

**Rabbinic Members:**

Rabbi Simon Benzaquen  
Rabbi Salamon Cohen-Scali  
Rabbi Mordechai Farkash  
Rabbi Moshe Kletenik  
Rabbi Yechezkel Kornfeld  
Rabbi Shalom Ber Levitin  
Rabbi Solomon Maimon

**Interim Director:**

Al Maimon



בס"ד

## Va'ad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle

June 6, 2008

### Letter to the Community from the Va'ad III

The focus of this article is on hashgacha and mashgichim. The purpose of hashgacha is to provide the kosher consumer with the assurance that the certified product or service conforms to the accepted standards of kashrut of the certifying agency (here, locally, the Va'ad's). In working with the provider of the product or service, it is a further goal to provide the certification in the most cost-effective manner, ultimately leading to the least expensive price for the consumer.

In the most basic circumstance where a single person is personally responsible for all the food (s)he eats, there is no need for an operational intermediary. Perhaps someone else may be consulted to provide information and consultation on halacha or food processing, etc. However, in such a case, the person essentially can be his or her own mashgiach. Even in a single household or social group where there is more than one producer and more than one consumer, if they are the same group/family unit producing and consuming, it is also less likely that there is a need for an operational intermediary. In both cases, there is a need for external expertise for specialized knowledge, but the food is essentially self certified - the same entity producing and consuming the product. An example of this scenario might be a self-sustaining family farm.

Once you have a provider who delivers products to multiple people, or a single consumer who gets products from others, there is a need for another level of connection between the provider and the consumer. In more complex and "spread out" circumstances, it is theoretically possible (with "full disclosure") for a consumer to know enough personally and to make individual decisions simply based on information directly provided by the producer. This was essentially the case in the United States some decades ago, when we thought we had all the information we needed in the ingredient list (which may or may not have been the case then). Today, for a variety of reasons, such is clearly not the case.

As these connections get more complex and tenuous, there is an increased need for an operational intermediary who can substitute for the consumers' direct knowledge and confidence about the nature of the food being consumed. Enter the mashgiach and the hashgacha "business". At its core, hashgacha depends on confidence and trust of those involved, which in turn revolves on mutual respect and honor. If this is in place, each party can perform their function with confidence and with a minimal amount of friction and doubt. It is ironic that the nature of hashgacha is to "audit" and ensure that policies, procedures, ingredients, facilities, and equipment are all in order - essentially to eliminate the suspicion or likelihood of there being a problem, but in order to do this, there must be underlying respect and trust between all parties.

Today, the food industry is complicated - both by sheer size and incredible complexity, in almost every dimension. We are further away than we've ever been from food sources (with rare exceptions) geographically. Food chemistry is the most advanced and sophisticated that it's ever been. The effects of globalization in transportation, economics, distribution, and production are overwhelming and the industry is extraordinarily dynamic. As a result, established assumptions about food items that permitted certain decisions continue to change and change rapidly. As a consumer it is increasingly difficult to know what you're getting from whom, under what government regulations or industry standards. The producers are equally distant from their consumers and find great difficulty, even if they wanted to, in establishing and keeping a special connection with them.

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How, then can a reasonable level of confidence be achieved to permit the consumption and use of the products and services of today's modern food industry, at a reasonable expense?

(To Be Continued...)

*As always please let us know your questions or comments and we'll gladly respond, personally or publically. You can contact the office (Elise Jacobs or Al Maimon), or one of the Rabbis on the Va'ad (listed above), or a representative lay-person from one of the Va'ad-member synagogues (Elie Pieprz from CSA, Robin Gindin or George Korn from EB, Jake Korn from SBH, Liz Rosen from BCMH, Bess Cox from CSTL).*

Al Maimon  
Interim Director