

My friends, organizations tend to choose their names wisely. They choose names that give the impression that everyone would agree with the organizations' causes. For example, Rabbis for Human Rights. What kind of rabbi is not for human rights? What rabbi would not join Rabbis for Human Rights. This rabbi, for one. In my view, Rabbi's for Human Rights emphasizes criticizing Israel for how Israel deals with terrorists more than it criticizes terrorists for committing acts of terror. Agree with me or not, it is undeniable that Rabbis for Human Rights is at least somewhat controversial, and I am far from alone in not joining.

The same holds true for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. What kind of horrible person would be in favor of treating animals unethically? How can anyone, especially a Jew, be against the ethical treatment of animals?

I say especially a Jew because Judaism has a large body of law regarding the treatment of animals. It is called *tzar ba'alei chayim*, and it demands that animals be treated with kindness and never abused. Yes, it does allow us to kill and eat animals, but only certain animals and only by the most humane method possible in the eyes of Jewish law. However, as my last statement made clear, the laws of *tzar ba'alei chayim* do not elevate animals to the level of human beings. In a little while, I will explain why I believe PETA does do that.

But first, the title of this sermon is *I Agree with PETA (For Once)*. When they're right, they're right. PETA is protesting the treatment of Tilikum, the killer whale who killed his trainer, Dawn Brancheau, during a show at Sea World in Orlando. It goes without saying that this was a terrible tragedy. It raises legitimate questions about the practice of keeping orcas in captivity for entertainment purposes. But what prompted me to go public saying that for once I

agree with PETA is that for extended periods of time since the accident, Tilikum has been kept in a concrete pool only two feet longer than he is. That clearly crosses Judaism's line regarding humane treatment of animals. To immobilize an animal meant to swim free in the open sea is indeed cruel.

Why is Sea World keeping Tilikum at all? He is no longer allowed to perform. Why not release him? Sea World has an answer that is probably correct. They say that after all his years in captivity, Tilikum is unprepared to live in the wild and could not survive. I'm no expert, but from my lay perspective that seems to make sense.

Why not euthanize the animal? Would that not be preferable to a slow death in the ocean, or being kept in a tiny pool unable to even move? Here the answer is more sinister. Tilikum is being kept because he is the source of an asset valuable to Sea World. He is used as a donor for

artificial insemination of female orcas. There is a YouTube video on the topic. Do yourself a favor and don't watch it.

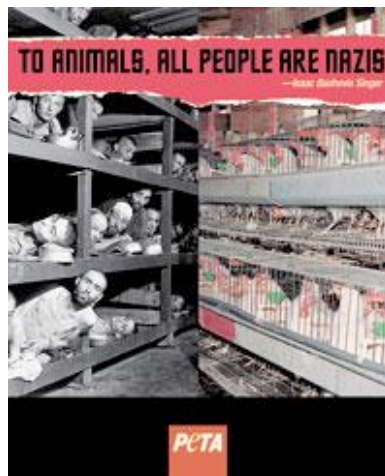
So if I agree with PETA on this issue, why am I so critical of them? I do believe they make the unforgivable error of elevating animals to the level of human beings. They are even doing so with regard to Tilikum, but let me save that piece until later. First, a history of my disagreements with PETA, given in no particular order.

First, PETA has shown itself to be insensitive to human beings. This is a sermon I urge you to view later when it is on our web site, because there it will contain some visual images. PETA recently ran a "Save the Whales" ad in Florida, trying to get people to become vegetarians. Why? Do Floridian carnivores eat whale meat? No, the whales in the PETA ad are overweight people.



Save the whales. Lose the blubber: go vegetarian. A vegetarian can be just as overweight as a carnivore. Eat french fries, pizza, and pasta all day every day and tell me how much weight you lose.

Even more offensive was PETA's Holocaust ad, designed, I'm sorry to say, by a young Jewish man. The ad featured a famous photo of Jews in a concentration camp barracks. The text read, "The Holocaust on your plate.", or "To animals, all people are Nazis."



The idea was to protest the killing of chickens for food. Allegedly, six million chickens are killed every day in America. I will never forget hearing the Jewish man who wrote that campaign being interviewed by Dennis Prager. The most unforgettable moment for me was Dennis saying that the Nazis had torn apart families, and the young foolish man replying that food producers tear apart chicken families. I promise you I have that story straight.

But the most egregious of all was what first turned me against PETA in the first place. This goes back to the intifada in 2003. Palestinians tried to blow up an Israeli bus by strapping explosives to a donkey. When the bus passed by the donkey, the detonated the bomb by remote control. Thank God no Israelis were injured. The donkey, of course, did die, and only a heartless person could fail to feel sorry for the innocent animal. Again I remind you of Jewish law and *tzar ba'alei chayim*.

Not surprisingly, PETA had something to say about the incident. PETA President Ingrid Newkirk, *who had never once protested the killing of innocent Israeli persons*, wrote to Yassar Arafat. She addressed him as “Your Excellency,” and her letter is summed up by the following excerpt:

“If you have the opportunity, will you please add to your burdens my request that you appeal to all those who listen to you to leave the animals out of this conflict?” Newkirk did not ask that Arafat stop murdering Israelis, only that he refrain from harming animals as he bombed buses and restaurants.

My friends, it was when this happened in 2003 that I came up with a better acronym for PETA. Decorum prohibits me from mentioning it explicitly tonight, but I can tell you that it stood for People Unconcerned with Terrorism in Zion.

As for Tilikum, PETA is right. He should not be forced to live out his life in a pool only two feet longer than his body. But even here, PETA does not understand the difference between an animal and a person. They have filed a lawsuit in which they claim that having orcas in captivity is illegal. Why? It violates the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which reads as follows:



*Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.*

For a completely selfish reason, part of me hopes this law suit is upheld and orcas are deemed to be slaves under the Thirteenth Amendment. It won't be long after that I have another easy sermon topic when PETA sues for the whales right to vote.