

THE WORLD PEACE DIET

Mastery Training Program



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with DR. WILL TUTTLE,
author, *The World Peace Diet*



Supplemental Readings

Module 3 – Awakening Our Capacities to Know and to Serve

Temple Grandin: Using Autism to Make Money Killing Animals

by Jeffrey Masson & Jeff Nelson

Jan 30, 2009 -- One of the most popular recent articles in the New York Times was a review of Temple Grandin’s new book *Animals Make Us Human*, a review by Dwight Garner titled “The Joys and Pains of Being an Animal” (January 21, 2009). Because so many people are convinced that Temple Grandin is a friend to animals (for some, she is the friend), we thought it important to point out some troubling views both in the review and in the book.

The first misleading aspect of this review is the picture of Temple Grandin with three handsome golden retrievers. Temple Grandin does not live with dogs. Photoshopped? Borrowed dogs? The second misrepresentation is the book review itself. Where to begin? How about the first sentence: “Grandin’s autism gives her a special understanding of what animals, whether house cats or cattle, think, feel and—perhaps most important—desire.” The reviewer has bought into the myth that Dr. Grandin seeks most to instill: because she is autistic, she understands animals. All you need to do is say this aloud to realize how ridiculous it is. Try it in other ways: “I am depressed, so I understand dogs.” “I hear voices, so I understand birds.” We have never heard anyone describe an animal, any animal, as autistic, so why should somebody who is autistic understand animals better than anyone else?

Our understanding of autism is that it often prevents those who suffer from it from understanding emotions, their own and others. Darwin understood long ago that human emotions are on a continuum with those of other species, and modern scientists are finally catching up with him. There is a consensus building that animals experience the same emotions we do, some of them more purely and more powerfully than humans do. Why would we need to have somebody self-proclaimed as autistic explain these emotions to us? All we need to do is live with any animal—dog, cat, parrot, cow, chicken, pig, sheep, goat, or even rat—to understand how deeply they feel emotions similar to ours.

If Temple Grandin has any special understanding, it has eluded us, though as someone who writes

about the emotional lives of animals (Masson) and someone who reads widely about them (Nelson), we have tried hard to understand her point of view. Can it really be that cattle “desire” to die? This is Temple Grandin’s specialty. She finds better ways to kill them. We find this disturbing. It brings to mind that remarkable film by Errol Morris, *Mr. Death*, about Fred Leuchter, who designed “humane”—his word—cyanide-gas execution devices (and who just happens to believe there was no gas in Auschwitz—he was the “expert” witness for Ernest Zundel and his book *The Hitler We Love and Why*).

The reviewer thinks that Temple Grandin is not as good on cats and dogs as on farm animals, such as cows and pigs, on the slaughter of whom she is the world’s authority (strange to think that this is a distinction the NYT would proudly proclaim). The reviewer and Temple Grandin both acknowledge that it is an odd thing for somebody who “loves” animals to work on improving the way they are slaughtered, but she argues that she is more interested in their life than in their death. But what kind of life can we talk about for animals who are killed long before the end of their natural life span? We have never understood restaurants that claim to be deeply concerned with the quality of life of the animals they serve for meals, but that proudly offer lamb or chickens who have lived sometimes for mere hours or days before being killed.

Dr. Grandin writes, “The more I observe and learn about how dogs are kept today, I am more convinced that many cattle have better lives than some of the pampered pets. Too many dogs are alone all day with no human or dog companions.”

This is absurd. Whatever we think about “pampered pets,” is it really better to spend a fraction of one’s normal life span in a feedlot or a factory farm with other depressed animals, the end point of which is a slaughterhouse? This is simply perverse thinking. How can the NYT even print such regressive nonsense?

Temple Grandin wants to hire “strong, caring” people and fire “bullying and sadistic employees” in slaughterhouses. She acknowledges the need for constant training and retraining of employees due to high turnover in the industry. In fact the turnover is often 60% in 90 days, and in any given year, 100%. The reason is simple: the work is dirty, dangerous, and psychologically scarring. Who, given a choice, wants to kill animals all day? Strong, caring people don’t last in this kind of work (which, as well as killing animals, exploits workers). If these workers really care about animals, one can only imagine the kind of distress it must cause them to be slaughtering them all day long. It is Temple Grandin’s fantasy that compassionate and empathic people do this work. It is whitewashing, it is denial, and it is contemptible—because it misleads the public into believing that animals go to their deaths cheerfully and willingly. Our friend Marti Kheel wonders, would anyone heap praise on guards who led Jews to what they thought were harmless showers?

“Ms. Grandin is in favor of almost total openness—she’s among the writers who believe that slaughterhouses should have glass walls,” writes the reviewer, before quoting Grandin: “No animal should spend its last conscious moments in a state of terror, and any visitor should be able to observe that they do not.” So if you sneak up on an animal and then kill her, that is OK? Does she not recognize that all animals, humans included, have as their very first concern the preservation and integrity of their body? Somebody who wants to kill you is not your friend, and if you know that someone is trying to do so, you are in a state of terror, and all you can think about is escape. Does it make it better that the person attempts to trick you into thinking he is about to serve you a gourmet meal rather than a terminal bang on the head?

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson is the author of the New York Times best seller *When Elephants*

Weep, as well as *The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: The Emotional Lives of Farm Animals* and the forthcoming *The Face on Your Plate: The Truth About Food*. Jeff Nelson hosts the much-viewed website Vegsource. The authors thank Stephanie Ernst for editorial input