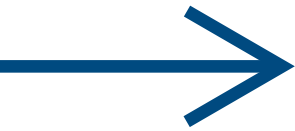




# Kashrut is the Essence

The Main Principles of the Reform in the  
State Kashrut System in Israel

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The kashrut system, in its current format, exhibits serious shortcomings that severely undermine official government (“state”) kashrut in the State of Israel.

The State Comptroller has extensively warned about this issue and determined that: “The current framework – in which the kashrut supervisors are employed by the place of business that they oversee and upon which they are dependent for their livelihood is a conflict of interest – and undermines the kashrut system and the motivation of kashrut supervisors to report kashrut problems.”

This situation is an egregious example of the religious councils turning a blind eye and is liable to compromise the very levels of kashrut and public trust in the kashrut system.

The reform plan of the Ministry of Religious Services (HaMisrad leSherutei Dat) will restore the credibility of state kashrut and allow kashrut observers to feel far more confident in purchasing and consuming food produced in Israel. At the same time, expectations are that the reform will improve kashrut in the public domain and will enable more establishments to maintain basic or enhanced (mehadrin) kashrut that will be much more.



## The Main Problems in the Current Kashrut System

### Lack of Supervision

The State Comptroller has repeatedly warned of the extremely dysfunctional, sometimes scandalous, functioning of the supervision system, wherein supervisors do not visit the very places of business that are under their supervision. This pervasive problem is testament to the lack of supervision. Moreover, in a significant number of the large cities, the position of rabbi of the city remains unfilled. As a result, in those locales there is no rabbinic supervision at all.

The root of the problem is the monopolistic structure of kashrut in Israel, which operates on the basis of a model of local monopolies. Each local rabbi or religious council has the exclusive authority to provide kashrut certification in their jurisdiction, in accordance with standards and procedures that they determine with virtually no external supervision.

Local monopolies create a lack of uniformity in halakha, a lack of uniformity in pricing, corruption, nepotism, and a lack of control over the national system which is manifest in numerous injustices caused to business owners.

On the basis of all of the factors described above, a sweeping reform in the area of state kashrut is essential.

Several weeks ago, a comprehensive kashrut reform of the Minister of Religious Service was launched. In its framework, it is anticipated that the Chief Rabbinate will become the supreme regulator and supervisor, while the market will be opened to competition between private kosher companies that will operate under extensive, uniform supervision that will be transparent to the public.

This program constitutes a perfect opportunity to restore public trust and build renewed support for the world of kashrut and Jewish tradition, while bolstering the authority of the Chief Rabbinate and ensuring quality kashrut.

The success of this course of action depends heavily on public support. We invite you to examine the main principles of the reform and we are certain that you will find it a worthy and even critical development.



## **The Essence of Kashrut**

### **Main Principles of the Reform in Israel's State Kashrut System**

#### **Chief Rabbinate – Supreme Authority**

The reform establishes – for the first time – the Chief Rabbinate as the supreme regulator, in setting the basic standards in the field of kashrut in Israel and in overseeing their implementation (directly or by means of incumbent city rabbis). This is in contrast to the current situation where each local rabbinate establishes an independent standard, with no supervision or monitoring.

#### **The Authority to Grant Kashrut Certification**

Today, the level of training and supervision depends on sometimes arbitrary local circumstances and considerations, relying specifically on the authority of the local rabbinate. In the framework of the kashrut reform, every place of business will be able to enjoy professional kashrut, which meets the rabbinate standard AND is under the oversight of the national commissioner for kashrut, subject to conditions and regulations that will be made accessible to the general public.

#### **Clear and Uniform Procedures for Granting Kashrut Certification**

To date, the halakhic standards and training procedures have not been transparent to the public, and are not uniform in different localities, and even in different places of business in the same locality. Under the proposed reform, transparent and uniform

halakhic principles and work procedures will be formulated at the national level by the Chief Rabbinate. The principles and procedures will be publicized and enforced consistently and equally.

Kashrut will be permitted on the basis of procedures approved by three city rabbis. This will be clearly delineated on the kashrut certificate to prevent any possible deception of the public.

## **Overseeing Kashrut Supervisors**

Guidelines for the training of kashrut supervisors in all private and badatz kashrut organizations, as well as their terms of employment and oversight of their work, will be determined in a transparent and uniform manner by a commissioner appointed under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate, which will operate the national oversight system.

## **Badatz Organizations**

For many years, badatz kosher authorities have constituted an alternative system of kashrut, not subject to any oversight, both in terms of corporate conduct and in terms of kashrut procedures and compliance with halakhic principles. In the framework of the proposed reform, the badatz kosher authorities would constitute kashrut corporations that will be required to comply with all national regulations pertaining to corporate conduct and proper management, under professional supervision and in keeping with clear and recognized standards.

## **A Single Kashrut Certificate**

Duplication in the field of kashrut is a well-known and deeply problematic issue. Currently, a place of business interested in badatz supervision is required to have duplicate certificates (badatz + Rabbinate), a fact that imposes double the costs on the business and opens a door to potential irregularities and the desecration of God's name. In the framework of the reform, each place of business will have only a single kashrut certificate.

## **Prices Known in Advance**

Under the current framework, the business's kashrut supervision costs are not made clear or uniform. Places of business find themselves functioning in an atmosphere of economic uncertainty, generating resentment toward the conduct of the kashrut supervisor as well as a desecration of God's name. In the framework of the reform, procedures and costs will be made transparent in advance for each place of business.

## **Transparency in Kashrut Procedures and Administrative Procedures**

The lack of transparency and the sense of arbitrariness in the field of kashrut are key factors in generating feelings of resentment and frustration toward the field of kashrut, the rabbinate, and even the halakha and Judaism as a whole. The fact that the minimum requirements of the rabbinate are far more stringent than the basic halakha also leads to a situation in which many businesses choose to completely forgo kashrut. The transition to clear, uniform, and transparent conduct will restore trust and support for kashrut, halakha and Jewish tradition.

In the framework of the proposed reform, three levels of kashrut will be delineated in order to facilitate kashrut that is in keeping with the fundamental law!

## **Addressing the Problematic “Employer-Employee Relationship”**

Most kashrut supervisors are employed directly by the place of business that they supervise. The current situation opens the door for improper conduct and the state has previously made a commitment before the High Court of Justice to rectify this problem. With the implementation of the new reform, the supervisors will be employed in kashrut corporations, and the status where the employee and employer are dependent upon one another will no longer be the standard.

## **Competition**

Introducing competition into the market will improve the level of kashrut in the State of Israel and is an essential factor in the promotion of quality service and cost reduction. The proposed reform anchors the status of the rabbinate as the authority that determines the national kashrut standards and supervises them. The broad powers of enforcement, supervision and punishment that will be provided to the commissioner are a clear and essential condition for the success of the reform, and will prevent the danger that financial considerations will negatively influence the level of kashrut.

In fact, the reform is based on the model that has already been in effect for years in the field of importing kosher products to Israel from abroad. In that framework, the rabbinate approved dozens of private kosher companies that implement supervision in food production plants located throughout the world without the involvement of Chief Rabbinate kashrut supervisors. This serves as an example that competition does not compromise the level of kashrut.

	The Situation Today	After the Reform
Clear and uniform procedures for determining kashrut	✗	✓
Oversight of kashrut supervisors	✗	✓
Eliminating dependence on local kashrut procedures	✗	✓
Subjecting badatz organizations to professional supervision and clear standards	✗	✓
Badatz certificate replaces the need for a regular certificate	✗	✓
Cessation of duplicate payments for businesses	✗	✓
Prices are uniform and known in advance	✗	✓
Transparency in kashrut and administrative procedures	✗	✓
Eliminating the supervisor's dependence on the supervised (currently often receives his salary from the business)	✗	✓
Recognizing the authority of private organizations to grant rabbinical kashrut certification	✗	✓
Chief Rabbinate – supreme authority	✗	✓



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