

ONE BITE

VEGAN MAGAZINE

Perfect Creamy
**Turmeric
Latte**

IG WORTHY
FIG & COCONUT
CREAM TOAST

Swirly Cinnamon Rolls
with Tofu Icing

*Tofu Spread with
Dried Tomatoes*

Rich Arugula-Pecan

**CHEESY
SPREAD**

Smoky Baba Ganoush Dip



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When Being Who You Are Challenges the Norms

By: Leo Babauta



I believe in shaking up the way things are done. Often we're stuck in a rut of doing things a certain way, because that's the way everyone else does things, because that's how it's always done. Because it's safe.

But the normal way of doing things is often not the only way, nor the best way. Bloodletting and

leeches were once the normal way of treating most illnesses until smart people started questioning the practice. Women for a long time were kept out of the workplace because they were thought to be too weak or emotional for many jobs. People used to throw away very little, and nothing was 'disposable' because that was thought to be wasteful ... wait, maybe that wasn't so bad.

What if you could shake things up ... just by being who you are? Without having to do anything but tell someone who or what you are? It turns out, that's often been the case in my life. I will just mildly tell people who or what I am, and they start getting defensive, even if I haven't actually attacked anything they do.

People assume I'm judging them, just because I do things differently. They're wrong — I don't judge what others do, but rather just try to live my life consciously, and conscientiously. I often fail, but in the attempt is everything.

Here are just a few examples from my life:

1. Vegan. Just telling people I'm vegan will cause all kinds of interesting reactions. Often people will start to talk about how they were once vegetarian, or how they eat very little red meat, or only sustainably. Or they'll start to talk about how delicious meat is, or how humans were meant to eat meat, or ask me if I just eat salad. I don't mind any of this. Instantly, people are giving more thought to these questions than they ever have in the past. As for myself, the reasons are simple: I do it out of compassion for living, feeling, suffering beings who are treated as objects in our society. (Read: the [minimalism of veganism](#).)

2. Minimalist. This is probably the other biggest thing I do that gets a reaction from people. They'll talk about how they live with very little, or how they want to get rid of clutter, or ask me how you can be minimalist with kids. These are good discussions. We need to start talking about why we own so much, why we buy so much (not just physical stuff, but apps and digital content), why we've become consumers instead of just simply living. (Read: my blog [mnmlist](#), or [breaking free from consumerist chains](#).)

3. Self-employed. This is becoming more and more common these days, of course, but the majority of our society remains employed by a

corporation (or unemployed). I choose to work for myself, to be my own boss. And now that I've done it, I'm unemployable. I'll never go back, and I'm constantly subverting people I know, showing them how to break from the chains of employment if they're unhappy. There's no reason we should work for other people if we don't want to.

4. Car-free. Almost a year ago, we gave up our car. We'd been slowly cutting back on car usage anyway, but finally giving up a car was liberating. Most people don't understand this — they see the car as a symbol of freedom, of convenience, without realizing just how much we've been chained to cars, just how inconvenient it is for us individually and of course as a society. People often don't know what to make of someone who voluntarily lives without a car. (Read: [lessons we've learned riding mass transit](#).)

5. Healthy & fit. There are many people, of course, who are healthy and fit — much fitter than me. But I'm healthier and fitter than most people I know, and while I don't judge them at all, discussions always come up about health and diet and exercise whenever I visit. Choosing to be active on most days is a radical thing in our society. Weird, I know.

6. Unschooler. My wife and I homeschool four of our kids, and that makes us weird. Even though compulsory schooling as we know it has only been widespread for a little over a century, and for most of human history, the majority of children were educated at home and somehow their parents found a way to deal with the socialization issue. Parents who send their kids to school get defensive when I talk about unschooling, which is a radical branch of homeschooling that throws the normal model of school (teachers dispensing knowledge to students who memorize it) out the window. We believe our kids should learn how to teach themselves, as many of us learned to do as adults. We don't believe anyone can create a curriculum of knowl-

edge that will prepare our kids for a future that can't be predicted, for a workforce that is rapidly changing. Instead, they should learn how to figure things out for themselves, to solve problems, to work on their own without being directed. They're the entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

7. Goal-free. I've written about the radical notion of giving up goals, though it's thousands of years old (Laozi taught it to me). But the idea of goals is incredibly ingrained in our society (myself included), that people think I'm weird

for even suggesting you can live an amazing life of achievement without goals. As if goals were the only reason to do something great. (Read more: [the best goal is no goal](#), and [the illusion of control](#).)

None of these things defines me, but they are all a part of who I am. They all challenge the norm in some way, bring up questions and discussion that otherwise might not occur, and I believe those are necessary questions and discussions.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leo Babauta is a simplicity blogger & author. He created Zen Habits, a Top 25 blog with a million readers. He's also a best-selling author, a husband, father of six children, and a vegan. In 2010 moved from Guam to San Francisco, where he leads a simple life. Learn more at zenhabits.net!

