weight, if you need to, in a slow, steady, sustainable way. You will no longer feel led around by the mood swings and cravings that fatty and processed foods can cause; your skin will clear up and take on a permanent glow; your circulation (and with it your capacity for sexual pleasure!) will improve; and as study after study has been showing, you dramatically reduce your chances of getting heart disease, stroke, and diabetes and quite possibly cancer.

As if these weren’t reasons enough, according to reputable scientists like Cornell nutrition professor T. Colin Campbell, PhD, and the Cleveland Clinic’s Caldwell Esselstyn, MD, among others, you can even *halt and reverse* many

diseases when you embrace a plant-based diet. There is a must-see film out called *Forks over Knives* ([forksoverknives.com](http://forksoverknives.com)), which is a documentary about the work of these two amazing researchers. You'll hear from them in this book, and also from other leading medical experts on diet and health. You will also find first-person accounts of people who overcame life-threatening and debilitating diseases through their shift to a plant-based diet.

But the personal health benefits are just one part of the story, albeit a very important one. What about the social and environmental benefits I mentioned above? It seems clearer every day that the planet thrives for every person who chooses to eat more plant-based fare, because animal agriculture is one of the top culprits in creating a host of very serious environmental problems. You've undoubtedly read other books or seen movies, newspaper articles, or blogs detailing the horrors of animal slaughter and meat "processing." But, you see, here's one area of our lives where we actually have some control. We can simply say, "No thanks; I'll take the vegetarian option!" and stop participating in something that feels wrong.

This will be a bit of an adjustment, but going easy with yourself and leaning in will help enormously. Remember, all you have to do is take in the information, and lean toward better choices. Gradually. At your own pace. You can choose nondairy milks that, frankly, taste better than regular old milk. You can replace your beloved BLT and have tempeh (vegetarian) bacon on your sandwich instead. It's really so much fun to find foods that are simply upgraded versions of the ones you grew up loving.

Maybe you've heard that eating vegan will help you lose weight. Maybe it's your affection for animals that's driving you to take a look at your diet. Or maybe you read somewhere that it takes sixteen pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat and realized that if you stopped eating meat you might help feed the world. Any of these would be reason enough to reduce your meat consumption. But once you do that you find all the other benefits too.

Being a veganist is good for your health, it's good for the environment, and it's certainly good for the animals, but it also has a powerful spiritual component. When you begin eating consciously, with compassion and thoughtfulness, you attain a certain lightness and inner peace, a sense of connectedness to the larger world. When you lean more toward a plant-based diet, you help liberate acres of farmland to grow food for more humans, not more pent-up cows and pigs and chickens. And that also connects you to the web of life. It's all upside.

It feels so good and empowering to know that we are bigger than our habits and hankerings, that we can actually make a subtle switch in what we put on our plates for the promise of a better life all around. It feels so liberating to know that we can be in charge of our well-being and our choices, and that those choices will ripple out in their effects, both personally and globally.

That's what this is about too. Being a veganist (or vegan-ish) is about choosing behaviors that support your values, that make a positive contribution to the kind of world you want to live in. Our food choices can contribute directly to

well-being and consciousness, or they can do just the opposite. It's so completely up to us.

### **How to Read This Book**

The book is organized into ten promises and is packed with information, some of which will appeal to you right now and some of which might just be too much to take during the first read. I know, because it took me years to get around to reading certain books; I avoided delving into the truth about how what we eat affects us and the world around us, because much of it was simply a shock to my system and made me really uncomfortable. I recommend that you browse the table of contents and then start with the chapters that appeal to you and circle back to the others when you are ready to layer on some more information. For instance, you may be interested in weight loss and cancer prevention, but don't really want to look at animal cruelty right now. Or you might want to take a good look at the spiritual aspect of diet and also understand about how the food industry affects the global food supply. Personally, my favorite chapters are the last two (Promises 9 and 10) because I tend to be more interested in spirituality and personal growth. And the Afterword is practically a whole book in itself because it's chock-full of tips and information on how to make changes of habit, so definitely read that. But I completely understand if the middle of the book becomes overwhelming; it is a lot of information. Feel free to skip around, dipping in and out of the subjects that catch your attention; the information will surely trickle in. If you encounter something that makes you uncomfortable, please don't put the book down or stop reading;

just move on to the chapters that are most compelling to you. Then lean in a little more when you're ready and inform yourself at a pace that's comfortable for you. There is some fascinating information within these pages, and I expect you will want to digest it according to the pace that feels right to you.

No matter where you are on this journey—whether you have cut back on eating meat already or are just starting to consider what that might look like—get ready for some miracles. Truly. Taking animals out of your diet is a game changer.

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