

*Time Out Tel Aviv — June 21, 2012*

## War Horses

**They suffer abuse, neglect, and intolerable living conditions. Why don't the authorities protect the cart horses (*alte zachen* horses)?**

By Ma'ayan Yachbas



**Photo credit: Hakol Chai**

When Meir Dizengoff asked the residents of Tel Aviv in 1933, by means of notices posted throughout the city, to have pity on animals, he surely never imagined that the problem would still be with us in 2012. In his notices, Dizengoff wrote: "These days we often come across overloaded carts. The beasts pulling these carts through the unpaved streets in the heat of the day stagger under their burden, and their owners goad and spur them on cruelly with the whip, causing injuries, scratches, and bruises."

Today, almost 70 years after Dizengoff's appeal, horses and donkeys are still part of the urban landscape, dragging heavy carts and not being cared for properly. These horses and donkeys are usually used by those engaged in the old *alte zachen* profession. There is currently no law prohibiting their owners from using the horses or donkeys for work, and furthermore, existing

Ministry of Transport regulations still define animals harnessed to carts as vehicles. There are animal welfare regulations defining the obligations of the owners of horses used in the *alte zachen* trade. However, unlike the bylaws for the supervision of dogs and cats, which are enforced by the local authority by means of its inspectors, these regulations can only be enforced by Israel's police and the Ministry of Agriculture, and so, in practice, there is almost no enforcement. Efforts are being made in Tel Aviv to eradicate the phenomenon, and some four years ago, 20 signs were erected in the south of the city prohibiting the passage of *alte zachen* horses. But these signs were pulled up, and they were never replaced.

In addition, keeping a horse in the city requires a permit, and according to the municipality, currently no one holds such a permit. On the other hand, riding a horse within the city limits in a manner that does not endanger others does not require a permit. In practice, even though the Tel Aviv municipality has not given out permits of this kind for many years, we still see carts drawn by horses and donkeys throughout the city, especially in the south.

"These peddlers are breaking the law, and as far as we know there is no enforcement of this matter. A situation has arisen in which there is no supervision of the way in which the horse or donkey is raised and kept, and because the Tel Aviv municipality does not apply the law to horses and donkeys as it does to pets, the horses and donkeys 'fall between the cracks.' On the one hand, Tel Aviv municipality rightly does not want horses and donkeys within the city limits, and therefore does not give out permits, but in practice it does not enforce the existing law, and as a result there is a kind of no-man's land in which the donkeys and horses are to be found," they explain at Hakol Chai, an association promoting education and action on behalf of animals, which is waging the battle against this phenomenon.

A few months ago, the association founded the "*Alte Zachen* Club," a Facebook project in which the public is called upon to document *alte zachen* horses in real time and posts the pictures to its Facebook page.

"One of the aims of the project is to prove to the skeptical regulatory bodies, which tend to view this as a practice of the past, that the problem is still alive and kicking, tormenting and unanswered," they say at the association, and add: "As a result of the project, our call center receives many complaints from frustrated residents, who have complained in the past to the municipal call center but now choose to refer their complaints to us as a result of the helplessness they have come up against. This is a cruel practice that in no way belongs to our times, which should be totally eradicated from city streets in order to prevent the callous mistreatment of animals, and sooner rather than later."

The Tel Aviv Municipality says in response: "The municipality acts to the best of its ability to eradicate the abuse of animals, including confiscating horses in a poor state of health. The municipality inspectors hand out fines to the owners of animals kept in inappropriate conditions, and to those who treat their animals in an illegal manner. It should be noted that the number of people keeping these animals in Tel Aviv-Jaffa has decreased by around 80% over the past five years, thanks to effective enforcement."