

PROFILES IN KASHRUS

Rabbi Raanan Broderick

In the decade that he has been engaged in hashgachah, Rabbi Raanan Broderick has gained a well-earned reputation for integrity, devotion to kashrus, and reliability. Like many Mashgichim, Rabbi Broderick is most available for a phone interview during one of his many long drives that can take him as far as a thousand miles from home. His accent reveals a unique blend, the product of his Chicago childhood, an extended stay in Lakewood, and current residence in Dallas, Texas.

Rabbi Broderick, please tell us a bit about yourself and how you entered the world of kashrus.

I grew up in Chicago, around the corner from Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, now Kashruth Administrator at the cRc.

After learning in Telshe Yeshiva in Chicago, I went to Eretz Yisrael to learn in Lakewood East, and then returned to the US to learn in Lakewood, NJ. In time, I married and settled down to learn in Lakewood, where I ended up staying for 8 years.

In 2000, my wife and I were recruited to join the Dallas Kollel, which has a strong *Kiruv* component as well as a robust *halachah* program. While there, I received my *Semichah* from Rabbi Hillel David, *shlit"á*. At that time, Rabbi Fishbane asked me if I could do some *hashgachah* work for the cRc; however, as I was still learning at the Kollel, I politely declined.

Around a year later, in 2005, I finished Kollel and began looking for another source of *parnasah* (income). After stints in property management, fund-raising and working as a real-estate appraiser, I realized that Hashem was telling me that I belonged in the realm of *kodesh* (holy work). The opportunity presented itself again when Rabbi Fishbane asked me to do some *hashgacha* work, and this time I excitedly accepted.

Around the same time, I was asked to stand in for the soaking and salting in a meat plant. While there, I was given the opportunity to learn *shechitah*, and I received my *kabbalah*



(certification) from Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz, *shlit"á*, *Rosh Beth Din* of the cRc. Today, I balance both duties, *shechting* on some days and traveling as a *Mashgiach* on other days. Since *shechitah* schedule is often erratic, it fits well with *hashgachah*, which can be done on odd days, and is generally not scheduled in advance.

How far do you travel?

I cover the Southwest Region. I drive so far south in Texas that I can touch the Mexico border. In the other direction, I go way up into Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. I travel east in Texas all the way to the border of Louisiana and west to Odessa, near New Mexico. I will average about four thousand miles a month. I actually just gave my Camry with 415,000 miles on it to my son.

When I go north in the winter, I am constantly checking the weather since I need clear roadways for at least two days, so I can get there and back safely.

What do you love about hashgachah?

There are many things that I enjoy, *baruch Hashem*.

One perk for me is the ability to make my own schedule. By definition, the visits of a *Mashgiach*, essentially an audit, are unscheduled and unannounced. Depending on the type of facility, what they produce etc., visits can be as frequent as once a week and as infrequent as twice a year. The key is that they almost never know when we come. In fact, it once happened that I visited a plant one morning and a colleague visited the same plant that very afternoon. We didn't coordinate it, but it drove home the point that we can come at any time.

I also really enjoy the professional, collegial culture of the cRc. People know their stuff and are very good at what they do. At the same time, I see how executives often defer to others



who may be more specialized in a specific area of manufacturing or *halachah* than they are.

Also, I am a regional *Mashgiach*, as opposed to an RC (Rabbinic Coordinator), who focuses on one specific field, such as chemicals, dairy, etc. I get to see a variety of plants, each one making a different product, as varied as tortillas, chemicals, condiments, honey, trailer washes, and more. This gives me a window into many areas of manufacturing and *halachah*.

I also feel a certain sense of mission when I travel far from the beaten path. When I stop at the side of the road to *daven*, I can be fairly certain that I am the first person to have ever said a *davar shebikedushah* (holy words) in that particular spot. When a non-Jew approaches me and asks me if I am Jewish, I know that my response will have a lasting impression on them and their approach to Klal Yisrael.

Do you catch mistakes or misconduct in the plants you supervise?

You often hear the stories of the gumshoe *Mashgichim* who discover deception or gross misconduct. Unfortunately, I am going to have to disappoint you with this.

The truth is that most of the companies I see are giant corporations. These are million-dollar and even billion-dollar corporations. Every move is planned well in advance and recorded, so there is little room for change and even less room for error. The odds of someone sneaking something onto the lines is negligible.

At the same time, we must maintain our vigilance and keep on checking. And the truth is that you never know. I once encountered a situation where chocolate milk was being enriched with a non-kosher gelatin ingredient, so *hashgachah* is vital as ever.

Now, all that is true for large factories. I also do some local

hashgachah for weddings and other events. These catered affairs are an entirely different situation. The hotel kitchen is just full of challenges, and the *Mashgiach* needs to be constantly watching, assessing the situation and trying to preempt problems before they happen. I once had a sous chef throw milk on a *fleishig* grill to put out a fire.

How has technology affected your work over the past 10 years?

For me personally, the biggest change has come with having everything online. When I started, I needed to print a ream of paperwork and ingredient lists every morning before I headed out. Now I have it all on my tablet.

There have been changes at plants, and packaging, for example, is becoming more and more automated, but the decisions are still being made by people, and the procedures and ingredients are still essentially the same.

What advice would you have for a new *Mashgiach*?

Many people envision the commercial *Mashgiach* as a guy with messy hair and an untucked shirt. The truth is that you are working with corporate executives, and you need to inspire a measure of respect and trust if you want to have their cooperation. You need to look presentable and have good communication skills.

It is a job that requires consistency, reliability and honesty. You need to balance being nice with being strict. It's truly a people's person job. They have a choice whether or not to go kosher, and a lot of that depends on their relationship with the *Mashgiach*.

In the beginning, I was overwhelmed by the procedures, the unfamiliar ingredient names and machinery. It takes time, but you get used to it. Now, instead of needing to check every single ingredient, I can look at a list and identify what can be problematic. Now I am looking for what doesn't belong.

We must always play offense, not defense. So, if something seems wrong, do your diligence and check it out. It's probably okay, but you don't want to find out the hard way that you've made a mistake. The Jewish nation is relying on us. ▲

The cRc's advanced EZcRc system gives *Mashgichim* like Rabbi Broderick and our clients remote access to up-to-date *kashrus* information about their companies. This also allows our clients and *Mashgichim* to submit changes, reports, and more, all of which streamlines *hashgachah* with modern innovations.