

Kosher Migration

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The arrest last week of 300 people at a Kosher Meat packing plant in Iowa has raised some interesting questions about Kashrut, ethics and the law. The 300 people were arrested on suspicion of "immigration law violations and identity theft"

The story first came to my attention last Tuesday, May 13 in a small article in the WSJ's U.S. Watch section. It was expanded and covered more completely in a story by Michelle Boorstein in today's Washington Post titled "Raid on Slaughterhouse May Mean Shortage of Kosher Meat."

The story raises the same questions I have been asking about the symbolic significance of these raids and their potential impact on the way Jews think about immigration.

One of the questions the article raises is "Can a company meet religious standards if it violates ethical ones?" It doesn't raise the more important question: What if the ethics and legality of the case are in conflict? In this case the ethical question that needs to be asked is "Can people be denied the right to work because of where they were born?" Jews particularly should be sensitive to this issue since they have had their freedom to live and work restricted by antisemitic governments many times in history. In recent history thousands would have been saved from the Nazis if the US and other nations had allowed the immigration of Jewish refugees.

We have reached a point in history where governments can no longer allow slavery or genocide with impunity. But governments can still restrict the right of responsible people to live and work where they choose based on where they were born. This intersection in Iowa of the rules of Kashrut and laws that restrict peoples rights based on where they were born may be a catalyst that opens the eyes of many Jews to the ethical dimension of immigration law.