

Shechitah and the Desecration of God's Name -- Part Two

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Shechitah and the Desecration of God's Name Part Two Crossposted with permission from Rabbi Adam Frank's Blog: Be The Change you Want to See in the World Rabbi Frank is the rabbi of Congregation Moreshet Israel in Jerusalem

At the Conservative law committee meeting where the halakhic ruling prohibiting inverted slaughter was made we were told that a commission would be created to address implementation issues. Rabbi Joel Meyers, then executive vice president of the Conservative Movement's Rabbinical Assembly (RA) under whose rubric is the law committee, told Aaron and me that the matter would surely be addressed. Months passed and there was no movement on the matter. Our inquiries went unanswered. Finally, we learned that the RA's Kashrut committee claimed the issue was one for the Social Action committee; the Social Action committee claimed it was a matter for the Kashrut committee…

We appealed to the Conservative leadership believing that if the Movement's over 1 million constituents, 750 synagogues, 10 summer camps, 2 university accredited seminaries, and rabbinical union of over 1,400 rabbis made a coordinated effort the necessary economic pressure could force the kosher meat supervising authorities (most significantly the Orthodox Union) to take the matter seriously. The CJ leadership was unresponsive.

As 100% of the supervision of kosher meat is under Orthodox authority it became clear to us that this was an authority that Conservative leadership did not want to confront on this issue.

A matter of time...

In November of 2004, an undercover video operation at the world's largest glatt kosher slaughterhouse, AgriProcessors in Postville, IA, exposed systemic animal abuse that even we were unaware was occurring. This abuse was not just in the form of inverted slaughter, under the supervision and approval of an estimated 50-70 kosher slaughterers and overseers – including agents of the OU – cows who were still fully conscious were having their tracheas (windpipe) ripped out in order to reduce blood splash.

When asked about the animal treatment she viewed on the videos, Dr. Temple Grandin answered, "...the most disgusting thing I'd ever seen. I couldn't believe it...AgriProcessors is doing everything wrong they can do wrong." (Dec. 7, 2004)

Dr. Lester Friedlander, former kosher inspector for the USDA called it, "The most egregious violations of the USDA Humane Methods Slaughter Act I have ever witnessed."

When faced with the prospect of a kosher meat scandal, Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of the Kashrus Division of the OU responded, "The Orthodox Union has said all along: AgriProcessors treats its animals humanely and meets our standards for kosher slaughter." (March 7, 2005-- if you follow this link, do note that the audit upon which Rabbi Genack relies is performed by the National Council of Chain Restaurants and the Food Marketing Institute -- not impartial agents)

The Conservative Movement's only public response was to restate its 2000 ruling against inversion pens and to call upon all kosher processing plants to employ the more humane upright holding pens.

Finally, in 2007 the production of kosher meat at AgriProcessors was shut down…due to the employment of illegal workers.

Next up: Horrific Kosher Slaughter in South America (with OU approval); the RCA's JPEG; and the Conservative Movement's Hekhsher Magen Tzedek