

# Should A Rabbi Need A License In Order To Give Kosher Certification?

## The Need for A Uniform Kosher Standard

Most professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and social workers require a license to call themselves by their title. Colleges and universities require the SAT scores as a standard entrance exam. But, when it comes to *kashrus*, there is no one standard that everyone can agree upon. For some people, this can cause a lot of unnecessary confusion.

The “Big Five” kosher supervisory agencies: “OU”, “OK”, “KOF-K”, “Star-K” and the “cRc” are widely accepted. Yet, there are a number of other *hashgachas* on packaged food, some of which are not always considered reliable.

According to *halacha*, food is either kosher or not. But, in a country where so many different *hashgachas* are given by different rabbis, it is not really that simple.

It becomes problematic when rabbis and consumers alike disagree on what is considered to be a kosher product. And, if that product is not kosher according to your standard, should it then be considered *treif*?

Ms. Mehlman's article appeared in Issue #138 and bears reprinting here. As the years go by, we see that her idea, whether or not it is doable, points to the need to develop universal acceptance in kosher. A higher standard for all as opposed to each agency for itself. AKO has been a good beginning in the *kashrus* world, but more unity is sorely needed.

## The Orthodox Standard of Kosher

Moving from a Conservative to an Orthodox lifestyle, I have experienced first-hand the conflict that emerges from an unclear definition of kosher food. What makes something kosher or *traif*? Many Conservative Jews accept that meat must be from kosher animals that have been properly slaughtered. They also accept the importance of separating meat and dairy utensils.

Orthodox Jews, however, follow guidelines (based on *halacha*) which are practically more demanding on both the type of food and its preparation.

Those Jews who overlook the need for a reliable *hashgacha* on food products, but rely only on reading the ingredients listed in a product, tend to polarize us even further. They do not realize that legally not all ingredients need be listed on a package label, and that non-kosher equipment will render even kosher ingredients to be non-kosher. Likewise, kosher supervision covers the certification of the sources of ingredients, something that no one can tell from reading a label.

As a result of these and other differences, food that is considered “kosher” by non-Orthodox Jews may be totally unacceptable to Orthodoxy. This problem is very noticeable when caterers and product labels claim that they are kosher, but, according to the local *vaad hakashrus*, are considered “not recommended”.

This vagueness in defining kosher has caused me considerable stress. When I was a Conservative Jew, I ate only kosher types of food — with no *hashgacha* but I felt that the ingredients were “kosher” — and waited three hours between eating meat and dairy. I shopped at a kosher butcher, but one that I would not use today. While my *kashrus* level at that time was unacceptable to Orthodox Jews, and even to me now, I was considered “very strict” according to the many assimilated Jews and gentiles with whom I came into contact.

Now that my level of *kashrus* is acceptable within the Orthodox community, it has created confusion in the other direction. It is difficult to explain to people why I can’t eat food that is labeled kosher by an unreliable kosher supervisory agency, including caterers who may advertise as kosher (or “kosher available”).

Is there such a thing as “more kosher” or “less kosher”? How do you explain to people why you can’t eat at an event while the caterer says it is glatt kosher? How do you explain why a national brand of hot dogs are labeled as “Strictly Kosher” and yet are not up to an Orthodox standard?

### Isn’t Glatt Good Enough

To complicate matters, Orthodox people attending a *simcha* may be eating from a caterer labeled glatt kosher, even though they are considered “not recommended” by my local *vaad*.

Only later in life did I see that a glatt kosher label by itself is not necessarily reliable proof of a proper kosher standard. People who don’t know this may wonder why food that is kosher enough for everyone else is not good enough for me.

### The Confusing “K”

When there is just a plain “K” on a food product, it may mean that no one certifies it at all. The “K”, if it is to represent kosher at all, may be just a claim of self-certification by the producer. And yet still we have products that have a good kosher certification but appear with only a “K”.

Better yet, or should I say worse yet, people have also asked me why I eat a certain product which bears only a “K”. Since we have gotten so

**SUBSCRIBE NOW TO**

**KASHRUS**  
*Magazine*

**Turn To Page 24**

used to the idea that a “K” alone is not a standard that is acceptable, it is hard for people to understand why even my *vaad* will recommend certain products bearing just a “K”.

These are just some of the situations and questions that have arisen through my transition from a Conservative to an Orthodox lifestyle. Because there is no one set standard for *kashrus* labels, it becomes difficult when Jews have different standards of kosher food.

Non-Orthodox Jews may become offended, and sometimes skeptical, when you decline to eat certain food. They blame “politics” for what are varying standards of *kashrus*. Yet, sometimes, an Orthodox Jew may feel awkward eating in homes of some other Orthodox Jews who do not have a full command of *kashrus* standards.

### The Solution

It is unfortunate that, in a society which has strict requirements for all kinds of labels, there is no standard requirement for *kashrus* that is agreed upon by everyone. If all rabbis needed a license to certify food as kosher or were required to meet specific standards to label food as kosher, it could eliminate a lot of confusion and misunderstanding.

In England, on Shabbos most Jews will walk to and *daven* at an Orthodox synagogue, regardless of whether or not they are observant. The same could happen with kosher — the institution of a universal basic standard out of respect for all Jews. It could unite us all. Until then, it will remain difficult to explain to others why food with a kosher label is often unreliable by Orthodox standards.

My hope is that this confusion will be recognized by the kosher industry itself so that changes can take place leading toward instituting a universal *kashrus* standard agreed upon by almost everyone.

**KM**