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LOCAL NEWS

Killing kosher

BY: JODIE SHUPAC

“There isn’t going to be any slaughtering tonight,” was the unlikely preface to a discussion last Tuesday night on how to kill animals the Kosher way. “The chickens look relieved,” quipped someone from the sidelines, gesturing towards six hens strutting in a backyard pen.

Roughly 15 people were clustered around a smouldering fire in a midtown backyard, their hair and faces flecked with snowy embers, to interpret Jewish texts against the backdrop of an illegal backyard chicken coop.

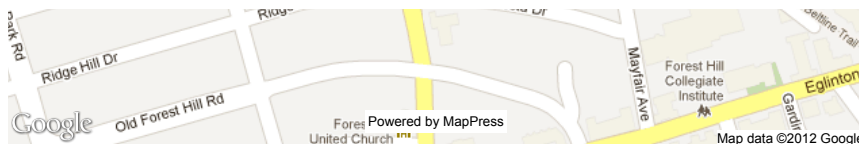
Risa Alyson Cooper, the executive director of Shores Jewish Environmental Programs, explained that the presence of the chickens (whose owner chose to remain anonymous due to legal concerns) served simply to “ground the conversation.” She and another staff member led the group in exploring the nuances of *Shechita* law, the certified kosher slaughtering technique.

The participants—who included strict vegetarians, devout Jews, and the curious—deliberated scriptural regulations like using a knife with absolutely no nicks (to provide the swiftest, most painless death) and only killing healthy animals. Debate arose about whether the practice of flipping animals on their back before slaughter, to prevent the prohibited and potentially painful “pressing” of the knife, might be stressful for the chicken.


One woman asked what, if anything, kosher law decrees about animals treated with antibiotics—apparently, preventive antibiotics are okay, but if the animal is sick and likely to die, it’s considered inedible. Ultimately, said Cooper, the group’s goal is to find the “intersection between Jewish tradition and contemporary food ethics. There are challenges, but not because the two are incompatible.”

The reflections gleaned during the discussion, and others like it, will be integrated at Shores’s Bela Farm near Orangeville, where the ecological organization hopes to eventually set up a facility for processing local kosher meat.

As the sky darkened and the guests headed home, the chickens, indeed, looked distinctly relieved.



TAGS *Bulletins, Judaism, Kosher Food, Religion, Risa Alyson Cooper, Shores Jewish Environmental Programs*

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Richard Schwartz

As president of Jewish Vegetarians of North America, I wonder, respectfully, why so many Jews are ignoring that the production and consumption of meat and other animal products arguably violate basic Jewish mandates to preserve human health, treat animals with compassion, protect the environment, conserve natural resources and help hungry people, and that animal-based diets and agriculture are causing an epidemic of diseases in the Jewish and other communities, and contributing significantly to climate change and other environmental problems that threaten all of humanity. I believe it is essential that the Jewish community address these issues and consider shifts to plant-based diets to help shift our imperiled planet to a sustainable path.

For further information about Jewish teachings on vegetarianism, please see my 150 articles and 25 podcasts and complete text of my book "Judaism and Vegetarianism" at JewishVeg.com/schwartz, and please see our acclaimed documentary "A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World" at ASacredDuty.com.

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