



KOF-K

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בס"ד

H- 1

## Summer Kashrus Issues – Hamodia Article (8-14-08)

1) Tell us about yourself, your background and your position at KOF-K.  
First want to thank *Hamodia* for their wonderful work in supplying *Yidden* all over the country with *kosher* reading material. *Yasher koach!*

I learned in *Eretz Yisroel* in my *Bais Medrash* years. Then I came to Yeshivah Torah Vodaath, where I learned for nine years under Harav Hagaon Rav Yisroel Belsky, *shlita*, from whom I received *semichah*. Five of those years were spent in the Torah Vodaath *kollel*. My wife, two children, and I live in Brooklyn. I am the author of *Halachically Speaking*, a *halachic* pamphlet read by tens of thousands of people worldwide on a daily, weekly (Friday *Hamodia*), or bi-weekly (e-mailed to subscribers across the country, distributed to *shuls* in Brooklyn and the Five Towns) basis. My first *sefer* is available in *sefarim* stores worldwide. [To receive *Halachically Speaking*, please e-mail to [mdl@thehalacha.com](mailto:mdl@thehalacha.com).] After the summer I plan *be"H* to publish together with the KOF-K an in-depth guide to *bishul akum*, which will be available to *kashrus* agencies, caterers and consumers worldwide.

This past November I entered the field of *kashrus*, building on a long-time interest in *kashrus*. In my job at the KOF-K as Rabbinical Administrator, I research *kashrus* questions asked by KOF-K *mashgichim*, account executives and consumers; write articles; and answer questions posed by consumers on our website.

The questions that come in are discussed with Rabbi Ari Senter, *Kashrus* Administrator at the KOF-K, and presented to the KOF-K *Bais Din*. On the *Bais Din* are Rav Aaron Felder, Rav of Kehillas Bnai Israel - Ohev Zedek, Philadelphia, a *talmid muvhak* of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* and the author of many widely acclaimed *halachic sefarim* including *Ohalei Yeshurun* and *Moadei Yeshurun*; Rav Shlomo Gissinger, Rav of K'hal Zichron Yaakov in Lakewood, NJ, well known as an expert in many areas of *halachah* and specifically on the subject of *tola'im* (insect infestation in foods); and Rav Doniel Neustadt, *Yoshev Rosh* of the *Vaad Ha'ir* of Detroit and author of *halachic* articles. Their *psak* is then entered into a database for future reference. The *Bais Din* meets regularly to insure that all KOF-K certified products meet the highest *halachic* standards of *kashrus*.



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2) What are some of the most common issues involving *kashrus* in the summer months?

Travel creates many issues. People travel to areas they are not familiar with and do not know if the food available there is compatible with their *kashrus* standards. One must make sure of this before leaving home. Road-side stores may post signs saying that they stock kosher items; but unless the entire store is certified, one should not patronize it. If an ice cream truck sells kosher ice cream but doesn't have a certificate saying the entire truck is under a *hashgachah*, then one should not buy ice cream from it.

3) In the summer months people often end up eating outside on picnic tables. This can attract flies or other insects. What *kashrus* issues does this bring up?

Eating insects *chas v'shalom* involves many *issurim*. If a fly fell into a food, one should scoop it out and then he may eat the rest of the food, although a person will just throw away the food. A point worth mentioning when eating outside is that "Eating in the street is comparable to the actions of a dog, and some say one who does this is *passul* to testify" (*Kiddushin 40b*). Some say this means one may not eat a meal in the street, while others say it means even if one merely grabs a bite. The *Yerushalmi* (*Meseches Maaseros 3:2*) says it is not praiseworthy for a *talmid chacham* to eat in the street. Some say that for a non-*talmid chacham*, only walking and eating is a problem, but sitting and eating the food is permitted.

It is common for cafes to have tables and chairs set up outside. A *ben Torah* should not eat outside even in an area that is enclosed with a gate; rather, he should choose to eat inside. For others, it is perhaps permitted (Rav Belsky). Eating at a table in a picnic area is not considered eating in the street and is permitted (Rav Belsky). A bungalow colony or a summer camp are semi-private places, so one is permitted to eat outside foods that are normally eaten out in the open, i.e. a bag of potato chips or an ice pop. In the mountains while traveling on secluded roads, or on a highway where people are not looking, one is permitted to eat.

4) If one enters a store and sees a certificate from a *kashrus* authority on the wall, does this suffice? Does it mean that everything in the store is kosher? Is there ever a reason to be concerned that the certificate is forged?

When walking into a store which is certified kosher one may rely on the certification. However, one must read the certificate to see if the entire store is under certification, or only packaged items, or only loose items. One *must* read the certificate before buying



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anything from the store. There is no reason to be concerned about forgery unless something looks out of the ordinary.

5) Is it permissible to purchase cut up fruits – or even a half a watermelon from a store without a reliable *hashgacha*?

This is a very common question. The *halacha* is as follows: When using a knife to cut fruit, one must make sure that the knife is not used to cut other items in the store such as fish. Some time the worker may use the knife to cut food needed for his lunch. Although a lot of fruit is cut at once and anything non-*kosher* will be washed off by the cutting of the fruit, one does not know which fruit is the one which might have the non-*kosher* food on the fruit. Practically, the above concern may exist in a mom and pop store (small store). However, large supermarkets such as Pathmark or Shoprite generally have special knives for this purpose and therefore buying cut up fruit at these and large supermarkets is permitted.

6) There has been much talk about buying “Re-packaged” foods. Can you tell us a bit about the possible *kashrus* concerns this may involve.

If the item in question is individually wrapped (hard candy, taffy, chewing gum...) of course there is no concern. Often stores will purchase loose items in bulk and repack them using their own labels stating the original hechsher. It is advisable to purchase these items only from stores that have a reliable hechsher supervising the repacking. This verifies that they are indeed packing the product stated on the repackaging. Many consumers opt to only purchase loose products from merchants whose entire store is properly certified by a reliable kosher agency. With such certification, the kosher status of the repacked product, as well as any other product in the store that it could come in contact with, can be assured.

7) Can one tell the *kashrus* of a product by reading a list of ingredients?

The list of ingredients is not enough. A product can be made on equipment which was used for non-kosher foods, which would require a *kashrus* agency to *kasher* the utensils prior to the manufacturing of the *kosher* product. An ingredient panel might say “flavors”; this can mean anything at all, since the government does not require the company to specify the source of the flavors that go into their product. Some non-kosher flavors are carmine, which is made from crushed beetles, or civet, which comes from a cat.

To answer your question, NO! One must look for a *kashrus* symbol on food before buying it. Nonetheless, there are some products which may be bought without such a symbol, such as non-flavored seltzer, sugar, non-flavored tea, and bottled water.



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8) What *kashrus* issues are there in purchasing coffee at a gas station? Are there any issues in drinking coffee or tea given out by the crew on an airplane?

The question arises if walking into a coffee shop or a rest stop store for coffee is a concern of *ma'ris ayin*. *L'maaseh*, since a coffee shop sells kosher items (coffee) as well as non-kosher, there is no *ma'ris ayin* concern (Rav Belsky). Walking into a store which sells only non-kosher products would be a problem (*Igros Moshe O.C. 2:40*). Those who are *makpid* to drink only *chalav Yisrael* should be careful not to drink from an open bottle at a roadside restaurant unless they saw it being opened.

Much has been written about the *bishul akum* status of coffee. It is beyond the scope of this interview to go into all the details. The accepted custom is to permit coffee made by a non-Jew. Non-flavored coffee does not need to be kosher-certified, but flavored coffee does require a *hechsher*. The coffee purchased in a vending machine is permitted; there is no concern of *bishul akum*. One should make sure, though, that the same machine does not produce chicken soup or other non-kosher foods.

When traveling on an airplane one is generally offered coffee. Is it permitted? Some *poskim* say yes; others suggest one get hot water from the urn in the kitchen which is not washed with other utensils. [Since the glass coffeemaker in hotel rooms are cleaned in the bathroom sink, it is permitted to use them for one's coffee (Rav Belsky). However, this is only if non-flavored coffee was used].

9) There are certain drinks that have a *hashgachah* on some cans and bottles, but not on others. May one drink even those that do not have a *hashgachah* and assume that it is in fact kosher? What about international soft drink brands that have local bottling operations overseas?

Soda syrup is produced in one facility and bottled in a different one. Many *kashrus* agencies only certify the bottling plants, while others certify both the facility where the syrup was made and the bottling plants. If there is no *kashrus* symbol on the particular bottle, then no *kashrus* agency takes responsibility for its *kashrus*.

10) Do you have a final message for our readers?

Summer is a time for relaxation. However, relaxing does not mean lowering our guard! We must maintain the same level of *kashrus* (as well other areas) during the summer months as we do all year long.

May it be the will of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* that the rest of the summer be a safe and healthy one, giving us strength for the days of Elul and the *Yamim Noraim*.