

## They Save Horses, Don't They?

by Hana Levi Julian

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(Israelnationalnews.com) Cart horses will be able to step a little lighter around the Tel Aviv area after the CHAI (Live) and HaKol Chai (They All Live) animal rights groups won a long-fought battle to ban horse-drawn carts from Tel Aviv streets.

For more than a decade, the two groups have pressured the Tel Aviv municipality to regulate -- and then later ban -- the practice of horses pulling heavily-laden carts through city streets. "These animals are often starved, beaten, and made to work in the hot sun without water, and not provided with veterinary care," charged a spokesman for HaKol Chai.



The group first approached city officials with their concerns in 1999, the spokesman said, with little progress to show for their efforts. In response, CHAI repeatedly exposed incidents of horse abuse in Yafo (Jaffa), rescuing and rehabilitating the abused horses along the way.

One of the worst cases of abuse was documented in 2001 and again in 2003 in two reports about a man named Nissim, who starved and sold the beasts of burden. Nissim was filmed hacking his animals with an axe in front of each other, and selling their meat in the market as beef. The undercover video of the abuse by Nissim shot by Hakol Chai was shown on Israeli television, forcing authorities to close his place down.

Other cases of abuse of donkeys forced to pull heavy loads, including one who had his ears cut off, led the organization's attorney in 2005 to demand that the Transportation Ministry and City Council ban cart horses and donkeys altogether.

Years of grassroots organizing followed. Cart horse owners lobbied the mayor's office to counter enactment of a ban, letter-writing campaigns by Hakol Chai activists pressured city hall, and finally, a concert supporting Hakol Chai's cause in December 2008 raised awareness still further.

The straw that broke the cart horse's back, however, was a civil disobedience demonstration at the entrance to Tel Aviv city hall in June 2009, with dozens of protestors waving signs saying "Animals are not cars," "Horses and donkeys are not vehicles," "They're hurting; don't you care?" "Stop Animal Abuse" and

"Carriages and cars are a dead trend."

CHAI, an acronym for "Concern for Helping Animals in Israel", was formed in 1984 to improve the condition and treatment of Israel's animals. Hakol Chai, the group's Israeli sister charity, came later, in 2001.

"Israel, with its security and economic problems, has only recently turned its attention to animal protection issues," the group observed in a statement on its web site. "Concerned Israelis are now working hard to make the Jewish principle of *tzaar baalei chaim*, the mandate not to cause 'pain to any living creature,' a part of daily life in the country. However, many others see the need to help animals as a very low priority."

CHAI director Nina Natelson said the fight has just begun, however. "We are pleased that, at long last, there will no longer be sights of thin, injured, beaten cart horses in Tel Aviv, and we will continue pressing mayors of other cities in Israel to issue



similar bans."

The Israeli group has meanwhile become part of an international coalition of organizations called Horses Without Carriages International, which seeks to end the practice of horse-drawn carts and carriages.

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