



This month, we're doing something different with our In Print section—devoting the entire space to Radical Vegetarianism by Mark Braunstein.

Radical Vegetarianism is an unusual book in both style and perspective. It does not offer any of the usual nutritional information or exercise tips found in most books dealing with diet and lifestyle, except in the sense that it is food for thought and an exercise in semantics and philosophy.

Braunstein would probably appreciate that description because that is the kind of word play he frequently uses throughout the book. Who else would title a chapter, "Ashes to Ashes, Life to Life"?

But more to the point, <u>Braunstein is a philosopher</u>. He's also a great writer, with a good sense of humor.

Vegetarianism differs from other popular diets of the day because of its heritage. The diet has historical roots and has, at times, been something of a social and religious force. The fact that vegetarianism influenced George Bernard Shaw, Gandhi, Tolstoy and other such giants, sets it apart, in my mind, from the dietary teachings of Pritikin, Dr. Atkins and all the rest of today's dietary gurus. More than a mere diet, vegetarianism is really a mind set—a philosophy.

Just as all social movements have their factions or schools, there is a distinct vegetarian movement which you might call the "East Coast Vegetarian Movement" since most of its adherents live in the East between Washington D.C. and Boston. This group of largely ethical, animal rights-oriented vegetarians numbers less than a thousand, but it's a very vocal and influential group. Mark Braunstein would qualify as a member, indeed a leader, of this group (although he hates to be categorized).

Put another way, I'd say that Mark, whom I've known for years, is an intellectual, an artist and a New Yorker with strong convictions. He can be intense, but

more often chooses to be playful and elusive.

The book is very much like the author. It is not the kind of book you'll find at your health food store (in fact, a national distributor of health food books told Mark there was "no market" for books on vegetarian ethics and dialectics), but it is the kind of book you might find in an "alternative" type of book store.

Braunstein has succeeded in raising the ire of many prominent people in the Jewish vegetarian community with his outrageous assertion in the book that the Holocaust was somehow related to the Jewish people's consumption of meat. We find this part of the book irresponsible and ludicrous, but we hope that this doesn't totally discredit the book in some people's eyes. It's unfortunate that Braunstein has probably succeeded in offending his most likely readers (Israel has more vegetarians per capita than any country aside from India) because his ideas, overall, are far above such an irresponsible level.

Even with these readers, the book would probably never have achieved the popularity of *The Complete Book of Running*, but it's the kind of book that will endure, perhaps well beyond the life of the author (he's in his early 30s).

Books such as this are rare in comparison to the large number of vegetarian cookbooks and books on diet and health. That's why we've devoted so much space and have asked two writers who have long been familiar with the material published on vegetarianism to give their impressions of Radical Vegetarianism. The reviewers—V.T.'s West Coast Editor Scott Smith and Ted Zagar ("The Vegetarian Astrologer")—are regular contributors to this magazine. For a sample of Mark Braunstein's style and opinions, you might want to look up his essay "On Being Radically Vegetarian" in Issue 36 of Vegetarian Times, March 1980.—Paul Barrett Obis

**VEGETARIAN TIMES** Issue #54

## While the wisdom between the lines in *Radical Vegetarianism* reflects the bright white of the paper, the wit within the lines is bursting with color.

On the 10th anniversary, of my last beef/pork meal, I found a copy of Mark M. Braunstein's Radical Vegetarianism in the mailbox. Skimming the table of contents stimulated a sobering reverie of the contents on my table over the past decade. In the early '70s, Midwestern vegetarians were as common as Anchorage avocadoes; periodicals and organizations extolling the virtues of flesh-free fare had yet to come out of the woodwork; and it took a full three years of defending my daily bread to each and everyone before crossing paths with another enthusiast of the Orphic way.

Not content to merely cite the myriad modes of vegetarianism, Mark, a lettered artist, uses pen to paint an inspiring, colorful and sometimes humorous picture of life itself as it is affected by what one chooses to eat. Thus, as chapter after chapter of Radical Vegetarianism satisfied my aesthetic taste, in addition to quieting my technology-encumbered hunger pangs for an ethical culture-cum-cuisine, one thing became apparent: this is the book that I should have had ten years ago. Clearly, both the literature and my gastrophilosophical preference—I'm a raw fruitarian—have come a long way.

Radical Vegetarianism's ten chapters are evenly divided into two sections—"Diet" and "Ethic"—which flow effortlessly from an informative introduction by Viktoras Kulvinskas, itself a microcosmic prelude to the text. Viktor's offering provides a concise treatment of human nutriment as indivisible food for both the cell and the soul which fuses together the cosmic and the concrete.

With this celestial/terrestial link established, Braunstein proceeds to treat fasting and every form of vegetariansm in the Diet section-and what a treat, indeed, for the reader! Mark characterizes the typical doctor/patient relationship with its vacuous, if not harmful, drug and diet therapies as "the bland leading the bland"; the animal protein peddlers become "merchants of venison"; and obesity is described as a "sufficiency disease." While the wisdom between the lines in Radical Vegetarianism reflects the bright white of the paper, the wit within the lines, only thinly camouflaged by the black ink, is bursting with color. "The Milky Way"-Diet's somber, concluding chapter—is certain to wean its share of lacto-vegetarians.

Where Diet leaves no nutritional stones unturned, the Ethic section leaves no georeligious zones unlearned. While the entire text features many fine quips and quotes from the wellsprings of Eastern and Western thought, *Radical Vegetarianism*'s immensely moving second half strips the scientists, saints and savants of their inhumane, specie-ist posturing and proselytizing which have paralyzed humanity's sacred and secular institutions for millenia.

Given a de-forested Earth whose thinned, leached and poisoned soil laboriously supports the cattle ranches of president, pop star and pope, as well as a British archbishop's hog farm and cramped battery hens managed by American nuns, one can hardly object to the author's well-meant critique. Homo sapiens-armed to their bloodied teeth-can ill-afford to continue suffering amazement at the violence that lunges full circle at our Lennons, Reagans, John Pauls and Sadats without acknowledging the karmic law of cause and effect. Radical Vegetarianism is a commendable attempt to speak for the voiceless in a world bent on throwing its sacred cows (and pigs, et al.) into the flesh pots, and onto the vivisectionist's table. Nevertheless, the author seems bound to draw much unfair criticism from those too steeped in carnivoral vices to abandon their butcher blades, licensed-to-kill research grants and the medieval torture toys of the sporting set to respond creatively to a point well-made.

All in all, <u>Radical Vegetarianism</u> is a work so well crafted that it could become a classic, not merely of vegetarian booklists, but of human literary efforts. You may wish to put it in the mailbox of someone who you love. After all, it is ten years ahead of its time. —Ted PanDeva Zagar

This is a rare, inimitable book, one to savor and turn to, time and again. No review can convey the experience of reading this work of art. It could really be read from end to beginning—each sentence is admirable in its own right. It is quite simply the most literate book I have ever read. It is thick with thought—it can inform anyone.

A couple of examples of its style should suffice. In discussing fasting:

The Greek gods dined on ambrosia and nectar, but our every mouthful reminds us of our mortality. For the cast-iron pot, we give up our iron stomach, end up with a potbelly. Humanity, bulbous-bellied but still its eyes bigger than its mouth, will never return to peace with the its gods by saying grace at any dinner table. Fruit alone will not even help; the apple was the problem in the first place.

## Later:

After separating the sheep from the goats and sifting the wheat from the chaff, next we must elect whether to keep the sheep from the wheat or to mix them into the soup. This, of course, is the choice of vegetarianism, of carnivorism, or of neither; of hesitation and negation, the supreme existential condition: starvation. These developments of conscience and consciousness few imitate and few conclude.

The book is aimed at focusing ethically motivated veggies on nutrition and the health-minded types on ethics. The book will, however, likely be too radical and too poetic to be popular (we shall see).

On the other hand, it isn't hard to fault the book. While the dairyless diet is, in my opinion, the correct diet, the Kulvinskas/Shelton versions would be seen as extremes by most people who are sympathetic to the general idea. Mark can also be a bit hard on those who embrace other philosophies.

The poetic and pregnant ponderables make this guide to higher consciousness unique in the history of vegetarian literature.—Scott S. Smith



Issue #54, February 1982