What Is Buddhism?
Buddhism began over 2500 years ago when a man sat under a Bodhi tree and became enlightened. Known as the Buddha, or enlightened one, he spent the next 40 years teaching what he had discovered. Today there are an estimated 500 million to one billion Buddhists in the world.

The Dharma
The Buddha taught that the purpose of his teachings, called the dharma, was to show a path to the end of suffering. The foundation of the teachings is morality, and it is only by developing morality that one can then discover for oneself the wisdom of the dharma. Central to Buddhist morality is the notion of compassion. Buddhist ethics is found in what are called precepts, and most important among these is the First Precept – Do Not Kill. Importantly, and what separates Buddhism from most other spiritual teachings, is that Buddhist morality applies to all of the beings who share the earth – humans and animals alike.

Animals
Many people don't have the opportunity to spend time with animals, particularly farmed animals. But when we get to know turkeys, chickens, pigs, goats and cows, we find that each animal is an individual with a personality, preferences, and as strong a desire to live as any human. Animals are smart, sensitive, and emotional, forming bonds with one another and with human caregivers, too.

Like humans, animals also suffer. Unfortunately, despite their sensitivity and capacity to suffer, we often fail to extend to animals the same compassion we try to extend to people. Instead, they are treated as commodities, here solely to meet our own human needs.

The biggest way we exploit animals, of course, is by eating them. Throughout the world, more than 70 billion land animals are killed for consumption every year. In the United States alone more than 10 billion land animals are killed annually. If we add the billions of animals living in water who are killed, this number is much larger. Should Buddhists be contributing to this?

Animal Farms
Most people are not aware of the way farmed animals are treated today. The farms of the past have been replaced by factory farms, whose only consideration is profit. Conditions on these farms are harsh and inhumane. Hens raised for their eggs come from hatcheries, where they have their beaks seared off and then spend their entire lives cramped into wire cages without enough room to even stretch their wings. Male chicks – incapable of laying eggs – are tossed into a garbage bag to either suffocate or be ground up alive. The male offspring of dairy cows – referred to as veal calves – are taken from their mothers at birth and spend their entire lives confined in crates, unable to move, and fed an anemic diet, all to ensure that their flesh is tender.

Finally, once their usefulness is gone – when hens can no longer produce enough eggs and cows can no longer produce enough milk – the animals are killed.

Right Eating
The teachings of the Buddha are based on the central ideas of non-harming and compassion. The Buddha recognized that all beings suffer, and it was because of his infinite compassion that he dedicated his life to helping all beings be free from suffering.

Extending compassion to animals starts with one thing that everyone can do immediately – stop eating them! It’s important to realize that whether you kill an animal yourself or pay someone else to do it, in order for you to eat an animal it has to be killed.

The Buddha said:
“Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain even from hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.”

- Dhammika Sutra

Why Vegan?
The term vegan refers to someone who not only refrains from eating animals but also does not consume products that come from animals. Whenever animal products such as eggs and milk are used for food, animals are harmed and killed. This is true even on the most “humane” of farms, which often deceptively call themselves “cage-free” or “free-range.”

Whenever someone eats an animal product, he or she is contributing to the suffering of an animal. In order to live a life of compassion, it is important to not cause suffering, and this means eating a vegan – or plant-based – diet. Once again, the Buddha realized this:

“[People] who do not wear silk, leather boots, furs, or down from this country, or consume milk, cream, or butter can truly transcend this world.”

- Surangama Sutra