

15 Years Later, the Cow That Shattered My Carnism and Veganized My Soul

From [Nivi Jaswal, MVLCE, MainStreetVegan.net](#)

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This personal experiential investigation into trauma, grief, love, and its lessons highlighted the importance of aligning both our body and energy identities. I found some interesting answers, insights, and ideas.



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August 2020, I sat numb in a [Main Street Vegan Academy](#) class, secretly hoping that I'd get by without much participation when [Jasmin Singer](#) declared she was going to speak about Veganism and the power of personal stories. I was numb because my father had just passed away, and my [mother was all alone abroad, still fighting the COVID virus](#). I was numb because while I identified with being *whole food, plant-based*, I was still terrified of the V-word(Vegan). Since 2018, when I eliminated all animal products from my diet, my focus was entirely on physical health and my father's untimely passing underscored that voice in my head, "*It's ALL about human health.*" I didn't know if I could drum up compassion for animals at that point.

Then Jasmin started speaking and leading us through prompts as we recalled encounters with animals. Memories are imperfect, because when we reconstruct them, we add selective bells and whistles. All versions of my memory of Jasmin's session have her and Victoria Moran dressed up as various avatars ranging from Cinderella's fairy godmother to Macbeth's witches to the wise and mighty High Priestess of the Major Arcana. I have deep respect and gratitude for the work of both these amazing individuals.

As Jasmin spoke, a trance took hold, my numbness transmuted into a surprising somatic flashback to a time when I was living in Indonesia several years ago. I was being driven to work and the car came to a complete standstill near a crowd of people cheering and watching a cow being slaughtered. Her neck was slit, blood gushing out, the animal crying out in pain in a way I have never heard from any living being before. We honked our way out of this incident and continued onto my worksite. I recall dining at an

expensive steakhouse with my team later that night. My brain filed away this memory and, as I discovered during Jasmin’s session, my body kept score.

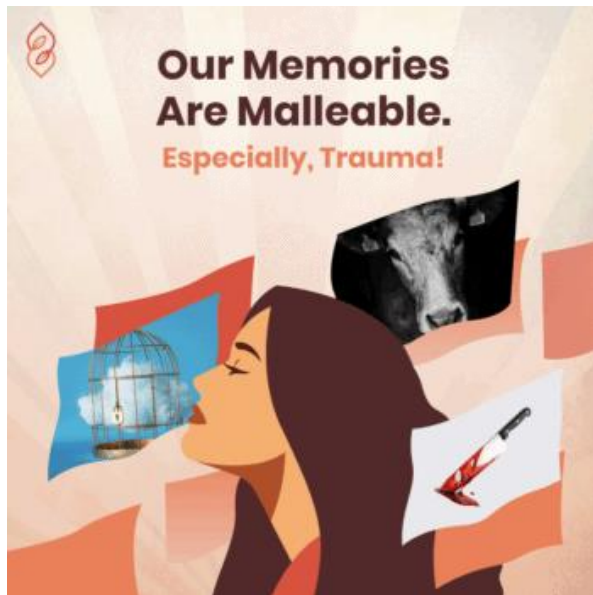


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During the seconds that I involuntarily relived this incident, my brain reconstructed the cow as if bathed in a white light. Several vibrant red streams of lifeblood drained out of her tormented soul, vaporizing in the humid tropical heat. Tongues of ominous gray smoke snaked their way to me as I sat in an air-conditioned gilded cage, staring at this spectacle with vacuous keto-glazed eyes.

Jolted out of my numbness, as if the cow’s soul foresaw the heart-wrenching trauma I would go through years later, it timed its appearance when my so-called *Identity-isms* were ready to release — especially the veil of carnism that shrouded my vision and values.



Image credit: [The Virsa Foundation, Inc.](#)

In the two years since, while processing grief, I curated a Vegan advocacy campaign, designed research initiatives, interviewed influencers, and navigated running a nonprofit with finite resources. In embracing trauma, I found several guides along the way who ushered me through doors beyond my body identity. In 2021-22, I struggled to make sense of my *Energy Identity* in the same way as in 2020 when I was challenged to touch and feel carnism.

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I also discovered the power of questions. Only when we ask new questions can we evoke new reflections and solutions.



Image credit: [The Virsa Foundation, Inc.](#)

So, I leave you with a few questions to ponder and resources to explore:

1. Does trauma live inside our physical or energy body? If it's stored in the primordial limbic system (hippocampus, amygdala), how might we [befriend our nervous system after trauma](#)?
2. Multiple identities within us bear protective armor, others carry weapons and wounds. How does this archetype of the [Wounded Healer](#) show up in activism? What might be other leadership models?
3. How effective is *trauma-exposure* ([shockvertizing](#)) as an activist's persuasion tool for long-term behavior change?
4. If humans thrive on co-regulation and food is a social glue, what is the ritualistic role of animal products in society? Might this help explain high rates of [Vegan recidivism](#)?
5. Exercising, breathwork, chanting, music help in alleviating the autonomic and somatic components of trauma, but if the memory remains unprocessed, it is easily activated by anything else with similar components. Considering limitations of somatic awareness, [how can humans resolve and grow from trauma](#)?

Embarking upon that quest of Self-Actualization or [Individuation](#) is our birthright. Veganism and identifying our carnism can open the door to this larger spiritual journey.



Photo credit: Nivi Jaswal

Nivi Jaswal is an intersectional Vegan advocate and social entrepreneur in the Boston area. She founded [The Virsa Foundation Inc.](#), a 501c3 nonprofit and the JIVINITI Research Program after healing herself through a whole food, plant-based lifestyle. In addition to holding a BA (Psychology, Sociology), an MBA (Consumer Behavior Marketing), and extensive international corporate experience in the consumer-packaged goods, medical devices and media and research sectors, Nivi is a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach trained at the Mayo Clinic. She is passionate about developing creative multidisciplinary intersectional content and designing unique research collaborations aimed at communities of color in the U.S., South Asia, and elsewhere.