



## THE HAKHEL COMMUNITY AWARENESS BULLETIN

Reviewed by HaRav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita

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The purpose of this Bulletin is to alert the public regarding timely issues which raise serious shailos, so that the informed person can ask his Rav the right questions. This Bulletin is not intended to provide the answers to these issues. It is intended to heighten each member of our community's awareness of important shailos in our community, **and to receive his own p'sak on each of these issues.**

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1. **Peiros Shv'iis.** This year, 5761, is a shmittah year in Israel. As a result, most poskim hold that fruits and vegetables grown and sold by Jews in Israel should not be eaten even by Jews in America. Yet, on the streets of Avenue J, Avenue M, Coney Island Avenue and Kings Highway, in various fruit stores and supermarkets, marked and unmarked fruits and vegetables which are shmittah year produce (including, for example, melons, oranges, persimmons, peppers, tomatoes, squash and cucumbers) are being sold freely. In fact (according to the February 2001 issue of *Kashrus Magazine*) some "Holland peppers" (a generic name) are not from Holland—but from Israel. Additionally, we have learned that a very large percentage of **flowers** sold in our area are imported from Israel, as well. Many types of flowers raise the same shv'iis issues as fruits and vegetables. Let the buyer beware! If you have mistakenly purchased any of these fruits, vegetables or flowers, or are not sure whether you have, consult with your Rav.

2. **"Kosher" Liquors.** Have you ever noticed and wondered why there is such a lack of disclosure on a liquor bottle as compared to a food item? All you see is that it is a product of Scotland (or Russia)...and not much else. According to a recognized kashrus expert in this

field, the liquor industry is shrouded in mystery because of the strong lobbying efforts that the industry has at its disposal. Because many of the finer single malt scotches are aged in casks previously used for different types of wines, several popular single malt liquors are not recommended by kashrus experts. This is not to say that such products are not kosher. It is merely to state that halachic issues are involved which require inquiry. Additionally, all *liqueurs* require hashgacha because of problematic ingredients, such as wine, flavorings, or even non-kosher glycerin.

Among those single malt scotches NOT RECOMMENDED are Glenfiddich, Glenmorangie (those aged in port wood casks), The McCallen and Balvini Double Barrel. Some of the very popular *liqueurs* that are NOT RECOMMENDED are Southern Comfort, Kahlua (not bearing the OU), Bailey's Irish Cream and Meyer's Spiced Rum. Additionally, liquors NOT RECOMMENDED to the Kosher consumer include Canadian Club Classic and Absolut Citron-Flavored Vodka. Call your kashrus agency or speak to your Rav before buying schnapps for your next simcha.

3. **Ribis Alert.** Jewish law forbids Jews to charge or pay interest on loans. Emigrant Savings Bank (Avenue M and East 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Flatbush Avenue, other New York City locations) is owned by a corporation which has only two shareholders—both of whom are non-observant Jews. The bank does not have a Heter Iska, a legal document which provides for a partnership relationship, rather than a borrower-lender relationship. We contacted Emigrant's legal department, and asked if they would provide for a Heter Iska relationship with their Jewish clientele. It does not appear that they are interested in doing so at this time. Does this mean that you cannot maintain an account or CD there, or take out any kind of loan (such as checking account overdraft, mortgage or home equity loans) from the Emigrant? Ask your Rav.

4. **Electric Shaver Alert.** Please be advised that recent technology has presented problems with the use of many current electric shavers. Although many great Poskim, beginning with the Chofetz Chaim zt'l prohibited modern shavers, most of the American frum community that shaved relied upon the opinion of Harav Hagaon Moshe Feinstein zt'l. Reb Moshe permitted many of the shavers with the exception of specific shavers that used blades that he determined were sharp and were thus prohibited. Today, according to many Rabbonim, many electric shavers utilize sharper blades than in the past, thereby raising serious halachic shailos. It is well known, for example, that Harav Hagaon Dovid Feinstein shlita feels that even according to the opinion of his father zt'l, many modern shavers should not be used. Rav Dovid Feinstein has advised that, in his opinion, there is no widely available shaver that can be purchased and used as-is. In his opinion, the only widely available shaver that is still permitted is the Norelco Lift and Cut model shavers – **but only after you remove the lifters.**<sup>1</sup> There are other models such as the Norelco Rota 2 shaver that he permitted, but the model has recently been discontinued. The ConAir and Windmere companies produced a model of triple header shavers that he holds are acceptable, but they are not widely available. It is important to stress that all foil and screen shavers may also raise halachic issues.<sup>2</sup> Your Rav must be consulted. In Judaism, ignorance is *not* bliss.

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<sup>1</sup> The Norelco Lift and Cut shaver uses a thin metal sheet that is attached to each individual blade. The triple header has three separate heads that contain many individual blades. The metal sheet on the blades can easily be removed by taking a screwdriver or other object and simply breaking off each sheet—separating it from its individual blade. (Different models have different numbers of blades.) If there are 15 blades, then this process would be repeated 15 times until all of the lifters are removed from each blade of the three heads. The shavers should continue to be effective after removal of the lifters.

<sup>2</sup> According to Rav Dovid Feinstein, they are all prohibited.

5. **The Hot Shabbos Kiddush**. Have you ever wondered how the Jewish waiters or even the non-Jews can do so much melacha on Shabbos at a hot kiddush? For example, are we cautious enough to make sure the following is not happening:

- Plugging in urns?
- Bringing in food and flowers forgotten by the caterer before Shabbos?
- Stirring cholents?
- Putting food on, and returning food to, the fire?
- Adjusting knobs on the cholent oven?

**Have you wondered why there is no mashgiach at a hot Shabbos kiddush? Maybe there should be.**

Consumer awareness can bring a higher kashrus standard to our community.

6. **Hairdressing**. Recently, male hairdressers have begun operating in certain religious areas. Because woman hairdressers are available, religious young ladies should take care to use only females, since hairdressers often physically contact their customers during the hairdressing appointment.

7. **Shatnes Alerts**. According to the International Association of Professional Shatnes Laboratories (PSL)—the umbrella organization of 13 shatnes laboratories worldwide, consumers should be aware of the following alerts:

a. Do not have your garments tested where purchased, unless the testing is done by representatives of your local shatnes lab **and** the testing is verified by a call to the local lab. In-store garment testing in heimishe and other stores in Brooklyn and Manhattan has proven to be invalid and unreliable – even when an apparently legitimate “shatnes-free” label is placed inside the garment. Only local certified shatnes laboratories should be used to test garments. Roshei Yeshivas and Rabbonim, including HaRav Malkiel Kotler, HaRav Avrohom Bick, and HaRav Shmuel Kamenetzky have endorsed this instruction. The phone number of the Flatbush Shatnes Lab is (718) 382-5689.

b. The PSL also publishes, free of charge, a quarterly publication which provides consumers with current information concerning shatnes issues. For more information about the problems described above or to order the quarterly publication, please call 1-800-SHATNES.

8. **Liquid Cough Syrups, Pain Relievers and Anti-Histamines**. A nationally recognized kashrus agency has recently released the following alert:

“The public should be aware that many liquid medicines such as cough syrups, pain relievers and anti-histamines contain non-kosher ingredients. They are present in substantial amounts and are generally pleasant-tasting and thus are neither batel nor pogum. As such it is assur to use them unless taken to protect against a life-threatening condition. Common opinion that permits their use is based, by and large, on misinformation. We are fortunate that comparable kosher products have become available to us, which are produced under Rabbinical supervision and are of the same degree of effectiveness as the finest alternate non-kosher medications... No one should assume that anything else is permitted without first asking a competent Rav... Heaven forbid that the issuer of ‘prohibited foods which clog the heart’ should be taken lightly, and allowed to be condoned by public apathy.”

9. **Brachos Confusion**. There appears to be some level of unnecessary confusion regarding brachos over commonly-eaten foods. Below are some examples:

a. **Licorice**. According to authoritative seforim on Hilchos Brachos, the proper brocha combination on licorice is *shehakol/borei nefashos* and not *borei minei mezonos/al hmichya*—even if flour is listed as an ingredient, because the flour is tofel. Please consult with your Rav.

b. **Cereals**. Corn Flakes, depending on how prepared, can be either a *borei pri ha'adomo* or a *shehakol*. Additionally, many cereals have mixed ingredients, including “wheat gluten.” If you are unsure of the proper brocha, ask your Rav or the kashrus agency supervising the product. It is irresponsible to guess or to shrug your shoulders and make a *shehakol*. There are answers to all our questions. We must ask our Rabbonim.

c. **Hydroponically Grown Produce**. Our neighborhood fruit stores and supermarkets are providing us with hydroponically grown vegetables, such as lettuce and tomatoes. Because the signs in the markets may not indicate that the vegetables are hydroponic, consumers should take care to check the produce boxes. These hydroponically grown vegetables are also prevalent at smorgasbords. According to authoritative seforim on Hilchos Brachos, a *bore pri ha'adomo* on hydroponically grown vegetables is not appropriate according to most poskim – (unless grown in an “Aleí Katif” manner). Instead, the proper bracha is *shehakol*. Ask your Rav if he concurs. If he does, care should be taken when purchasing at fruit stores and when eating at smorgasbords to determine the source of the vegetables so that the proper bracha is being recited.

10. **Strawberries, Raspberries, Blackberries**. One of the most respected U.S. kashrus organizations has recently provided the following guidelines to us in a **Special Kashrus Alert**:

“Due to new increased levels of insect infestation in strawberries, we find it necessary to make the public aware that fresh **strawberries** may l'chatchila be used **only** when prepared as follows:

1. Remove the green leaves, being careful not to cut so deeply so as to make a hole in the top of the strawberry.
2. Immerse the strawberries for a few minutes in cold water containing some concentrated unscented dishwashing liquid (such as Ultra Dawn or Ultra Joy).
3. Agitate the strawberries for a few seconds in the soapy water.
4. Rinse each strawberry carefully and meticulously under a stream of cold running water. Run your fingers down the entire surface of the strawberry while rinsing.

Strawberries from **Mexico** should be avoided.

**Raspberries** and **Blackberries** are extremely infested and several major kashrus organizations have totally discontinued their use in their certified establishments.”

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Do you know about something important you would like to make your community aware of? Is there something you would like to help your community with? Let us know by faxing to Hakhel at (212) 647-8921. The Bulletin will B'EH appear periodically, as necessary. Thank you.