

Are You Partially Responsible for the Shevach Scandal?

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Most certainly virtually everyone will answer a resounding “No!” to this question. After all, many reading this probably never had anything to do with Shevach Quality Meats. How then could any of us who never had any connection to this company be in any way responsible for the scandal?

A scandal like the one that unfortunately occurred with Shevach Meats does not occur in a vacuum. To some extent it is related to the environment within which it occurred. Therefore, I do believe that many of us must share in some of the “blame” for what happened. Let me explain.

All too often those of us who live in large observant communities are complacent when it comes to kashrus. How many times have you eaten at a Kiddush or other simcha without knowing who the caterer is or whose supervision the caterer has? Well, you say, “I know the person making the Kiddush, and he and his family are upstanding, observant people. What else do I have to know?” However, the person making the simcha may have chosen the caterer because someone else used him. I have personally asked people making a simcha some questions about the food being served, and often they really have no concrete knowledge save that “Everyone else eats there.”

“Everyone else eats there,” should not be good enough, because it gives the message to those in the food business that the public is not very vigilant when it comes to kashrus. They are satisfied by words like “Glatt,” Cholorov Yisroel,” Chassidishe shechita,” and “Heimish.” In truth, what are the standards behind these buzz words? Do you know? Are they the same as your standards? Is the caterer using products that you use in your home? Is he using meat and chicken that you use at home? What is its source? What is the story with the vegetables that are being served? Etc.

If you do not inquire, then how are you to know? Furthermore, if you do not inquire, then you send the message, at least implicitly, that you really are not very concerned about the kashrus. Someone once wrote to me the following cynical remark: “People are not concerned with whether something is kosher or not. They are only concerned that it has a hechsher.”

Caterers spend good money for supervision. By checking with them about their supervision you at least send the message that you care about kashrus and that the money the caterer spends for supervision is well spent. Similar remarks can be made for those

selling meats and poultry. If the public showed more concern about kashrus, then (hopefully) those involved in the food business would be more concerned about making sure that everything is done properly.

There is another aspect of this scandal that is disturbing. How could a person who appears to be a Frum Jew do such a thing? Such actions are totally inconsistent with being an observant Jew. Yet, it happened, and it has happened before. I doubt that any of us will be surprised if it happens again.

Such an action, aside from being completely against Halacha, is totally dishonest. An honest person would never do such a thing. Therefore, it is most important that we instill honesty in our youngsters. Unfortunately, I do not see this being consciously done as part of the educational process that our children undergo.

I am convinced that every yeshiva should have an honor system. When people hear this, they often react with, "Good idea, but it will never work." When I point out that I teach at a secular college that has had an honor system since 1908, they reply, "Well, it may work at your school, but it will not work in yeshivas." I can only wonder why not. Is it because the culture of "dishonesty" when it comes to academics is so pervasive amongst our yeshiva students? If so, then we are in real trouble, because being dishonest in one area often spills over to being dishonest in other areas.

The slogan of the Stevens Institute of Technology Honor System is, "The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out." Of course, we know that there will come a time when whatever we do will be found out.

Elul is here. Rosh Hashanah is not far away!