

two for one

I owe this blog a recipe AND a conversion question. Today? I'm giving you both. How does that sound? Try to contain yourself. We're running out of really juicy questions, so I'm going to have to go with a pretty easy one.

If you were filling out a form today, which asked you to fill in your religion, what would you write in?

Seriously? This is a conversion question? I mean I guess I get having to pause for a second? Listen, I've been saying I was Jewish since before I really even knew what that meant. My Facebook profile, for instance, has said that I'm Jewish pretty much since my profile went up. It's kinda a non-issue. The thing I've been wondering lately is the exact opposite. When do other people start seeing me as Jewish? Maybe that's a weird question. I feel like I'm becoming more and more sensitive about my Jewish identity. I'm not worried if I'm Jewish enough, I'm more concerned that people think converting is somehow fake or inauthentic. I'm not going to temple just because I'm converting, I'm not celebrating Jewish holidays to put on a big Jewish show. I just wonder lately if the folks around me understand that. I'm definitely going to temple more often now, than I was before the conversion process began. I don't know. I'm not going to come to some sort of solution in this blog post. I guess it's an ongoing process for everyone in my life, not just me. It's a growth process? I guess this is where I get to practice patience.

Can we talk about food now? I finished reading *Eating Animals* this weekend. In the last week? I haven't really been eating animals, y'all. The book really changed me. Maybe the word change is going to get me into trouble. The book really forced me to think a little more about my food choices. I'm

not saying that I'll never eat meat again. Meat is delicious. I'm just not going to eat it every time I sit down for a meal. I had a turkey burger last night. I hadn't eaten meat in about a week. I wasn't even really trying to do avoid meat. In fact, I didn't even realize that I hadn't eaten meat all week until Friday night when we sat down for a little pre-Shabbat dinner.

How on Earth could I possibly not realize that I hadn't been eating meat? Well, I was inspired by my friend Julie to make a pot of vegetarian chilli. When I say a pot of chilli, what I really mean to say is a GIANT pot of vegetarian chilli. We've been eating it all week. The recipe that I found is crazy simple. Like it takes only about an hour to cook, which is sorta out of character for making chilli. Once we were at the end of the chilli I realized that I hadn't really missed meat. How could I with stories of factory farming running through my head.

I don't know what your connection to meat is or how you feel about giving it up. I'm not judging you and I'm certainly not here to try to convert you to vegetarianism. But...what about a vegetarian challenge. Could you do it? Could you even make it a week? I've said it before and I'll say it again. Eating Kosher style really asks me to think about the food that I'm eating. It forces me to be cognizant. So, I ask you. Are you aware? After my turkey burger last night? I think I've decided that I don't really miss meat. It has only been a week and who knows what I'll want to eat for lunch tomorrow, but for now? I think I'm not that interested.

Want to have a vegetarian moment? Here's a quick and easy vegetarian chilli for you. The best part about this chilli is that it's sorta fall themed.

WHAT?

1 large butternut squash

1 (12 oz.) bag frozen onions and peppers
2 (15 oz.) cans stewed tomatoes, Mexican style
1 can black beans, drained
1 can red beans, drained
2 cups vegetable stock
2 tablespoons chili powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cumin
1 tablespoon olive oil

HOW?

In large soup pot sauté chopped onions in olive oil until tender. Stir in chili powder and cumin. Chop your butternut squash into half-inch or inch size pieces. Add butternut squash and vegetable stock. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer for 15 minutes or until squash is tender but not mushy. Add tomatoes and drained beans and simmer and simmer for 5 minutes.

It's seriously amazing. I think the best part might be that it's so fast. I let my chilli simmer for about 20 minutes, because my husband wasn't home yet...

Oh, Lord.

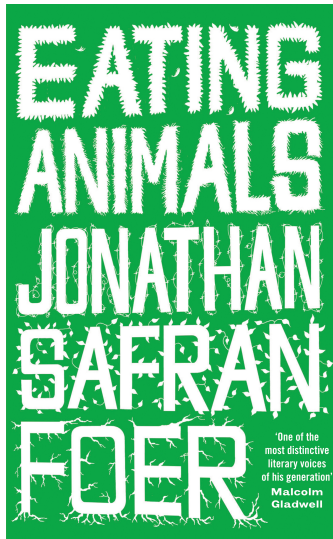
What is the hardest thing that you are giving up from your prior religion?

Oy va voy. Here we go. Wow. How do you write an introduction to that question? This one is particularly sensitive. It's almost too sensitive to answer. I mean, I guess. I'm over thinking I have to cry the blues when talking about religion or switching religions. I've got to tell you I don't feel any great loss. I don't associate finding a path to Gd, or choosing one religion over another with loss. I believe that there are many paths to Gd. If Jesus is your way, good for you. If you're into Buddha, awesome. I've never thought that there is one way to get there. I'm choosing to go down a Jewish path. Mazel Tov to me. Mazel Tov to you if you're doing it a different way. The goal is to be cognisant. The goal is to be mindful and not blindly follow a choice that you were spoon fed at 3.

Though, I think I'm supposed to answer this with something big like Jesus or Christmas. I've got no beef with Jesus. He was a good man. He's a great example. I just don't think of him as divine. AND...so what. You might have noticed that a lot of folks don't. Then there's Christmas. Well, Christmas? To me? That's a time of year that celebrates family. Being Jewish doesn't mean that I don't get to celebrate my love for my family at any point in the year. If my mom wants me home for Christmas, you can bet your ass I'm going.

I'd rather celebrate the things that I'm gaining. How about how I get to argue about the meaning of the Bible? How about how now I'm part of the conversation? How about how I have to take time out each year and review who I am and how I'm relating to people in my world? I could go on and on. I'm going to choose to celebrate the things that I'm gaining, rather than what I may or may not have lost. So, take that.

Eating Animals



My favorite thing about eating Kosher is that it keeps me conscious of the food choices that I'm making. Not just will I have chicken tonight. There are bigger decisions. I was surprised to learn that eating Kosher style goes well beyond avoiding mixing meat and dairy. Will I eat processed meats, for instance. Where did these eggs come from? Can I make salad dressing that involves ingredients that I can pronounce? There are a lot of questions, which of course can make eating very Jewish. Now that I'm paying more attention to the things that I'm eating, I find that I'm also searching for ways to make me more food conscious. Naturally this lead to me reading Eating Animals by Jonathan Safran Foer.

I know what you're thinking. What a terrifying thing to read. How could I possibly do this to myself? How could I back myself into a meatless corner. I was warned not to read it. Everyone I talked to about the book told me how it made them the great vegetarian that they are today.

I'm sorry to report that the book isn't having quite the same effect on me. Though, I should also admit to you that I'm only about half way through. I started reading Eating Animals last week mostly because my Rabbi suggested it to me. I also thought that it would force me to become a vegetarian, which I was maybe a little excited about.

Confession: I want to be a vegetarian. I've always wanted to be a vegetarian. I've also always wanted to be a tap dancer.

I'm not very good at either. I never got those tap lessons and I can't stop my obsession with chicken. There. My secret is out.

I'm a terrible person. I'm a miserable excuse for a Liberal Democrat. I can't even give up meat. Somewhere there's an alarm going off. At any moment they're going to come and take away my subscription to The New Yorker, force me to wear slightly less chunky glasses and rip up all of my cardigan sweaters. But it's true. I'm just not very good with that kind of limitation. No more chicken? Ummmm...no.

What I'm trying to tell you is that if you've been thinking about reading this book (ahem...Whitney?) then you should read it. There are some pretty terrible images in the book, I think we all know that factory farming is a really disgusting thing. I don't, however, think that it'll force you to run screaming from the meat section of your local grocer. Will I start buying Kosher meat? Probably. Will I think twice before actually eating meat? Absolutely, but I won't give it up forever. I'm just not that strong.

Here's a little vegan recipe for you. If you're feeling a little sassy about your devotion to meat? Brown 1 or 2 lbs of turkey (or ground beef if you're really feeling defiant) and add it to the recipe...

WHAT?

1 large Onion

1 bag of Spinach

1 can Rotel

2 cans White Beans

2 bags of Uncle Ben's 90 Second rice...or you can be fancy and make your own...but you'll spend 45 minutes on that and who has

that kind of time?

HOW?

Chop up that onion and fry it in a couple of table spoons of olive oil. Everything delicious starts this way. When you've browned the onion, toss in your cans of beans and Rotel. You'll have a pretty good soupy thing going on at this point. Bring it to a boil. Turn the heat down and add your spinach. Stir in the spinach, you want it to wilt into the mix. Prepare your rice. When the rice is ready? You're ready to eat! Toss some rice in a bowl and add your bean mixture. Stir and enjoy.