



Eating Out in Israel - Part 1

One of the things that excite many people upon their arrival in Eretz Yisrael whether on vacation or making Aliyah is the multitude of restaurants that are labeled “kosher.” As we have pointed out in the past, there are various levels of kashrut in Israel. It is certainly an experience to walk into a mall and see that almost all restaurants and food stands have kashrut certificates displayed. While OU Kosher cannot decide for every consumer which *hashgachot* is reliable and which aren’t, we can offer you knowledge of our standards in OU-certified eateries, as well as an outline of the issues involved relating to other certifications. In addition, we will discuss some of the concerns that might arise at food services in Israel specifically. While it may be impossible to enumerate every scenario that might conceivably take place, we will make this series as brief yet as comprehensive as possible.

MEHADRIN AND NON-MEHADRIN

There are two general standards of kashrut in Israel: *mehadrin* and regular *rabbanut*. Most regular *rabbanut* certifiers will accept anything approved by the import division of the Chief Rabbinate, as well as anything produced locally and certified by other local rabbinates. In practical terms, this means that dairy products with non-*mehadrin* certification are *not Chalav Yisrael* and meat products are *not glatt*. Although OU Kosher certainly approves *Cholov Sta’am* products oversees there is a range of issues of approving such ingredients in Israel for food service that are not OU as such after long research OU Kosher decided to only approve *Chalav Yisrael* for their restaurants and hotels in Israel.

Regarding the issue of *Bishul Yisrael*, there is a dispute between the *Rema* and the *Beit Yosef* about the minimal requirement to remove the prohibition of *Bishul Akum* (certain kosher foods that are nevertheless prohibited because they were cooked by non-Jews). According to the *Rema*, it is enough if a Jew performs a small act in the cooking process such as lighting the fire or throwing a match into an existing flame. The *Beit Yosef* requires more hands-on participation in the cooking process, such as putting the food into the oven to be cooked or flipping the food during cooking (see *Shulchan Aruch* YD 113:7). *Sefardim* generally adhere to the *Beit Yosef*’s opinion, while *Ashkenazim* rule like the *Rema*. All *mehadrin* certifications, however, are supposed to uphold *Bishul Yisrael* according to the more stringent standard of the *Beit Yosef*.

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The OU Israel Gustave & Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education was created to raise awareness and educate the public in all areas of kashrut. Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Deputy Rabbinic Administrator for OU Kosher Israel is the Center's director.



To summarize, the three main differences that are almost universal between *mehadrin* and non-*mehadrin* establishments are in the realm of *Bishul Yisrael*, *Chalav Yisrael* and *glatt* meat.

Another unfortunate difference among restaurants which can be contentious is the issue of ingredients. The OU, as well as other kashrut organizations, does not approve all “*mehadrin*” ingredients in Israel. This is because of the complexity of Israeli certifications. Many ingredients are imported, sometimes from countries where kosher certification is difficult, or where the manufacturer is not interested in certification. In such a case the importer must deal with whatever is available. Often, importers exert tremendous pressure to get ingredients certified here in Israel without requiring any changes in production or supervision abroad, and this leads to what is essentially a rubber-stamp procedure.

HASHGACHAH

For obvious reasons, supervision is an essential part of the certification process. Many Anglos are shocked when they enter an establishment in Israel with no *mashgiach*. In many cases they are told that the *mashgiach* does not spend full days at the establishment. This is an essential difference that should be understood. According to Israeli standards, especially in a case of Jewish owners, the idea of a full time *mashgiach* is non-existent. It is not clear how this came about, but in Israel even certifications with the highest standards don't require a full-time *mashgiach*. There are certifications that require very little presence

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of a *mashgiach* — he might show up once a day for an hour, or only once or twice a week. It is very important when deciding to dine at a restaurant to understand how often the *mashgiach* is present and how much he is really involved with the kosher program of the establishment. Some establishments have *mashgichim* that come in for a few hours a day, and in addition they have an employee who works as a *ne'eman kashrut* (that is, someone who is reliable according to halachah to ensure that the food being served meets the requirements of the restaurant's *hechsher*) In Europe such an individual is normally called a *Shomer*. When a *mashgiach* is not present full time many concerns arise such as *Bishul Akum*, mixing up utensils and the use of non-approved ingredients.

In the coming weeks we will continue to dig deep into the standards of restaurants and food service in Israel. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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