



The Kashrus Pitfalls of Home Events

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Parties, parlor meetings, *tzedakah* events and the like taking place in private homes or backyards is not a new phenomenon. It has been common for many years for people to open their homes for various causes and serve their guests some refreshments.

More recently, however, the level of professionalism at these gatherings has gone way up. Today's events often include sweet tables, carving stations, sushi bars, burger bars and alcohol bars—and the list goes on and on. Party planners are often hired to take charge of entire affairs—everything from celebrations at home, events in halls, Shabbos conventions and many other types of gatherings—and arrange for the food to be brought in

from different sources.

In such a situation, if the supervision of the *kashrus* is unorganized and haphazard, it can lead to numerous problems. Unfortunately, there have been some hair-raising incidents where serious problems cropped up that were a direct result of the lack of proper supervision.

Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger moderated the following panel consisting of three prominent members of the *kashrus* community—Rabbi Dovid Babad, Dayan of Tarnopol and the director of Tarnopol Kashrus; Rabbi Yechezkel Auerbach, *kashrus* administrator of the KSA and director of Independent Kashrus Research; and Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, *kashrus* administrator for the Chicago Rabbinical Council and executive director of the Associated Kashrus Organizations (AKO)—to receive guidance on this important issue.

Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger:

I understand that there are some *kashrus* problems that apply particularly to private parties and events. Can you please tell us some of your experiences with these issues?

Rabbi Dovid Babad:

A common scenario these days is for someone who is hosting an event in his house to hire a professional party planner to take care of all of the logistics. The party

planner may then hire a caterer to provide the bulk of the food, while simultaneously contracting other vendors to supply nosh tables, popcorn machines, cotton candy machines and doughnuts or the like. In this situation, the caterer may have a very reliable *hechsher*, but the peripheral add-ons aren't under that *hashgachah*.

The host himself might not have a say in where the food is coming from. Sometimes, he doesn't even know who the caterer is going to be or what kind of supervision

he has. Therefore, if a guest knows the host to be a person who is scrupulous about *kashrus* and assumes that he can eat anything served in his home, he may be making an erroneous assumption.

The caterer is well aware of what he himself is serving but has no input into whatever other food is brought onto the premises. This means that even if someone is familiar with the caterer and knows he has a good *hechsher*, he cannot assume that he can eat anything he sees.

Let's say that a guest walks in and asks about the *hechsher*. He is told that the *hashgachah* certifying the event is "kashrus agency X." However, he may misunderstand what this means. It's possible that the person he asked was telling him the name of the agency that certifies only the caterer, while the many items brought in by other vendors at the behest of the party planner that aren't under that supervision. Even if the guest sees a *mashgiach* keeping an eye on the food preparation, he cannot presume that his job is to certify every food item at the event, as he may be a *mashgiach* only for the caterer and not for the doughnut machine, sushi bar, etc.

Rabbi Yechezkel Auerbach:

This issue is actually even more complicated than one might think. To illustrate: If someone wants to know if a restaurant or pizza shop is reliably certified, he can easily check the credentials on the certificate. He also can walk in and engage in a conversation with the *mashgiach*.

A party or event is completely different. The guests usually feel that they were invited by their friend; it's just like being invited to his house. They think, *If Yankel invited me to his party, he must have taken care of every concern I could possibly have.* But the truth is that when someone hosts a party, there are a lot of moving parts to juggle, so he will often have the mindset of just getting a hall, finding a caterer or party planner and crossing the food off his list. Once the food has been delegated, it is no longer his problem. The level of *kashrus* may not even be discussed by the host or *baal simchah*. Some people speak to the caterer very assiduously and say that they want to maintain a certain level of *kashrus*, discussing things like what chicken and meat to use. Others are not so meticulous. So, yes, there is a lot to take into consideration.

Rabbi Hisiger:



Kashering equipment

Can you share some stories that illustrate the potential problems?

Rabbi Sholem Fishbane

There was one party where all the food came from a reliable caterer, and all the stations set up by the party planner also had a good *hechsher*. One of these stations was a juice bar, where the party planner even made sure not to use fruits that are known to be infested with insects, using only things like pineapples, oranges, grapes and kiwis.

What the party planner didn't think of was that although the ingredients were all kosher themselves and the process being used was cold blending (so there were no *bishul akum* concerns), the non-Jewish worker manning the station was juicing grapes (via a juice extractor), which created a very real *she'ilah* of *stam yayin*.

Rabbi Babad:

Here's an example that I personally witnessed. It was Chanukah, and a family was making a party. They hired a prestigious party planner to make the arrangements. This party planner had no *hashgachah* of his own, but he hired a caterer that had very good supervision.

At the party, a *mashgiach* was on site, keeping close watch on the food the caterer was preparing. When he entered the ballroom to make sure that everything was in order, he noticed a man coming in with a doughnut machine. The man, who didn't look Jewish, proceeded to light the fire under the machine's deep fryer so he could start making doughnuts. The *mashgiach* approached him and asked, "Did you just turn on that fire?" The man gave him a funny look and replied, "What do you mean? It's my machine. Of course I lit the fire!"

The *mashgiach* realized that this person didn't know anything about the laws of *kashrus*. Then he started looking at the ingredients and was shocked to realize that some of them weren't kosher at all. Other ingredients were *milchig* even though the event was *fleishig*. He began conversing with the doughnut maker and asked, "Who are you?"

"I do a lot of jobs for you people," the man said. "I know Moishy. I know Yanky..." He started proudly listing names of *frum* party planners he had worked for.

The *mashgiach* was now even more concerned. It was evident that this man's products were thoroughly non-kosher. How many parties had he worked at? He

walked over to the party planner of that event and asked him, “Where did you get that doughnut guy from?” The party planner answered, “I called Mr. So-and-So (one of the most well-known *frum* party planners) and told him I was looking for someone who does doughnuts. He gave me this guy’s number.”

It wasn’t technically the *mashgiach’s* job to approach the doughnut man. But if he hadn’t, who knows how many more parties he would have been hired to do? The party planner had no ill intent. He didn’t mean to feed anyone non-kosher food. But that is the danger of not having any supervision. He simply never thought to ask if the doughnut machine was kosher. And no one else was in charge of making sure that it was.

Rabbi Hisiger:

That story is hair-raising because it was a case of one person referring another person. Who knows how many people have used this non-Jew for parties without even knowing?

Rabbi Babad:

Here’s another troubling story:

A party planner was hired to take care of an event. He called a *heimishe* store with a good *hechsher* to order sushi, and his call was transferred to the sushi department. He spoke to whomever answered the phone and put in his order.

Later, at the event, the *mashgiach* on the job noticed a Chinese man walking in with sealed boxes from the store where the party planner had placed the order. The *mashgiach* broke the seals and opened the boxes, and immediately noticed that something was amiss. What was the problem? Number one, the sushi contained fresh, unchecked kale. He also saw that the kani

“He didn’t mean to feed anyone non-kosher food. But that is the danger of not having any supervision. And no one else was in charge of making sure that there was.”

roll wasn’t the kind that’s made by kosher companies. These were both telltale signs that something was seriously wrong. The *mashgiach* spoke to the party planner, who told him that he had ordered the sushi from a kosher store. He then called the *rav hamachshir* on the store, as well as the store’s owner. After a lot of back and forth, it was discovered what had occurred.

It turned out that this Chinese man worked the sushi counter at the kosher store, but he also owned his own store. He wanted the business, so he didn’t tell his boss about the call. He took a roll of “kosher tape” from the store in which he worked and used it to seal the boxes of fish from his own store, and then delivered the non-kosher sushi to the party.

Rabbi Hisiger:

What’s really alarming is that no one—aside from the Chinese man—really did anything wrong. The host relied on the party planner, who made an order from a reputable kosher source. No one could have foreseen the worker’s dishonesty. What this story clearly demonstrates,

however, is how crucial it is to have on-site *mashgichim* who know what they’re looking for and are always ready and willing to check and double-check when something doesn’t seem completely aboveboard.

But the real question is what can be done to help the overall situation.

Rabbi Babad:

As these stories illustrate, it is implausible to think that one can unquestioningly eat anything he sees unless there is competent *hashgachah* taking responsibility for the entire party. What we ourselves do is have the *mashgiach* sit down with the party planner and ask some basic questions: Who are your vendors? Aside from the catered foods, what else are you bringing to the party? Where is the equipment coming from? Our *mashgiach* ensures that everything is under our supervision.

Rabbi Hisiger:

So you really take ownership of the whole job.

Sometimes the caterer will hire an outside bar and bring in a mixologist to make drinks. If I’m going to a party where the whole event is under a *rav hamachshir*, can I assume that the bar is under his supervision, or should I be asking questions?

Rabbi Babad:

Unless the *hashgachah* specifically takes on the responsibility to make sure that all of the drinks and ingredients used to make cocktails is kosher, one cannot simply assume that they are.

Rabbi Auerbach:

There are some supervising agencies that feel that they cannot certify the drinks, so they put up a sign that says: “Everything is under our *hashgachah* except for the bar.” Other times, the supervising agency

will put up a note that guests should check the CRC website to determine what they can and cannot drink. But who's going to do that at a party or wedding? What usually ends up happening is that the bar just comes in and serves whatever it wants, with no *hashgachah* at all.

I've been to many affairs where I noticed questionable things at the bar that I had to bring to the attention of the host. Nice people will say, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize it," and take those items away. Others will say, "What are you talking about? I was at such-and-such a venue and the *rav* let me use it." They try to pit rabbis against each other, and the "*posek acharon*" ends up being the non-Jewish mixologist. This is obviously a problem and something that every host needs to address in advance of the *simchah*, and if necessary, hire a separate *hashgachah* for the bar.

Rabbi Hisiger:

Does that mean that when you go to a party you shouldn't drink from the bar if you don't know who's *hashgachah* it's under?

Rabbi Auerbach:

Absolutely. It's an area of tremendous *hefkeirus*. If the hall is under a *hashgachah* that posts that they take no responsibility for the drinks, who *is* taking that responsibility?

Rabbi Hisiger:

Would you say the same thing about sweet tables?

Rabbi Auerbach:

This brings us back to the basic conflict of party planners. The reality is that party planners get paid to make people happy; therefore, they are going to do whatever they can to achieve that goal. A good *mashgiach* will check the sweet table in advance. But it happens all the time that a party planner knows when the *mashgiach*



A *mashgiach* visiting a poultry farm

is busy in the kitchen, so he'll pull out the stuff he's bringing in from the outside and put it on the tables then.

It would be wonderful if the *hashgachos* could get together and say that we will only allow party planners who have certification. Someone has to take responsibility; if it's not the caterer of the event, then it has to be an independent *hashgachah*. In a case like that, there would be a "chain of custody" for which somebody would have to take responsibility at the end of the day. When things are brought in from the outside, the caterer may try to say, "I work with this vendor and he has *hashgachah*, so deal with him." If there is someone taking over all *achrayus*, it would be his job to do that. This would avoid a lot of guesswork and allow everyone to know what's going on.

Rabbi Fishbane:

The biggest problem with sweet tables is that the party planners often buy their products from small home businesses. This one makes the best miniatures, that one makes the best chocolates... A lot of these businesses have no *hashgachah* at all. Where does that leave the average person at an event? Eating food whose origins

are unknown.

The same problem exists even at a small *kiddush* or the like. Someone buys a meat board or miniatures from a local home business that doesn't have a *hechsher*. This company will then deliver their product directly to the *simchah*, and if there is no *hashgachah* overseeing the entire event, the host may not even know that he is serving unsupervised food.

Rabbi Hisiger:

On a similar topic, many events take place in *shuls*. A *kiddush* is often a "*heimishe*" affair. The same can be said about numerous other gatherings such as a *vort*, *aufruf*, *bris* or *pidyon haben*. Friends and family bring over cakes, cookies, salads or other dishes. Quite often, there is very little *kashrus* oversight.

Rabbi Babad:

Even if the *kiddush* is catered and the caterer employs a good *mashgiach*, the *mashgiach* is often unwilling or unable to get into a confrontation over outside people bringing things in. If the *kiddush* is in a *shul*, the problem may be more challenging, as it is even more difficult to maintain

supervision over anything that comes in than it would be in a hall.

Again, the importance of having a *mashgiach* in charge of everything that is served comes to the fore. In one recent incident, an individual made a *hachmasas sefer Torah* in a *shul* and a friend brought over a homemade cake. The event was being wholly catered by a certain caterer, who told the woman, “Our *mashgiach* is on the way. Please take the cake away before he arrives and gets angry. Do me a favor and take it home.”

The woman asked, “What’s wrong with this cake? I made it myself. I am *makpid* to only use *heimishe hechsheirim!*”

The caterer knew the score and replied, “I’m sorry, but there is nothing I can do. This is the *mashgiach’s* clear policy. He doesn’t allow any food that was made in a private home.”

The woman continued to protest and said, “But I’m telling you that I only use J&J cream cheese!”

“Cream cheese?” the caterer exclaimed. “This is a *fleishig* event!”

It was the middle of the day on a weekday, so the woman assumed that it would be *milchig*. If not for the *mashgiach’s* vigilance, who knows how many people would have eaten the cake.

The typical *shul* kitchen has a *milchig* and *fleishig* side, and the utensils and pots and pans are distinguished by a designated color. But who really makes sure that nothing is taken from one side to the other, or that the dairy and meat stay separated?

There are even some small events where *fleishigs* is served on the men’s side while the women are eating *milchigs*. Who is making sure that no men wander over to the women’s side or vice versa? If a *shul* has no on-site *mashgiach*, this is something that is impossible to keep track of, and in general it is far from an ideal situation.

For this reason, we unfortunately can-

“If a shul has no on-site mashgiach, this is something that is impossible to keep track of, and in general it is far from an ideal situation.”

not rely on any *shul* kitchen being kosher. Therefore, whenever we supervise a *simchah*, we have to assume that all of the counters must be covered and the sinks cannot be used unless they are *kashered*. Since the kitchen itself has no certifying *mashgiach*—and often doesn’t even have a specific person in the *shul* who takes responsibility for its *kashrus*—it cannot be assumed that it has remained kosher according to the *hashgachah’s* standards.

Rabbi Hisiger:

Are you saying that you presume every *shul* kitchen is *treif*?

Rabbi Babad:

Yes. It’s a *bushah* to say it, but that’s the truth.

Rabbi Auerbach:

A friend of mine has a 14-year-old son who was hired to be a *mashgiach* for a Shabbos *sheva brachos*. This is a nice, sweet kid, but he knows nothing about *kashrus*. The boy called me on Friday 20 minutes before *licht bentchen* and said, “Hi, I’m going to be a *mashgiach* on Shabbos. What am I supposed to do?”

I said, “Really? They dropped you down

in the middle of a kitchen and didn’t even tell you what’s what and who’s who?”

“They didn’t tell me anything,” he replied.

I quickly walked him through it. I gave him a crash course in the *halachos* involving the warmers, *shehiyah* and *chazarah*, and what he needed to know about *amirah lakum* and some other important things. By the way, this was a very reputable *hashgachah*. Apparently, they said, “Are you *shomer Shabbos*? Okay, you’re the *mashgiach*.”

Rabbi Hisiger

At least they had a *mashgiach*.

Rabbi Auerbach:

Yes, and they must have been very proud that they found one. They were lucky that his father had a friend like me that he could call 20 minutes before Shabbos. Others aren’t so lucky.

You cannot expect a consumer to have more *derech erez* for *kashrus* than the supervising agency, nor can you expect the *mashgiach* to have more concern than the *rav hamachshir*. If the *hashgachah* doesn’t take things seriously, neither will the *mashgiach*, and certainly not the *baal hasimchah*.

There are two ways that caterers provide food for an event. The first is “drop-off” service, meaning that all the food is delivered in sealed disposable containers. Once it’s dropped off, they are no longer involved and the *baal hasimchah* is responsible for everything that follows. The other way is that the caterer sticks around for the entire affair. In that scenario, the supervising agency has the responsibility to make sure that the caterer is reliable, as in people’s minds the caterer and *hashgachah* are inextricably bound. In either case, if food is being cooked off premises, you have to make sure that there is a *mashgiach* on site to certify that everything is acceptable.

Rabbi Fishbane:

If you think about it, a *kiddush* in a *shul* is really no different from a restaurant. You would never eat in an eatery without a *mashgiach* who is actively making sure that all aspects of the *hechsher* are being followed. Unfortunately, in many *shuls* no one is responsible for the kitchen. That is why it's incredibly important that a *shul* member learn the halachic practicalities of *kashrus* and become the person in charge of implementing them. The goal should be that just as every *shul* has a *rav* who is the authority when it comes to *ruchniyus*, it should also have someone in charge of the food situation. Actually, my suggestion is that the *rav* should appoint no less than three individuals to train in *kashrus*. It is especially important that they learn *hilchos Shabbos*, which is one of the most neglected areas of *halachah* when it comes to *kashrus* at *kiddushim*.

The tricky part is that there are many *machlokos* in *halachah*. How should a *shul* set policy? That is why the *rav* needs to begin by setting clear policies and teaching them to these three designees. You can start with the simple things: Is the *shul* *makpid* on *yashan*? Will the *shul* have a "mevushal only" wine and grape juice policy? Does canned tuna need to be *bishul Yisrael*?

Many *shuls* say they don't know anything about liquor. In that case, they should follow the CRC or the Star-K lists. And if they want to make their own liquor policy, they have to decide what it will be for sherry and port cask whiskey.

Many times, a *shul* has an oven that's supposed to only be used for *feishigs*. What happens when they have a dairy event? Is the *rav* going to allow something dairy to be double-wrapped and placed in a *feishig* oven? What if there's only one sink, which is *feishig*? Is the policy going to be to allow *milchige keilim* to be washed in it as long as the water isn't *yad soledes bo*?



What about fish and meat? Do they need separate pots? And does the kitchen always have to be locked?

Those are all general points that should be decided ahead of time. We've all heard horror stories over the years, and setting clear policy in advance can hopefully prevent such things from happening.

Rabbi Hisiger:

What you're highlighting is that eating in someone's house and eating when that same person makes a *kiddush* in *shul* isn't the same thing. Please explain why.

Rabbi Fishbane:

The simple answer is that it's "*kedeirah d'bei shutfei*," meaning that there is more than one cook in the kitchen. At home, your wife is in charge of the kitchen and knows exactly what needs to be done. By contrast, in a *shul* kitchen, everyone thinks that someone else took care of things. Furthermore, the *sheilos* that come up are different. When you're at home, you have your own rules about what you allow. Your next-door neighbor may have different rules.

I'll give you a recent example that didn't occur in a kitchen but it's definitely related.

There was a very *choshuve* person who learned in a certain *yeshivah*. For whatever reason, that *yeshivah* permits relying on a *hechsher* that isn't considered acceptable by other *hechsherim*. This person's wife was in charge of making *pekelach* for an *aufref*. The candy she used was under the *hashgachah* that was acceptable to her husband but that most people in his *shul* would never touch. In other words, when you're dealing with the *tzibbur* and have multiple "cooks," the number of *sheilos* goes way up. And there's usually no coordination between them, which makes for much less control of the situation.

The simple difference between a home kitchen and a *shul* kitchen is that a home is a controlled environment and a *shul* simply isn't. In a *shul*, deliveries are coming in and party planners are sometimes involved who want to do things their own way.

Rabbi Hisiger:

You said that ideally a *rav* should appoint three members of the *kehillah* to oversee the *kashrus* at events. What exactly do they need to know, and what would their job entail?

Rabbi Fishbane:

The first thing they have to do is receive clear policy guidelines from the *rav*. Do they allow food that is cooked in someone's private home? Some *shuls* allow food made by members but not by anyone else. But a lot of people aren't comfortable with that because as the *shul* grows, so does the potential for different standards. So you have to know ahead of time what the *rav* wants to do.

Then there are questions like what to do about disposable aluminum pans. Do they need to be *toiveled*? What about turning on the fire? Can we allow a non-observant Jew or a non-Jew to do the cooking once we light the pilot light? That's actually an interesting question. I was recently in a kitchen where the pilot light was lit by a *frum Yid* but the pilot was far away from where the flame was. It was a typical case of "*eish me'eish*," which is not acceptable for *Sefardim*. They also have to know *hilchos Shabbos*. Some issues are *chazarah*, water in an urn, Crock-Pots, teabags, *kli shlishi*, whether or not you can add spices and salt on Shabbos, *bishul* with dry foods, and whether or not the *rav* allows opening cans and bottles. What about peelers? How close to a meal does it have to be to permit their use?

Another major pitfall they have to be aware of concerns the waiters. I often hear *sheilos* where they ran out of something at a *simchah* and a waiter ran out to a store to buy it. Who supervised what the waiter brought back with him? Unfortunately, that happens a lot.

I would add that all three people don't have to be on duty every week. Sometimes one is enough. As to what their responsibilities are, they'll call the *baal hasimchah* before the event and say, "*Mazal tov!* I'm in charge of *kashrus* in the *shul*. Let's go through your plans. Are you serving any salads? What kind of salads are we talking about? Who did the checking?"

If the *rav* only allows prechecked greens with a good *hechsher*—which is smart

and doable, especially on the East Coast where many varieties are available—and this person was planning on bringing in fresh lettuce, he'll have to tell him, "I'm sorry, but I can't allow that. You have to use only packaged, prechecked lettuce." He should then continue the conversation by going through the menu. He should also ask, "Are you using a party planner? Is he bringing a *mashgiach*? And if so, who is paying for him?" The *rav* might not allow the party planner to pay for the *mashgiach*, as the party planner then becomes the *rav hamachshir* in a certain sense. Instead, he may insist that the *rav* should be the one to pay him, after which the party planner reimburses the *rav*.

Another question has to do with bringing things in on Shabbos. If the *rav* doesn't hold of the *eiruv* or there is no *eiruv*, he will have to inform the *baal hasimchah* of that. And if the host is planning on having the staff clean up on Shabbos, some authorities don't allow mopping the floor. In short, they have to go through a prepared list of questions.

Of course, up until now I've been talking about a situation where a *shul* has no actual *hashgachah*. If a *shul* is large enough or has the financial wherewithal to hire supervision, it goes without saying that that's the best option. That way, no one in the *shul* has to worry about anything.

Recently, both a *shul* and a *yeshivah* contacted us to inquire about obtaining *hashgachah*. I was happy to hear that they considered it something of importance. The idea is beginning to spread.

Rabbi Hisiger:

Another major component of planning a party is the equipment. This often entails renting tables, chairs, tents and various other odds and ends from rental companies. For some events, it also includes flatware, plates and glasses. With all these things traveling from place to place, it might not be easy to keep an eye on how and what they were used for. How is it pos-

sible for a certifying agency to vouch for them?

Rabbi Babad:

I actually didn't give *hashgachah* on rentals for several years for that reason, as I felt that it was too hard to oversee. But then a few rental companies started to get *hashgachah*, and when I saw that that needed improvement in the way it was being done, I took on some companies because I felt it was an emergency.

In order to provide *kashrus* certification for rental items, a supervising agency has to be on top of every order and keep track of where everything is at all times. For starters, the plates and flatware have to be marked with *milchig* or *fleishig* stickers, but the *mashgiach's* job goes far beyond that. He has to keep track of exactly where they go, which makes this one of the more tricky aspects of certifying events.

In any case, a guest who wants to be sure that he's eating kosher must ascertain that the dishes and other utensils are included in the supervision. If the party planner has no *hashgachah*, it is highly probable that the rented items don't have one either.

Rabbi Auerbach:

Most rental places don't have an in-house *mashgiach*. Obviously, the best-case scenario would be to have a resident *mashgiach* in control of the inventory. When someone applies for a rental, there would be forms to be filled out with questions like: Who will be catering? Who will be the *mashgiach* at your affair?

I've been involved in providing *hechsherim* for things like this in the past. The way we did it was to deliver items in a sealed Rubbermaid locker and only release them after we knew to whom they were being entrusted, with the proviso that we would get everything back in exactly the same way. That way, there was a clear chain of custody. But that's very uncommon. Dishes, flatware and even grills are often used at parties without any idea of what they were

previously used for. A responsible agency has to understand the product and be aware of potential problems so they can be taken care of in advance.

Rabbi Hisiger:

How can people be assured that it's okay to eat at an event that uses rented utensils?

Rabbi Auerbach:

People have to have *derech eretz* and respect for *rabbanim*, but they also shouldn't be afraid to ask questions. There's nothing wrong with calling a supervising agency and saying, "I heard that this rental place is under your *hashgachah* and I have some questions. Do you have a *mashgiach* who makes unannounced visits to events that aren't under your *hashgachah* but use the same rentals?" It is not only a person's right but also a responsibility to ask reasonable questions. Supervising agencies should be held accountable as long as it is done in a respectful manner. I think it's important for people to start doing this. The agencies need to hear people's concerns and take them seriously.

Rabbi Hisiger:

Have you seen any movement towards party planners obtaining reputable *hechsherim*?

Rabbi Auerbach:

I haven't seen it for the simple reason that most laypeople are unaware of the problem and *rabbanim* don't make it a front-burner issue. You can't expect the average person to be in tune with what's going on in the *kashrus* world. When someone is making his first bar mitzvah and his friends say, "I went to a beautiful affair and the party planner arranged everything," his response will often be, "Really? What's his name?" He will then use that person without a second thought. It never occurs to him that there's anything to worry about.

Publicizing the problem in print would



Kashering equipment with a blowtorch

be a big help, as it would lead to a discussion that would create awareness. So would *rabbanim* getting up in *shul* and talking about it. I also believe that if people were informed about this issue in their neighborhood *shuls* and smaller venues, it would work its way up to the larger catering halls.

Rabbi Babad:

In today's world, it isn't hard to find kosher doughnut machines, sushi makers and just about anything you're looking for. By the same token, attendees shouldn't be afraid to ask questions. If a *mashgiach* is on site, don't be hesitant to talk to him. He'll probably be happy to address all your concerns. Hopefully, the increased awareness of potential pitfalls will lead every party planner to obtain supervision on everything from A to Z. That way, many problems will be averted.

Rabbi Hisiger:

Kol has'chalos kashos. Everything is hard in the beginning, but we know that matters ultimately work out for those who are *mezakeh* the *rabbim* by making sure that everything we eat is on the highest

level of *kashrus*.

Rabbi Babad:

We are genuinely thankful to those party planners who do have supervision. They are sometimes *mevater* on certain things, so we should definitely have *hakarashatov*.

Rabbi Hisiger:

At the end of the day, an educated consumer is the best customer, and the more frequently the highest level of *kashrus* is insisted upon, the higher the bar will collectively be raised.

Rabbi Auerbach:

Absolutely! It's very encouraging that I've seen a groundswell of people of good will who have taken the initiative to say that they want something better. In this *zechus, klal Yisrael* will hopefully move onward and upward! ●

Special thanks to Let's Talk Kashrus, an initiative of the Kashrus Awareness Project. The project's mission is to inform and educate the kosher consumer to know what to look out for and what to inquire about. For more info, see www.kashrusawareness.com.