

## Kashrus Confusion in Brooklyn

By Dr. Yitzchok Levine

A number of years ago a friend of mine, who was at that time residing in Connecticut, called seeking my assistance. "My wife and I are in Boro Park and would like to get something to eat. However, there are so many different *hashgochos* that we have no idea what is reliable. What should we do?"

To be frank, I was not certain what to answer him. Not only are there many different organizations and rabbonim giving *hashgochos* in the various neighborhoods in Brooklyn, but there are even some restaurants with no supervision that claim to be kosher according to the strictest of standards. Added to this is the plethora of caterers and catering halls that have many different supervisions. Indeed, what is one to do? How is one to decide where to eat and where not to eat?

A number of years ago I was invited to the weddings of the daughters of a Rosh Yeshiva and a Rav. I called both establishments and was told that they had no supervision. The response to my inquiry by one caterer was, "You are welcome to come here and look around." The other caterer told me that he gave his own supervision and therefore did not need any other supervision. He then went on to add, "And, if you think that I need supervision, you are not a *maimon*."

Surprised at these responses, I spoke with each of these *rabbonim*, pointing out what I had found out. Their initial responses were, "He must have supervision." I reiterated what I had found out, and was told that they would look into the matter. In the end, the Rov and the Rosh Yeshiva each brought in a *mashgiach* who supervised their *simchos*.

The fact of the matter is that before we go to a *simcha* or eat in a restaurant or a hotel we should call up the establishment and ask some questions, such as: "Who gives your supervision? Is the owner observant? Is there a full-time *mashgiach* on the premises? Whose meat and chicken do you use? Where do the baked goods come from? What is the story with checking vegetables?"

The reader may think this is a bother, and it is. Perhaps those making *simchos* could help out somewhat by listing on the invitation who supervises the place where the *simcha* will be held. Also, the *baal simcha* could make sure that at a *kiddush* or other event in a shul a sign be posted providing the name of the caterer and the person or organization that is supervising this event.

Different organizations and different rabbonim that give supervision have different standards. Unless one investigates, how is one to know if the standards of the establishment coincide with one's own standards at home? Relying on the fact that others, even those considered to be strictly observant, eat or make *simchos* at any particular establishment does not guarantee that your particular standards are being adhered to at this place.

I believe that one of the reasons why we have *kashrus* confusion in Brooklyn is because people do not make inquiries. The public has to demand high standards. If they do, then the supervisory organizations may well end up agreeing upon guidelines for products that virtually everyone is comfortable with. Indeed, it could even lead to the replacement of all of these organizations by one umbrella communal organization that all of us feel we can trust.

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