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PETA'S REAL AGENDA

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Throughout the controversy concerning shechita at AgriProcessors, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has maintained that it is not against kosher slaughter per se.

"Those affiliated with PETA said the group is not going after kosher slaughter, but just those practices at Agriprocessors. Further, they say PETA is sensitive to issues of anti-Semitism." (<http://www.jewishaz.com/jewishnews/041203/peta.shtml>)

On the PETA website one reads, "Kosher slaughter, done correctly, is kinder and quicker than standard slaughter methods in the United States."

Benjamin Goldsmith, campaign coordinator for PETA, wrote in a letter to the editor of The Jewish Press (Jan. 7): "We at PETA agree with Rabbi Menachem Genack that shechita, done correctly, is less cruel than other slaughter methods in the U.S."

I am convinced that PETA is being disingenuous when it comes to its views on shechita. My evaluation is based on the comments of the Beis HaLevi regarding what Joseph said when he revealed his identity to his brothers in Parshas Vayigash ("I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?")

The Torah tells us that Joseph's brothers were unable to answer because they were confused! According to the Medrash, Abba Cohen Bardela said: "Woe to us from the day of judgment, woe to us from the day of rebuke. If the brothers could not stand up to the words of rebuke of Joseph, the (second) youngest of the tribes, how much more so, when God comes to rebuke each and every Jew according to what he is, as it is written: 'I will rebuke you and I will evaluate you', that he will not be able to stand up to that rebuke."

"Where," asks the Beis HaLevi, "do we find rebuke to the brothers in the words of Joseph?" They are contained in the question, "Is my father still alive?" This question appears to be superfluous, because Jacob had to be alive. If he were not, why would Judah have referred to his aged father as he attempted to get Joseph to rescind his decree that Benjamin be held in Egypt as a slave?

Judah's argument was that in all likelihood Jacob would die from anguish if Benjamin did not return. Joseph countered with the reproach, "I am Joseph whom you sold to Egypt. Is my father still alive?" Judah's argument is not valid, since Jacob did not die due to anguish over Joseph's disappearance. The very argument the brothers had used to try to convince Joseph to see their point of view is the argument they should have used before deciding to sell him. That is why the brothers were speechless. < BR>

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To me, the same is true of the words in Mr. Goldsmith's letter to The Jewish Press. He wrote that "shechita, done correctly, is less cruel than other slaughter methods in the U.S." He did not say that shechita is the most humane method of slaughtering an animal. In his mind, shechita, while not as cruel as other methods of slaughter, is nonetheless still cruel. Hence it should be eliminated.

Mr. Goldsmith and I recently exchanged several e-mails. He saw my article "Your Own Words Refute Your Claims" on my website (http://personal.stevens.edu/~llevine/your_words_refute.pdf)

and on Feb. 2 wrote, "I don't think that we are (I am) being disingenuous, as you suggest: I feel that the unnecessary killing of any animal (any living thing, for that matter) is wrong, AND it is a fact that shechita, done correctly, is the most humane form of slaughter in this country, and I wouldn't be surprised if it were the most humane in the world. Animals will continue to be slaughtered unnecessarily in this country, and because I think that is the case I think it should be done as humanely as possible."

Note that Mr. Goldsmith changed his wording from "less cruel" to "most humane." Thus, one

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might think that my evaluation of his letter in The Jewish Press was incorrect and that PETA is not, in fact, against shechita per se. However, in a subsequent e-mail, dated Feb. 24, he wrote, "PETA as an organization holds that animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment. We believe that animals have rights, such as the right to lead a life free from suffering. All of our investigations and campaigns are driven by this fundamental tenet "

So there you have it in Mr. Goldsmith's own words. PETA wants to eliminate the slaughter of all animals by any and all means. PETA's commitment to this goal is so overriding that the organization makes an analogy between the way Jews were treated during the Holocaust and the way animals are treated today.

PETA wants to stimulate contemplation of how the victimization of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and others characterized as "life unworthy of life" during the Holocaust parallels the way that modern society abuses and justifies the slaughter of animals. Just as the Nazis tried to dehumanize Jews by forcing them to live in filthy, crowded conditions, tearing children away from their mothers, and killing them in assembly-line fashion, animals on today's factory farms are stripped of all that is enjoyable and natural to them and treated as nothing more than meat-, egg-, and milk-producing "machines." (<http://www.peta.org/news/NewsItem.asp?id=2327>)

The activists of PETA even went so far as to conduct something called the "Holocaust on Your Plate" National Tour. This obscene presentation features a "Giant Graphic Display (that Shows How Today's Victims Languish in Nazi-Like Concentration Camps" and contains juxtaposed pictures of Holocaust victims and animals. This travesty can be viewed at <http://petaliterature.com/ProductImages/holocaustposters.pdf>, but I must warn the reader that the adjectives "insensitive, inappropriate, and offensive" are far too mild when used to describe it.

What does Mr. Goldsmith have to say about this disgusting campaign? In his e-mail of Feb. 22 he wrote,

I am the coordinator of PETA's Holocaust campaign, and I also coordinate this ongoing kosher slaughter investigation and subsequent campaign. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you have about these and any other PETA campaigns, or just chat. My mother's grandparents were both in concentration camps for a short time and only narrowly escaped Nazi Germany in 1939 - they lost everything. My family, my congregation and I regularly talk at length about both of these campaigns, and I am responsible for their content. My reaction to the Holocaust campaign was, at first, like yours, but as I investigated the matter further it became more and more clear that this campaign is both compelling and worthwhile.

Quite frankly, it is beyond me how it could become "more and more clear that this campaign is both compelling and worthwhile" to anyone. In my opinion, just the opposite should be true. To compare the deaths of innocent Jews who were slaughtered by the Nazis to the slaughter of animals is sacrilegious.

By the way, if PETA's goal were simply to minimize animal suffering wherever possible, there are other activities it could pursue that have nothing to do with shechita. On Feb. 23 I wrote the following to Mr. Goldsmith:

I have wondered about something else. If PETA's goal is in truth to minimize animal suffering, then I would have expected to see PETA involved in the following. Anyone who has ever witnessed or seen a video of one animal killing another in the wild has no doubt been taken aback by the cruelty of what happens. Indeed, there are times when the killer animal actually begins to consume the other animal before it is dead. Given this, and PETA's supposed desire to minimize animal suffering, I do not understand why PETA has not channeled its efforts into distributing the meat of animals that have died naturally to places where carnivores kill other animals. No one would object to this, and it would accomplish PETA's supposed goal of minimizing suffering. Can you tell me why PETA has not mounted such a campaign, but instead has put forth its Holocaust campaign which I find disgusting?

In his reply to me on Feb. 24, Mr. Goldsmith chose not to respond my question as to why PETA does not make such a campaign the focus of its activities. His decision not to respond tells me that we should not be fooled by PETA and its claims that it is not against shechita. Indeed, recently PETA launched a national ad campaign against AgriProcessors. (See <http://www.peta.org/mc/NewsItem.asp?id=6003>.)

There is no doubt in my mind that PETA would like nothing better than to eliminate all animal slaughter including shechita. All we have to do is recall the lesson the Beis HaLevi teaches us from Joseph's words to his brothers. In this light it is clear that the words "less cruel than other slaughter methods" or "most humane" when used by PETA refute their claims that "the group is not going after kosher slaughter." That may be true today, but it most surely will not be sometime down the road.

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