



## 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. **Supermarkets.** It has come to our attention that many of the larger "kosher" supermarkets do not have any Hashgocha, or independent supervisory agency, that confirms the kashrus of the products they sell. Some supermarkets have limited Hashgocha on their meat section, take-out section and/or bakery section. There may even be different Hashgachos on the different supermarket sections (!). As a result, highly questionable imported and domestic items may be found in stores owned by otherwise Torah-observant Jews. No one should assume that the kashrus of candies, gums, breath-fresheners or cookies from overseas are reliable based upon a fine-looking emblem in Hebrew touting itself as "Kosher LeMehadrin". Instead, one should ask his Rav about the reliability of the product. Similarly, one must be wary of fruits, vegetables and canned products which may come from Eretz Yisroel and are peiros shviis or have problems with terumos and maasros. Additionally, unwrapped candies are often repackaged and sold by the pound in these supermarkets. The repackaging may be done without supervision and by a Non-Jew. Care should be taken to confirm that the labeling on the product as to manufacturer and contents is indeed accurate.

2. **Tevilas Kelim.** With the introduction into the community of mikvaos for kelim in supermarkets and department stores, we urge the consumer to confirm the continued kashrus of these mikvaos by asking the store owner or manager whether the mikva is under Rabbinical supervision. When toveling, the following halachos should be kept in mind:

- a) Minors (boys under 13 and girls under 12) are not n'eeman to tovel, unless an adult is "omed al gabav".
- b) One cannot tovel a k'li in parts (i.e., a large dish or pot cannot be toveled by dipping one side and then the other). Once again, this tevila would be invalid, even b'dieved.

c) One should not tovel a cup, glass, pot, urn or other electric containers upside-down, even when completely immersed in water. A vacuum of air is created between the inverted bottom of the utensil and the water, causing the bottom of the kli to remain dry and not be toveled. (You can confirm this by filling your sink with water and placing a cup, with a tissue in the bottom of cup, in the sink upside-down – the tissue will remain dry!)

3. **Dangerous Noise Levels at Simchas.** It has come to our attention that there is much medical evidence that loud music amplification at simchas can severely impact short-term and long-term hearing. Rabbi Dovid Feinstein Shlita and other Rabbonim have been consulted about what we can do to deal with this important issue. Further details B'ezras Hashem will follow in our next Bulletin.

In the interim, if you are making or attending a simcha, please feel free to contact us for further clarification of this serious issue.

4. **What to Ask.** Ongoing developments in the areas of institutional kashrus have created many difficult shailos relating to kashering kitchens and utensils at non-kosher hotels (such as the Hilton, Sheraton, Marriott, etc.) and non-kosher catering halls, which are kashered for each individual yeshiva dinner or affair (such as Astoria Manor, El Caribe, Crest Hollow, etc.). It is for this reason that you may notice many more people at these affairs passing up the special opportunity for “prime ribs” or duck. This may not be necessary. We have asked kashrus experts in the field what questions a person should ask the Rav Hamachshir of the affair to determine whether it is appropriate to eat there. The following is a list of important issues which frequently arise, and which you should ask about:

- a) Does the hotel or catering hall have more than one kitchen that is operating during the time that the kosher affair is taking place?
- b) Are the keilim B'nei Yoman – i.e., were the utensils kashered within twenty-four hours after non-kosher use?
- c) Is the caterer using the hotel's glasses and showplates?
- d) Do you have a mashgiach whose specific job it is to make certain that kashered and not-kashered utensils are not inadvertently exchanged?
- e) In your opinion, can I eat here l'chatchila?

5. **Brochos Confusion.** At this time of year, we are give the almost-weekly opportunity to make the appropriate brocha on lightning and thunder. What is the proper brocha over thunder? Do you make two brochos when you see lightning and hear thunder? Must you see the actual lightning bolt to make the brocha or is the illumination enough? Can you make a brocha over thunder even if it is not raining? Can you make a brocha over lightning without thunder? Can you stand inside your house and make the brocha or must you be outside? Ask your Rav for clarification, so as to avoid, *chas vashalom*, making the wrong brocha or a brocha l'vatala. Let us utilize the golden opportunities we have to properly declare Gevuras Hashem!

6. **“Lace” Cookies.** There appears to be some confusion as to the proper brocha over “lace” cookies. The brocha probably will depend upon each individual bakery's composition of the cookies. One packaged haimishe lace cookies product sold lists “cake flour” as the fifth ingredient. We asked the Rav Hamachshir what the proper brocha was on these cookies. His response was that the cake flour was merely l'dabek (for binding purposes), and that the proper brocha is shehakol. Consult with your Rav if you require further clarification on this issue or as to any particular product.

7. **Tortilla Chips.** Several haimishe companies produce tortilla chips which in no way resemble corn. Yet, the label may read “100% whole white corn”. Does this mean that the correct brocha is ha'adomo and not shehakol? The individual Rav Hamachshir must be consulted. Note that most corn chips are made of ground corn and that their brocha is shehakol. The same may be true for “whole white corn” tortilla chips. We must accustom ourselves to reading labels. As always, ask your Rav for a final p'sak.

8. **What's the Hashgocha?** Sunkist Fruit Punch is a drink produced by the Pepsi Cola Company. We called the Rav Hamachshir on most Pepsi products, but he was unaware as to who was the Rav Hamachshir on Sunkist Fruit Punch. One important lesson to draw from this episode is that we cannot assume that just because a company may have one general hashgacha, all of the products made by its subsidiary companies have the same hashgacha. This is also evident in the case of New York area Coca-Cola plants being under the OU Hashgocha, while Minute-Maid juices (a Coca-Cola subsidiary) bear the Triangle K (Rabag).

9. **Mashgiach-less Affairs.** There has been recent consumer awakening to the lack of kashrus standards when individual mashgichim are not present at catered kiddushim, sheva brochos, brisim and vorts. Instead, a “Shomer Shabbos” waiter is relied upon to know Hilchos Shabbos and Kashrus, and, in some instances, to supervise non-Jews (and know Hilchos Amira L’Akum). As far as we know, these waiters do not need to “pass any tests” to serve in such capacity. Indeed, at a recent unsupervised fleishig bris in Flatbush, the individual waiter who brought and served the unsealed cold cut trays at the affair, who sported a large black yarmulke, white shirt and black pants innocently was asked why his payos were cut so high above his bone. His response was that he “did not believe in organized religion.” It is up to the ba’alei simcha to insist on the presence of a mashgiach at their simcha. Both hosts and guests can avoid many issurim by proper supervision of the preparation of already kosher food.

10. **Tefilas Haderech.** There are many opinions as to if and when to recite Tefilas Haderech when traveling by plane. We understand that according to many poskim, the preferred time to recite Tefilas Haderech is on the runway, as the plane is speeding up for takeoff, since these are the most dangerous moments in air travel. Ask your Rav for a p’sak.

11. **Daily Kiddush Hashem.** Each one of us is given the opportunity to sanctify our existence by being M’Kadesh Shem Shomayim in our daily life at home, on the street, while shopping and while at work. We recently heard of one baal habayis who kept his own private “Kiddush Shem Shomayim Log”. Men have two additional, special opportunities to be M’Kadesh Hashem every day. The *Mishna Berurah* (Orach Chaim 125:4) writes “One must apply his mind ardently when he says Kedusha to sanctify Hashem ... through the merit of this, Hashem will rest His Holiness upon him from Above. (During Kedushah,) one should have in mind to fulfill what is stated ‘...And I will be sanctified among the Children of Israel (“V’nikdashti b’soch B’nei Yisroel”).’ The Arizal would urge this strongly.” Translation courtesy of the Feldheim edition, Volume I(D), page 345. We urge those who can, to read the electrifying original Hebrew text of the *Mishna Berurah* relating to Kedusha (125: 4,5).

12. **What's the Answer?** A recent non-observant woman visited a local religious neighborhood to go shopping and asked the following question: “Why can I not go around in my uncovered hair? These wigs are so gorgeous I am sure they must be much more beautiful than the woman’s natural hair!” This is a question which we must be prepared to answer to our non-religious colleagues. If you are unsure of how to answer, please consult with your Rav. For a thorough explanation of the concept of “sheitel,” see *Oz V’hadar Levusha* pages 241-254. This is an English sefer written by Rabbi Falk of England and published by Feldheim Publishers.

13. **Tznius Quiz.**
- Starting at what age must girls follow the laws of tznius (covered elbows, knees, etc.)?
  - Must knees be covered even while a woman is sitting down?
  - Is it permissible to wear skirts made with slits present for the purpose of making it easier to walk?

If you have any lack of clarity on the answers to any of these questions, ask your Rav.

14. **Portobello Mushrooms.** The high quality Portobello Mushrooms, which have a meaty taste, have a brown fan-like underpart which often houses insects. Accordingly, prior to use, this underpart should be thoroughly cleaned away with a spoon or similar instrument.

**REMINDER:** The alert regarding strawberries, raspberries and blackberries by major kashrus organizations remains in effect (see our first Bulletin).

15. **Moving Mail on Shabbos.** According to *The Halachos of Muktzah* by Rabbi Yisroel Pinchas Bodner Shlita (page 142) “Items which cannot be read are muktzah unless such items are also normally used as utensils.... According to all opinions, where the letter is important, and one would not use it as a bookmark, etc. for fear of damage or loss, it is muktzah. It is suggested that one should not move mail on Shabbos or Yom Tov. In cases of great necessity, a competent Halachic authority should be consulted.”

Ask your Rav for his P’sak on what to do with your mail.

16. **Important Phone Numbers.** If you have a shaila and your Rav is unavailable, or for other community services, the following numbers may be used (toll charges may apply):

- 1) **Mechon L’hoiroa** (Available **24 hours** in the case of an emergency) **1-845-HALACHA**. Dayanim of the Beis Din of Mechon L’hoiroa can answer your shaila in all areas of Halacha.
- 2) **Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation Shmiras Halashon Shaila Hotline** (Hours: **Monday – Thursday, Motzei Shabbos, 9-10:30PM**) **718-951-3696**. Poskim answer your real-life shailos in Shmiras Halashon relating to shidduchim, family, business, etc.
- 3) **Choshen Mishpat Shaila Hotline** (Hours: **Sunday-Thursday, 3-6PM**) **1-973-614-0053**. Dayan Wolfson Shlita of the Passaic Community Choshen Mishpat Kollel is available to answer your shailos.
- 4) **National Jewish Referral Network** (“Where to Turn When You Don’t Know Where to Turn”), a project of Agudath Israel of America (Regular Business Hours) **212-797-7399**.
- 5) **Project Chazak**-Free Inspirational Ten-Minute Shiur (Courtesy of Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation) (Recording Available 24Hours Daily) **718-258-2008**.
- 6) **Hashovas Avida: 1-800-LOST-116**.

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Note: **We received a very positive response to our first two Bulletins and we thank all those who have given us chizuk in this matter.** If you would like a copy of our previous two Bulletins please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each Bulletin requested to Hakhel, 1327 East 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn, NY 11210

**5762 Gemach List.** Hakhel’s 5762 Flatbush/Boro-Park Gemach List, containing over 150 Gemachs of all kinds (simcha, clothing, baby needs, kallah needs, services, money and others) is now available. For a free copy, mail a self-addressed, stamped envelope to our address above.

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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 writing to Hakhel at the address above. The Hakhel Bulletin will B’EH appear periodically, as necessary. Thank you.