

Your Own Words Refute Your Claims

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Throughout the recent controversy concerning shechita at AgriProcessors PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has maintained that they are 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.jewishhaz.com/jewishnews/041203/peta.shtml>) On the PETA web site one reads, "Kosher slaughter, done correctly, is kinder and quicker than standard slaughter methods in the United States." (<http://www.goveg.com/feat/agriprocessors/>). Furthermore, Benjamin Goldsmith, Campaign Coordinator for PETA, recently wrote, "We at PETA agree with Rabbi Menachem Genack that shechita, done correctly, is less cruel than other slaughter methods in the U.S."

However, I am convinced that PETA is being disingenuous when it comes to its views concerning shechita. My evaluation is based upon the comments of the Beis HaLevi regarding what Yosef said when he revealed his identity to his brothers in Parshas Vayigash. The Torah records that he said, "I am Yosef! Is my father still alive?" The Torah tells us that his brothers were unable to answer, because they were confused! The Medrash comments: 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 Yosef, the (second) youngest of the tribes, how much more so, when G-d 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 Yosef?" They are contained in the question, "Is my father still alive?" This question appears to be superfluous, because Yaakov had to be alive. If he were not, why would Yehudah have referred to his aged father in an attempt to evoke Yosef's mercy that he drop his claim that Binyomin be held in Egypt as a slave? Yehudah's argument was that in all likelihood Yaakov would die from anguish if Binyomin did not return. Yosef countered with the reproach, "I am Yosef whom you sold to Egypt. Is my father still alive?" This argument is not valid, since Yaakov did not die due to anguish over Yosef's disappearance. The very argument that the brothers had used to convince Yosef 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.

The Beis HaLevi points out that the Medrash quoted above tells us that these are the same methods Hashem will use against us after we pass away. When it comes to prayer He will say

When your child spoke to you insincerely, one thing with the mouth, but something else in his heart, didn't you get angry with him? Your child was small, and you were only a human being. Given this, then why did you, a grown-up, pray to me, Hashem, the King of Kings, in an insincere manner? You claim that you did not give Tzedakah because you didn't have enough money, and you were struggling to make ends meet. But how is it that you always had enough money for good food and many luxurious household items? How come you never seemed to forego your annual expensive holiday? For yourself you had the money; why not for Me? You claimed that you did not have the time to learn Torah daily. You say your time was taken up with earning a living. Then how were you able to find time for reading newspapers, or for listening to music, chatting with friends and dancing at every wedding in town? You never seemed to forego those things that interested you! How is it that for your activities you found time, but not for Mine?"

Thus it will be precisely those words that one uses to defend oneself that will incriminate one.

To me the same is true of the words that Mr. Goldsmith wrote in his Letter to the Editor. 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 is, while not as cruel as other methods of slaughter, nonetheless still cruel. Hence it should be eliminated. And make no mistake; PETA wants to eliminate the slaughter of all animals by any and all means. This is clear from their web site where they have even gone so far as to make 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>)

They 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." It contains juxtaposed pictures of Holocaust victims and animals! This terrible display 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.

We should not be fooled by PETA and its claims that it is not against shechita. I have no doubt that PETA would like nothing better than to eliminate all animal slaughter including shechita. All we have to do is keep in mind the lesson that the Beis HaLevi teaches us about Yosef's words to his brothers. With this in mind it is clear that the words "less cruel than other slaughter methods" of PETA refute their claims that "the group is not going after kosher slaughter." That may be true today, but it will most surely not be true sometime down the road.