



SELECTIVE COMPASSION
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There are many misconceptions about vegetarians, vegans, and animal activists, and it's a joy to debunk them whenever I can. However, one that leaves me somewhat sad is the assumption that because I care about this issue, I don't care about others. That in caring about animals, I don't care about humans, as if compassion for one group means lack of compassion for another. The implication is that humans have a limited capacity for mercy, kindness, and empathy – that we don't have enough to go around and that we'll just run out.

Though I wasn't explicitly taught to limit my compassion only to humans when I was growing up, I was given messages that encouraged me to have "selective compassion." Like most children, I was dressed in clothing that depicted animals, I had more stuffed animals than my bed could hold, and every book read to me used animals to teach me – how to count, how to talk, how to read. Yet, as I was being encouraged to love animals, I was also being fed animals – even the very animals I was brought to the zoo to admire! Also like most children, I had a natural instinct to intervene when someone suffered, whether that someone was a human or non-human animal.

So, years later, when I became vegetarian and an animal advocate, a decision motivated by the very same compassion my parents and society sought to instill in me, I was surprised to encounter people who questioned my choice to widen my circle of compassion. The quality that had been encouraged in me as a child was now met with suspicion – even derision – because of who I included in that circle. The message seemed to be: 'it's okay to be compassionate, but let's not be indiscriminate with it.'

Though I don't believe people have a limited capacity for compassion, I do think our innate childhood compassion gets dulled by the many ways in which our society values convenience and convention above everything else. As a vegan cooking instructor and animal activist, my work is built on a foundation of compassion for all, and, contrary to what some may believe, I've found that the more I give, the more I have to go around.