



Eating Out in Israel – Part 2

INTRODUCTION

When addressing the issue of kosher restaurants, caterers, and event halls in Israel, one must understand the complicated nature of kosher food service and the unique challenges it presents.

Although the international kosher certification industry for manufactured food products far surpasses the number of kosher-certified manufacturers in Israel, the situation is almost the exact opposite when it comes to food service. The number of kosher restaurants and food-service establishments throughout Israel is enormous and far exceeds the combined number of kosher restaurants in other countries around the world.

As such, food service can arguably be considered the *Achilles' heel* of kosher certification in Israel. This is particularly true because

a large segment of the Israeli public expects and seeks kosher food. Providing reliable kosher certification to so many establishments requires substantial logistics, manpower, and effective systems of supervision.

PRACTICAL SUPERVISION

In Israel, the level of supervision required in a restaurant or other food-service establishment varies according to several factors. Among them are:

- Is the establishment owned by Shomrei Shabbat Jews?
- Are Jews exclusively employed in the kitchen?
- How complex is the menu?
- What types of food are being prepared?
- Is the establishment meat or dairy?
- How frequently is cooking taking place?
- Are non-Jews involved in food preparation?
- What other logistical or operational concerns exist within the establishment?

It is therefore very difficult to establish one uniform standard of supervision for all restaurants. In addition, it is relatively uncommon to find a *Mashgiach Temidi*—a full-time kosher supervisor—working in every restaurant.

Some certification agencies establish systems in which a competent *Mashgiach* visits the establishment several times a day, together with a *Shomer Shabbat* representative who works at the restaurant and can assist with maintaining the kosher program throughout the day. Under other certifications, the *Mashgiach* may visit once a day or even once



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every few days, depending on the nature of the establishment and the requirements of the certification.

There are many factors that can affect the level of *Hashgacha*. These include whether the establishment is meat or dairy, what products are being prepared, the complexity of the cooking process, and the presence of non-Jewish employees in the kitchen.

There are, of course, establishments where a much tighter system of supervision is necessary. Hotels, hostels, and *Simcha* halls are prime examples. The kosher program in these establishments can be extremely complex because food is prepared throughout the day, menus can be extensive, and both meat and dairy kitchens may operate simultaneously.

In general, OU Kosher takes a strict approach to food-service supervision and requires some form of *Hashgacha Temidis* in its establishments. Depending on the circumstances, this may involve a full-time *Mashgiach* in a hotel or a "working *Mashgiach*" in a restaurant. In the latter case, the *Mashgiach* may be responsible for additional duties, such as overseeing orders and receiving deliveries, allowing him to remain present in the establishment throughout the day while maintaining effective kosher supervision.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERSIGHT

Oversight is essential in every area of kosher certification, and food service is no exception. Even when an establishment has an on-site *Mashgiach*, there should be a trained supervisor or rabbinic authority overseeing the overall kosher program.

Numerous halachic questions arise in food service, as well as questions regarding kosher protocols, changes in ingredients, alterations to recipes, and changes in the establishment's logistics. These situations often require someone with greater experience who can evaluate the circumstances and determine the appropriate course of action.

This is itself an important consideration when evaluating different *Hashgachot*. The presence of a *Mashgiach* is important, but so is the system of oversight behind him. A strong kosher program requires not only personnel on the ground, but also experienced rabbinic oversight capable of addressing questions as they arise.

MEAT STANDARDS

As mentioned in previous articles, the subject of kosher beef and poultry in Israel can be quite sensitive. All chicken *Shechita* for the Israeli market is performed within Israel. Although standards have greatly improved over the years, it remains important for consumers to understand which *Shechita* they are consuming and whether it meets their personal standards of *Kashrut*.

When entering a *Mehadrin* or *Badatz* establishment, it should be clear which chicken *Shechita* is being used. There is a common misconception that there are simply two levels of chicken *Shechita*: "Mehadrin" and "regular." In reality, the situation is considerably more complicated.

Virtually all chicken *Shechita* operations use the term *Mehadrin* to describe their standards. However, there can still be significant

differences between the standards and practices of different slaughterhouses. Consumers who are particular about the *Shechita* they consume should therefore ascertain which *Shechita* is being used rather than relying solely on the term "Mehadrin."

BEEF

Regarding beef, the subject is even more complicated.

In broad terms, there are three levels that are commonly discussed when referring to the kosher status of beef:

1. **Non-Glatt**
2. **Glatt**
3. **Chalak Beit Yosef**

The differences between these standards relate primarily to the examination of the lungs following *Shechita* and the halachic status of various lesions and adhesions found on the lung.

Glatt certification generally follows the accepted approach of the *Rema*, together with additional later customs, while not necessarily satisfying all of the stricter requirements of the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding the examination of the lung.

Chalak Beit Yosef follows the more stringent requirements associated with the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch* and is intended to satisfy the stricter standards of the various opinions.

Chalak Beit Yosef can be found in both Rabbanut *Shechita* and in slaughter conducted under various *Badatz* certifications.

Practically speaking, non-Glatt beef is no longer common in many kosher communities overseas, and consumers whose communities have traditionally required Glatt meat should assume that non-Glatt meat is unacceptable for them.

In Israel, Glatt meat as a separate category is also uncommon because the prevailing practice among many higher-level certifications is to require meat that satisfies the stricter standards. As such, OU Kosher requires *Chalak Beit Yosef* meat for its caterers and restaurants in Israel.

HINDQUARTERS

The issue of beef hindquarters is another unique area in which consumers must exercise caution.

In many communities overseas, the hindquarters of cattle are not sold as kosher meat because the complex process of *Nikkur* required to remove the forbidden fats and nerves is not performed. Consequently, kosher certification is generally not granted to those portions of the animal.

In Israel, however, there are several *Mehadrin* certifications that perform *Nikkur* and approve premium cuts from the hindquarters.

OU Kosher, based on the accepted custom followed by its standards, does not recommend consuming hindquarter cuts, even when they are sold under a reputable kosher certification.

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Consumers who are particular about this issue should therefore be aware of which cuts come from the hindquarters. Common examples include **Filet (Fillet), Sinta, and Sheitel**.

When purchasing meat at a restaurant, hotel, or catering establishment, consumers who follow the stricter practice regarding hindquarters should confirm that the establishment is serving only meat from the forequarters.

CONCLUSION

Eating out in Israel presents a unique set of challenges. The sheer number of restaurants, hotels, caterers, and event halls means that kosher certification cannot rely on a single model of supervision. Each establishment must be evaluated according to its ingredients, production methods, employees, logistics, and the halachic standards of the certifying authority.

For the consumer, this means that the words "kosher," "Mehadrin," or even "Badatz" do not necessarily provide the complete picture. Consumers should understand what standard they personally follow and, when necessary, ask questions about the *Hashgacha*, the *Shechita*, the source of the meat, and the procedures used to maintain the kosher program.

A reliable kosher system depends on more than a certificate on the wall. It requires knowledgeable supervision, strong rabbinic oversight, clear procedures, and the ability to respond appropriately when unexpected questions arise. In Israel, where eating out is such a significant part of everyday life, maintaining these standards is both a tremendous responsibility and an enormous undertaking. ■

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