

## Feature

## Catering to Kashrus Needs at Simchos

By Hershel Kahn

Is a *baal simchah* responsible for the kashrus of the food served at his *simchah*, or can he rely on the caterer's kashrus certification?

In order to answer this question, we need to take a look at what goes on inside the caterer's kitchen.

When we sit at a festively set table with a sumptuous serving of food in front of us, do we stop to think how many stages of preparation the food has gone through before it reaches our plates? Do we ever stop to inquire who oversaw the entire preparation process to ensure that everything was done according to Torah requirements?

This topic can be narrowed down to several questions, which we hope to address throughout the article:

• Do kashrus problems crop up in a catering kitchen?

• If so, what problems commonly turn up, and what are other possible problems that may occur, albeit less frequently?

• Doesn't a kashrus certification assure us that these problems won't arise?

• What can a *baal simchah* do to ensure the highest possible level of kashrus at his *simchah*?

We'll answer the first question with the following: Ask any housewife who's involved in food preparations in her home if she ever has *she'eilos* when dealing with food. Whether it is a question about milk and meat, or insect-checking, or whether a certain *hechsher* is reliable, every G-d-fearing *balabusta* will answer in the positive — of course *she'eilos* crop up while preparing food!

If this is true in a private kitchen, how much more so in a commercial kitchen, where non-Jewish employees run things in the systematic manner they're used to. It is obvious that problematic scenarios may arise under such circumstances. A great deal of caution must be exercised to avoid pitfalls.

In response to the second question about which problems might arise, we will try to touch upon the various possibilities that may have to be dealt with in a commercial kitchen:

**Checking for insects.** In every kitchen, many of the foods that are used require checking for insects, some *mid'Oraisa* and some *mid'Rabbanan*. Who is in charge of checking for insects? And if the kitchen uses brands that are considered to be insect-free, who testifies that the said certification is reliable enough, given the reality that for each insect one ingests, one transgresses numerous Torah prohibitions?

**Meat and milk.** Are dishes conspicuously labeled, in order to prevent mix-ups between meat and dairy dishes? Are the non-Jewish workers warned not to bring dairy food into the meat kitchen, and vice versa? Is there a clear demarcation in the refriger-

## Responsibilities of The Ba'al Simcha

At a Simcha on shabbos

- 1) Before the Zemen of Hadlokas Nieros make sure that all food is properly placed on the blech/warmer according to Halacha, all food requiring seals are properly sealed or locked securely.
- 2) If there is a thermostat on the warmer to control the heat, make sure the dail is covered before Shabbos.
- 3) Any time that the guest leave the hall (leaving the waiters by themselves\*) make sure that all fish, meat etc., are properly sealed by the special seals prepared for this purpose.
- 4) During the meal there should be a reliable Shomer Torah Umitzvos going in and out the kitchen, keeping a watchful eye on the waiters, so that no problems occur to food through Chilul Shabbos.
- 5) If you see anything suspicious during the simcha, please notify us, by leaving a message on our Tel. line 1877.KASRUTH (527.7884) and we'll try to take care of it.

זכות שמירת קדושת המאכלים וקדושת השב"ק,  
נוכה כלנו יחד לאכול מסעודת לוייתן ביום שכולו שבת.

\*One may not rely upon Jewish waiters, unless personally known for reliability.

erator between meat and dairy foods? Do the employees wash their hands or change gloves in between handling meat and milk?

**Keeping meat and fish separate.** Is it ensured that meat is not prepared on a table that's dirty from fish? Are dishes or utensils that have meat residue on them used for fish? Do the employees change gloves or wash their hands in between meat and fish?

**Bishul Akum.** Who ensures that a Jew ignites the flame on the stovetop? Perhaps the non-Jewish chef who entered the kitchen early in the morning knew that the food had to be ready at a certain hour, and thus could not wait until the *mashgiach* came to turn on the gas. And if a non-Jewish chef is the one cooking, perhaps the flame went out and he reignited it.

**Products that require a seal.** When a non-Jew delivers fish and meat, who checks for the proper seal and certification? If all the Jewish workers leave the kitchen and only non-Jews are left there, does the meat become forbidden on the premise that it was "entrusted into the hands of a gentile" (*basar shehifkid b'yad goy*)?

**Verifying hechsherim.** When a distributor makes a delivery, who goes through all the products to check if they have proper kashrus certification? I heard from an expert *mashgiach* that pitfalls in this area are common. This *mashgiach* once instructed another *mashgiach* in a certain establishment that whenever an order would arrive, he should carefully go through *each and every* can and container to check its certification. This is indeed what the *mashgiach* did.

When an order once arrived of forty packages of french fries, he examined each one separately. Thirty-nine of them were fine; the fortieth package was found to have been fried in non-kosher oil!

An alarming scenario such as this highlights the need for extreme vigilance.

The preceding examples represent only a few of the many possible snags that may occur during food preparation by a catering company. It is up to each one of us to derive the right lesson and give the matter more thought. As one prominent *mashgiach* succinctly said: "Everything [problematic] that can happen does actually happen" (if there is no trustworthy supervision over it).

Onward to question 3: Don't our kashrus certifiers assure that these snags won't occur? Ultimately, the responsibility rests with the *baal simchah* to check that the supervision is thorough and stringent — that there's a *mashgiach* who oversees all the details and does his job devotedly — as opposed to a situation where the *Rav hamachshir* mainly relies on the caterer or kitchen manager, and a *mashgiach* just "drops in" once in awhile.

Experience has shown that a kitchen manager cannot be bothered with assuming responsibility for the kashrus of the food, since he is preoccupied with so many different things and his foremost priority is his client's satisfaction.

Our final question was: What can a *baal simchah* do to ensure that kashrus at his *simchah* is of the highest possible standard? The answer is that the *baal simchah* has to be ready to fill the void when a diligent *mashgiach* is absent. This, in essence, would mean to hire a *mashgiach temidi* who would supervise the entire process of food preparation for the *simchah*. If the *baal simchah* were to do so, he could be calm and confident in the knowledge that the food he is serving his guests is truly *kosher l'mehadrin*.

"Am I obligated to do so?" one may ask. "Let the guests decide for themselves if they want to eat the food or not. Is it my responsibility to be on top of every single

detail of kashrus?"

The answer to this would be that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* grants us the merit of making a *simchah*, we do everything possible to ensure that the One Above derives true *nachas ruach* from the new couple, from the bar mitzvah boy, from the newborn baby who just had his *bris*, etc. We *daven*, we give *tzedakah*, we perform all sorts of *segulos*. But can we be guaranteed *siyatta diShmaya* if, at this *simchah*, our guests might be *nichshal* through a forbidden food, even one insect, *bishul akum*, or *basar b'chalah*, *chas v'shalom*?

By throwing the ball into the guest's court, you might be subjecting him to an inner conflict: "If I do eat, who says the kashrus was supervised as necessary? And if I don't, perhaps I'll be undermining the *kavod* of the *baal simchah*." Thus if he eats, it is partially because of you, and if he doesn't eat, how will you feel knowing that your guests left your *simchah* hungry?

Therefore, dear *baal simchah*, realize that the responsibility does indeed rest upon your shoulders. You already oversee myriad details so that they run smoothly throughout the *simchah*, that the couple's apartment is set up just so, that everyone's dresses and shoes look just right, that the decor in the hall is attractive and the food tasty. So, too, see to it that your Torah obligations are fulfilled to the maximum degree. The spiritual aspects deserve to be regarded with at least the same amount of importance that is appended to the external aspects of the *simchah*.

In Monsey, a group of individuals has already banded together to establish a team of expert *mashgichim* for this purpose. The group, Mevakshei Hakashrus, offers the community the option of hiring a *mashgiach* for an affordable price to supervise the entire process of food preparation for a *simchah*.

## אחריות הבעל שמחה

לשמחה ביום השב"ק

- א) לבא לפני הזמן לאולם לברר שכל המאכלים הונחו על הבלעך או בתוך WARMER כדת וכדין. ולסגור את הבשר, דגים, יין, וכדו' בחוותמות שהוכנו לזה, עד שיבא יהודי המוסמך להשגיח, להאולם\*
- ב) באופן שעל WARMER יש THERMOSTAT שיכולים להגביר ולמעט החום, צריך לכסותו קודם שבת.
- ג) בכל זמן שעוזבים את האולם ונשארים שם גויים או יהודים שאינם שומתו"מ, לסגור את כל החוותמות על הבשר, דגים, יין, וכדו', (בין בלילה, ובין ביום אם רוצים ליקח השיריים אחר שבת) עד שיבא יהודי המוסמך להשגיח, להאולם\*
- ד) במשך זמן חלוקת המאכלים, להיות יהודי מוסמך יוצא ונכנס בתוך המטבח, לפקוח על החולקים (WAITERS) שאינם אוסרים את המאכלים ע"י חילול שב"ק ח"ו.
- ה) אם רואים דבר הצריך תיקון, נא להודיע לנו, ע"י השארת מעסעז"ש על המאשיין (527.7884) 1877.KASRUTH ובעזרהש"ת ננסה לתקן הדבר.

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נוכה כלנו יחד לאכול מסעודת לוייתן ביום שכולו שבת.

\* הנסיון הוכיח שאם לסמוך על ה"חוייטעריס" אף שנראים שות"מ, בלי ידיעה ברורה שהם מוסמכים, רד"ל.  
ליותר פרטים בענין זה יש להתקשר להטעל. סיסטעם, לטעם ההסבר ע"י הר"ג ר' יוסף יצחק ראזננעלד שליט"א

Recently, this group came up with a terrific method to solve a problem that has plagued Rabbanim and *baalei machshir* for a long time: A *simchah* on Shabbos can involve many kashrus "hazards" when the Jewish caterer goes home to eat his meal and leaves non-Jews or non-observant Jews in charge of the kitchen. Because they are there alone, unsupervised, there is room to suspect that there may be instances of meat entrusted into non-Jewish hands, *bishul akum*, *bishul b'Shabbos* and many other severe transgressions.

I'll conclude by relating an episode that occurred at a lavishly-prepared *kiddush* in Monsey. There, in addition to other hot dishes, sautéed liver was served. One Yid happened to overhear a waiter on the phone asking his friend, who apparently was working at a different *simchah*, to bring over some liver from his hall, since they were short on the sautéed liver at the first *simchah*.

In light of such uncertainties, many halls in Monsey have implemented a system whereby a supervisor is on top of the waiters to ensure that they do not transgress the laws of Shabbos, among other kashrus *halachos*. For example, the supervisor is also in charge of sealing any foods that need to be sealed when no Jews are around.

Along with having such a supervisor, the *baal simchah* also appoints a family member who acts as a *nichnas v'yotzei* throughout the *seudah* — this person repeatedly goes into the kitchen to keep an eye on the *blech* and the refrigerator.

*This simple but effective idea has been warmly commended by many of the city's Rabbanim, who hope this practice will be adopted by other communities as well. Hershel Kahn is the co-founder of (Chama) Chaburas Mevakshai HaKashrus. He can be reached by leaving a message at Chama (877) 527-7884*