

IN RESPONSE TO "THE PETA PRINCIPLE"

In his recent article entitled, "The PETA Principle," Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for Agudath Israel, offers his thoughts on PETA's campaign for improved animal welfare standards at AgriProcessors. We appreciate Rabbi Shafran's clear concern for animal welfare and would like to address the issues that he raises.

In the wake of the slaughterhouse scandal, AgriProcessors has not been able to find a single scientist, animal welfare expert, or veterinarian who is willing to defend the shoddy slaughter practices that we documented.

PETA, on the other hand, has received an outpouring of support from leaders in the veterinary, animal welfare, and even meat industries, as well as in the Jewish community, which was shocked by the horrifically cruel treatment of animals that has been the norm at AgriProcessors for years.

Dr. Temple Grandin, consultant to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the American Meat Institute, did not mince words after viewing the tapes, stating, "I thought it was the most disgusting thing I'd ever seen." Dr. Lester Friedlander, a former USDA kosher slaughter inspector, echoed these sentiments, writing, "The footage captured by PETA represents the most egregious violation of the USDA Humane Methods of Slaughter Act (HMSA) I have ever witnessed."

Our investigator witnessed the slaughter of 278 cattle. One-fourth of these animals were clearly—and, according to scientists, inarguably—still conscious after they were dumped onto the concrete floor, roughly a minute after *shechita*. Contrary to what one might hope, for the past ten years, there have not been USDA inspectors assigned to the kill floors of any slaughterhouses. Thus there were none there during the six extended occasions over the course of seven weeks that our investigator was present.

Three weeks after our investigation was made public, AgriProcessors killed animals properly for Dr. Levinger. This is encouraging, but it also proves that AgriProcessors could have slaughtered animals humanely all along but chose not to. We guarantee that of the 150 animals slaughtered in Dr. Levinger's presence, not one stood up or showed the other signs of consciousness that we documented in so many cases.

AgriProcessors' recent willingness to invite government inspectors to its plant is like a serial killer who calls the police over to his house to watch him not kill people. Criminals may sometimes act in accordance with the law, but that does not exonerate them for their crimes. The fact that the slaughter that Dr. Levinger witnessed was so different from the slaughter that we documented clearly shows that even AgriProcessors understands that its previous actions were unacceptable.

The animal welfare community is not asking much of AgriProcessors. We are only requesting that the company adopt the widely accepted regulatory standards for religious slaughter developed by the Food Marketing Institute. These guidelines—which can be read at GoVeg.com or FMI.org—will ensure that AgriProcessors' handling and slaughter practices are in keeping with Judaism's inherent and laudable commitment to kindness and respect for animals.

It was the norm at AgriProcessors to strike animals in the face with electric prods, rip their tracheas and esophagi out while they were fully conscious, and slaughter them in a careless and haphazard manner. This can only be seen as a complete denial of Judaism's firm commitment to compassion. All Jews will surely agree that the standards that PETA recommends—along with the Rabbinic Assembly of the conservative movement and a growing number of Jews from across the spectrum of Judaism—will ensure that kosher slaughter is consistently quick and humane, as provided for in the Torah.

No one can deny that "where pain is concerned, a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." This does not mean that all animals are morally equivalent—it simply conveys that G-d designed us out of flesh, blood, and bone and that He endowed us with the same capacity to feel pain. No scientist will deny this. And anybody who watches animals struggle to stand and flee while their windpipes hang from their bloody throats will see that the animals at AgriProcessors felt immeasurable agony and terror as they fought against death.

In fact, our respect for the uniquely human ability to make complex moral calculations is central to our mission at PETA. As human beings, we have an obligation to make compassionate choices when possible. As Rabbi Shafran notes, for many, this calculation leads them to vegetarianism. For all, however, it should lead to profound moral outrage at the horrific and consistent cruelty to animals perpetrated by AgriProcessors for so many years.

Please be aware that PETA has never been duplicitous. You may disagree with our stance, but we have never exaggerated and we never would. We have no wish to hurt our credibility, and we have supplied our video and all relevant documentation and factual support to three government agencies. Any exaggeration on our part would be criminal and would subject us to forfeiture of our nonprofit status. As the world's largest animal rights organization, with more than 800,000 members and supporters and a 25-year history, we would never jeopardize our existence in this way.

After reviewing the video documentation and reading additional expert and rabbinical testimony at GoVeg.com, readers will surely agree with Rabbi Barry Schwartz of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' Task Force on Kashrut, who said, "The suffering of these animals during slaughter is sickening. Death is neither quick nor merciful. If this is kosher, then we have a big problem."

For information on Judaism and vegetarianism, please visit the Web site run by Jewish Vegetarians of North America, at www.JewishVeg.com.

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