

# UP AND OUT

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"For I am the Lord your G-d, who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d, and you shall be Holy, for I am Holy." [11:45]*

Rashi points out that the Torah usually says that G-d "brought you out from the land of Egypt." Here, however, it says "brought you up." What is the difference?

There is a Medrash from the House of Rebbe Yishmael: if I had brought you out from Egypt only to give you the laws of what may be eaten and what may not be eaten, for this alone it would have been worthwhile. Even without all 613 commandments, just teaching that you should not eat crawling insects, dead carcasses, crab, and lobster -- this alone would have carried tremendous benefits. This alone would bring you not merely out, but up.

The laws of Kosher food are often misunderstood, even maligned. Some claim that Kosher food laws came in reaction to such things as, for example, the fact that undercooked pork can lead to a trichinosis infestation. This is perplexing at best -- trichinosis manifests itself after a one to two week incubation period. Tracing it back to pork requires a level of medical knowledge which we have not seen among ancient cultures.

No, these are spiritual matters, whether or not there are healthy side-effects. "You are what you eat" -- and what you eat can either bring you closer to G-d, or move you further away.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand repeated a story told by Rabbi Berel Wein, who said that the president of the United Jewish Appeal once told him that 80% of the charity raised by the UJA comes from a small portion of the Jewish population. The rest, said the president, "just don't care" (although, obviously, there are many who omit the UJA but donate directly to worthy organizations). Rabbi Wein reacted, "that is what eating crabs for 30 years will do to Jews." Non-Kosher food injures us spiritually -- so much so that when Rabbi Wein heard about Jews "not caring" enough to give charity, he immediately attributed it to the abandonment of keeping kosher.

An interesting support for eating kosher came from, of all places, the Washington Post. On April 10, 2001, they ran a page one expose on the treatment of cattle in modern processing plants.

Two notes before I continue. First, I have heard some say that the entire opposition to kosher slaughter is led by anti-Semites. I do not believe this. However, as the Washington Post article makes clear, those not motivated by bias are simply extremely ignorant of what actually goes on. As

a case in point, there was a rabbi (!!), obviously not a traditional one, who wrote the following: "chapter 48 of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 'Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act' exempts kosher slaughter from the normal definition of humane slaughter, which requires that 'animals are rendered insensible to pain' before slaughter. Advocates of kosher slaughter have always claimed that shechitah is the least painful method of slaughter. That seems no longer to be the case, now that the government requires 'humane' slaughter. One might have expected that Orthodox authorities would re-examine and even amend the ancient and medieval requirements of shechitah in order to adhere to the principle of causing the least possible pain to animals..."

Which leads me to my second note, before we discuss how the "Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act" translates into reality: this is not for the squeamish. Those reading this at the Shabbos table might justifiably skip over the next few paragraphs.

The Washington Post, April 10: "It takes 25 minutes to turn a live steer into steak at the modern slaughterhouse where Ramon Moreno works. For 20 years, his post was 'second-legger'..."

"The cattle were supposed to be dead before they got to Moreno. But too often they weren't..."

"On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. 'They die,' said Moreno, 'piece by piece.'"

The Post then went on to detail the definition of "humane slaughter" which certain misinformed congressmen (and rabbis) deemed superior to Kosher shechitah, so much so that the latter was "exempted." "Under a 23-year-old federal law, slaughter cattle and hogs first must be 'stunned' -- rendered insensible to pain -- with a blow to the head or an electric shock." Yes, according to the U.S. government, clubbing an animal over the head is superior to cutting the carotid artery (which causes a near-instantaneous cessation of all brain activity).

And even that clubbing does not happen. "Enforcement records, interviews, videos and worker affidavits describe repeated violations of the Humane Slaughter Act at dozens of slaughterhouses, ranging from the smallest, custom butcheries to modern, automated establishments..."

It is very simple. Only in kosher facilities do you have specially trained experts whose sole function -- and religious obligation -- is to ensure that the animal dies immediately, and a supervisor to ensure that they not only fulfill this role, but do so using a knife so sharp and so perfect that the animal never feels it.

On April 15, the last day of Pesach, the Post printed the following letter. It comes from Jonathan Javitt of Chevy Chase, MD -- and it delivers its message so well that I will merely quote it in its entirety.

"The rigid laws of kosher slaughter, in which an animal is killed instantly and painlessly by a single knife stroke across the carotid arteries by a highly trained specialist, originated at a time when pagan

practice frequently involved hacking off one limb at a time or bludgeoning an animal to death.

"The kosher slaughter laws were intended to remind humans of the need to respect all forms of life, even when taking life in order to achieve sustenance. Those laws frequently have been viewed as an anachronism and occasionally been attacked as 'inhumane' in the face of 'modern and scientific' approaches to meat processing.

"The Post suggests that we may not have evolved as far from those pagan practices as we thought and that the Talmudic reasoning of 2000 years ago may be as relevant today as it was then. Those wishing to disassociate themselves from the horror described in the article need only venture as far as their nearest kosher butcher."

Need I say more?

A Good Shabbos,  
Rabbi Yaakov Menken