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'The Vegan Guide,' a cult book reminding us of food and ethics -- or denial of it

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This brings us to the vibrancy of the discussion by readers of books on allied subjects on the Internet. There are micro guides and macro guides. There is enthusiastic praise -- and harsh criticism. There is 'The New York City Vegan Guide to the Lower East Side,' by **David Boles**, published in June 1999, and updated in October 2000. And there is John Howley's 'Vegetarian Restaurants and Natural Food Stores in the US: A Comprehensive Guide to over 2500 Vegetarian Eateries.'

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'The Vegan Guide to New York City-2004,' by Rynn Berry, Barry Litsky, Chris Abreu-Suzuki. 2004. Pages 70.

This volume is slight only in the number of its pages; it is almost a cult book, and has sold more than a thousand copies a day since its release this January. The New York Times called it 'More Than a Food Guide, A Portable Conscience,' which reminds us that food is not just a matter of calories. To some, it is more a matter of ethics -- or the denial of it.

For example, while most Indian philosophy is idealistic and cuisine vegetarian, there has also been a materialistic school. It's not vegans alone who will be shocked by the admonition of the hedonistic sage, Charvak, to his followers to get into debt in order to gorge on ghee.

For those who are opposed to eating not just meat but all animal and dairy products, 'The Vegan Guide' is not only easily carried around, but it's essential to have it with you as go around the city. Each area of the city is taken separately, with eateries rated according to quality and cost, and clearly labeled as vegan, vegetarian, or vegan-friendly (those that might serve, say, fish). A reader writes in the Internet: "The book details restaurants, diners, take-outs, and even food-carts, and is the clearest guide to eating vegan in NYC that I have found. At the back of the book is a short index of vegan shops in the city.

"Well worth the price, and well worth taking on every trip to the city. For vegans, it is indispensable."

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Most of these works are factual, but a few are on the borderlines of fiction. One of the authors of 'The Vegan Guide,' Rynn Berry, co-authored with Jack Kroll and Glory Brightfield, a work that spices up history with apocrypha -- 'Famous Vegetarians and Their Favorite Recipes: Lives and Lore from Buddha to the Beatles.'

The author has come up with recipes claimed to be reflecting the tastes of famous vegetarians throughout the ages.

Anecdotal sketches give life to each of the 32 celebrities from Plato and Pythagoras to Tolstoy, Gandhi and George Bernard Shaw along with "contemporaries" like Paul McCartney and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

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