Dear Reader,

The days of Elul and the Aseres Yemei Teshuva are times designated to make a cheshbon hanefesh, a stock taking of our spiritual accomplishments and the areas which still need improvement.

Some things are easy for us to spot; we know when we aren’t doing our best. But others are more difficult to identify. Sometimes we overlook the obvious, everyday occurrences and somehow assume that no improvement is needed.

It’s for precisely this reason that rabbis and staff members are constantly double checking our work to ensure that everything bearing our symbol is kosher to the highest standard possible. The is the only kashrus organization that sends a rabbinic coordinator annually from our main headquarters, who is personally familiar with the facility and products, to double check each facility with fresh eyes, in addition to the regular local visiting rabbis who do the regular kosher inspections.

The great strides that Israel is making in the cultivation of insect-free produce, as described in this issue, are a prime example of our unceasing goal to provide products that are kosher without compromise. Enjoy the fascinating article by Maayan Meir that describes the process of growing, inspecting and packaging corn and strawberries that are certified as insect-free.

Finally, as Simchas Torah comes around we all take for granted that most vodka and alcoholic drinks are kosher, but Rabbi Levy shares with us his firsthand experiences at distilleries around the world that proves that not all is as it seems when it comes to alcohol.

Enter certified Terressentia – a boutique brand with a state of the art distilling process. Turn the pages to learn all about their patented process and their pride in being certified kosher.

L’chaim to a wonderful new year!

Wishing you and your families a happy, healthy, sweet and kosher new year,

Rabbi Chaim Fogelman

Editor in Chief
Now might just be a great time to go kosher!

A new scientific study published by the National Academy of Sciences has found a sharp rise in vibrio, a deadly bacteria found in oysters (not kosher), due to rising ocean temperatures.

This is Dovid’l (David) from the Bronx who works at © certified Thanksgiving Coffee, wrapping Tefillin for the first time, with mashgiach Rabbi Mendel Wolovovsky.
Dear Kosher Spirit,
During the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, most people are more careful to consume only Pas Yisroel baked goods. I’ve been wondering, do granola and granola bars need to be Pas Yisroel?

Rabbi Hanoka responds:

First, let me explain what falls into the category of “pas” and is therefore subject to the classification of Pas Yisroel. According to most poskim, dough made from the five grains (wheat, oat, spelt, rye and barley) and then baked, and would satisfy a person as a meal (if enough is consumed) is considered “pas” and would require one to bendcha Birkas HaMazon. This includes bread and cookies, cakes, pizza, etc.

On the other hand, stalks of wheat or oats have the brocha of Ha’adama. When deshelled or cooked, they lose some of their appearance (like oatmeal) and have the brocha of Mezonos, but they always carry the brocha achrona of Al HaMichya, regardless of how much is consumed. Because these foods always carry the after brocha of Al HaMichya, thus they are exempt from Pas Yisroel.

Granola is made from solid ingredients (as opposed to flour), such as oat flakes, nuts, fruits and flavorings, which are stuck together by using hot honey, malt syrup and liquid sugar first (in the case of the granola bar are pressed together) and then dried in an oven, thus not having the ruling of a dough. In addition it does not carry the appearance of bread, as it is made of bits and pieces and thus never requires one to bendcha Birkas HaMazon regardless of how much is consumed.

In terms of the question of Bishul Akum, granola does not require Bishul Yisroel for numerous reasons, including that it is not eaten as a meal, but rather as a snack food, and is not a food that can be classified as being of a royal nature. (It is not the norm to eat it with bread, a person does not invite one’s friend to come over just to eat it, etc.).

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1. Yoreh Deah siman 112 seif 6 and Pri-Chodosh, end of the Siman.
2. Shulchan Oruch HaRav, Birchas HaNehenin, Perek 1, seif 8 & Perek 2, seif 15.
3. Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 113 seif 1 and Rambam Hilchos Machalos Asuros perek 17 halacha 15
Benefits of Apple Cider Vinegar

Apple cider vinegar helps reduce blood sugar levels by stopping digestive enzymes that break down carbohydrates into simple sugars.

Apple cider vinegar can help prevent overeating at meals, saving 200-300 calories.

Consuming apple cider vinegar can help unclog sinuses and reduce mucous.

Apple cider vinegar has antibiotic properties and gargling with it can help heal a sore throat.

Consuming diluted apple cider vinegar helps balance acidity in the stomach to reduce acid reflux.

Applying apple cider vinegar to the skin, or adding to bath water, can help inflammation from mosquito bites, sunburn and poison ivy.

Apple cider vinegar, poured directly on the site of the injury, will soothe a jellyfish sting.

Rinsing your hair with apple cider vinegar can improve shine and reduce dandruff.

It’s Minhag Yisroel to eat a sweet apple dipped in honey on Rosh Hashanah, and many have the custom to make a variety of sweet apple dishes during the month of Tishrei.*

Vinegar is an essential household product, with dozens of uses. The tangy, delicious, apple cider variety has a multitude of health benefits, in addition to being a great salad dressing!

*Some people have the custom not to have vinegar on Rosh Hashanah
WHAT
BROCHA
DO WE MAKE
ON HEARTS
OF PALM?

BY RABBI
BENZION CHANOWITZ
HEARTS
OF PALM

come from the center (or heart) of the palm tree. Palm trees can grow for 50-75 years and produce a variety of fruit, such as dates and coconuts, and other less widely used varietals. The fruit usually begin to grow after the tree is three to five years old. Hearts of palm actually come from the core of the trunk of the tree and can be harvested in addition to the fruit produced by the tree.

Hearts of palm have been used in Brazilian and Costa Rican cuisine for many years. Since 1970, this interesting food gained fame and became a popular Central and South American export. Accordingly, various varieties of palm trees have been cultivated in order to maximize yield and harvest efficiency.

Currently the most popular palm trees for hearts of palm are Palmitos and Peach Palms. These palm trees reach a height of about 9 feet in 12 months. When the tree reaches this stage, the center stem is cut and the top half of the trunk and the leaves are discarded. The remainder of the trunk is peeled, leaving about a 30-inch long heart. Due to concerns about deforestation, mature trees are not harvested; rather, they plant new trees specifically to harvest the heart. After the center stem is cut, another stem will take over and become a center stem, regenerating the trunk and leaves. This process can repeat about ten times before the tree can no longer regrow.

Now that we understand the makeup of the tree, what brocha would be appropriate to make on the hearts? We know that when we eat the fruit of a tree, we say borei pri ha’adamah. The palm tree surely is a tree, but would we consider the heart a fruit of the tree? (Note: This discussion will also shed light on bamboo shoots.)

In order to gain some insight, let us study a piece of Gemara, Masechta Brachos 36a. The Gemara discusses the appropriate brocha for “koireh” (interpreted in the Artscroll Talmud as “palm shoots”). Rashi explains that each year, as the branches of the tree grow, a soft layer is added. This layer is soft during the first year and later on it hardens. Accordingly, this is what is referred to in the Gemara as the edible part of the tree. (Note: Rabbi Iliowitz, the Rov in San Paolo writes, from personal experience, that this part is not edible. He, therefore, concludes that surely Rashi meant the heart of the palm.)

Rav Hai Gaon, in his commentary on a Mishna in Masechta Uktzin 37, says that “koireh” (or “koir”) refers to a tree that does not produce fruit. When you cut down the tree (as they do in Arabic countries), the top of the tree is soft (on the inside). The Rambam (Hilchos Brachos, Perek 8, Halacha 6) adds that it is white, and is (somewhat) similar to dried cheese. It would seem that they are all referring to hearts of palm.

In the Gemara, there are two opinions. Rabbi Yehudah says you would make the brocha “borei pri ha’adamah”. Rabbi Shmuel argues and says that you would make the brocha “shehakol ni’yoh bidvaro” because the “koireh” will eventually harden and become inedible; therefore, it is considered a minor quality food today. The Gemara then explains that Rabbi Shmuel’s opinion (shehakol) is valid only when the tree was not planted specifically for this food. If the tree was planted specifically for the harvested food (like radishes), then even though it will eventually harden, one makes the brocha “borei pri ha’adamah”.

Today, the palm trees are planted specifically for their hearts, so most rabbonim agree that one would not make the brocha “shehakol ni’yoh bidvaro”, as this is their designated use. (Though some may argue that since it was shehakol during the times of the Gemara and beyond, it should remain so today. For a longer discussion, see Even HaOizer, Siman 204, as well as V’Zois Habracha pg. 309.)

Yet, if the brocha is not “shehakol ni’yoh bidvaro”, should we not say “borei pri ha’etz” on the hearts? After all, it does come from a tree, and we do say “borei pri ha’etz” on dates and coconuts.

The Gemara (Brachos 36a) discusses the proper brocha for “tzlaf” (translated by Artscroll as a caper bush). The be-raisa says, “On the caper leaves and its dates (those that grow on the leaves), you should say “borei pri ha’adamah”. 

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On the berries and the husks you should say “borei pri ha’eitz”. The reason for this distinction is because the main purpose of the tree is to bear fruit. For the main fruit, you would say “borei pri ha’eitz”. Eating the leaves and their berries is secondary, so one says “borei pri ha’adamah” on those.

When it comes to hearts of palm, we have a dilemma. Originally, the palm trees were planted for their fruit. The usage of the hearts was only a side benefit of the tree (to be harvested when the tree had to be cut down or was no longer fertile). Today, the trees are planted specifically for the hearts especially the peach palm, which does not produce edible fruit), so what is the appropriate brocha?

Rabbi Moshe Heineman paskens that you should say Borei Pri Ha-Eitz, since the hearts of palm are the primary fruit. Most of today’s Poskim would say that you make a Borei Pri Ha-Adamah. Some of their reasons are:

1) THE GEMARA (Brachos 40a,b) says that you only make the brocha “borei pri ha’eitz” when the branch remains after you pick the fruit (and will be able to produce fruit again later on). If the branch does not endure after the fruit is picked, you say “borei pri ha’adamah”. This is also the reason that we say “borei pri ha’adamah” on bananas. When harvesting hearts of palm, there is no remaining branch.

2) THE BAHAG (see Biur Halacha, Siman 202, se’if 15) says that you do not make a “borei pri ha’eitz” on sugar cane because you are eating the branch itself, not the fruit of the branch. With hearts of palm, even though the palm is a tree, when we eat the center of the tree, it is not considered the fruit of the tree.

3) THERE ARE TWO opinions as to how we determine the purpose of planting the palm tree:

A) ONE OPINION is that we look at all of the palm trees in the world. Accordingly, palm trees are planted mainly for their dates and coconuts; the hearts are a secondary or a tertiary use (and may even require “shehakol”, as mentioned above).

B) THE SECOND OPINION is that we look at the main reason that these particular trees were grown. If so, clearly the main purpose of these palm trees is to produce hearts. Yet, it would seem from the Teshuvos HaRashba, Chelek 1, Siman 400 that since most palm trees are planted for their fruit, the hearts are considered secondary and would require a “borei pri ha’adamah”. (Please see V’Zos Habracha page 308-9 for this discussion.)

4) IN ADDITION, when one is not sure whether to make the brocha “ha’eitz” or “ha’adamah” we make the latter brocha, since all trees grow from the ground.

5) THERE ARE SOME who make a distinction between cultivated palms (“ha’adamah”) or wild-grown palms (“shehakol”).

6) A FEW YEARS AGO, one of the periodicals had a discussion which focused on the laws of orlah (the prohibition of eating fruit of a tree during the first three years). In the article, the author wrote that “sugar cane and hearts of palm are good examples of edible stalks, which are not usually prohibited since they are not fruits (otherwise they would be subject to the prohibition of orlah).”

Though the article does not explain why they decided that “they are not fruit”, the author may be relying on a sentence later on in the article. “The Shulchan Oruch and horticulturists consider the fruit of an annual (a plant that dies or degenerates after one year or season), to be a vegetable. Later on they discuss eggplant and come to the conclusion that it is not bound by “orlah” because the quality of the eggplant diminishes dramatically after its first harvest.

Furthermore, the Gemara (Brachos 36a) seems to say that if a “fruit” is not halachically considered a fruit for “orlah” purposes, it would also not be considered a fruit when determining the brocha. (I was told that those who hold that you say “borei pri ha’eitz” opine that the criteria for brochos are not the same as the criteria for “orlah”. This surely can use further clarification.)

All of this supports the opinion of most of today’s poskim, which is that the brocha for hearts of palm is “borei pri ha’adamah.”

In addition, in Otzar Habrachos, the author mentions the issue of Bishul Yisroel. As we know, any foods that cannot be eaten raw, and are served at fancy dinners (oleh al shulchan melochim) cannot be cooked by a non-Jew. In order to assure that you are eating Bishul Yisroel, please check your labels for proper supervision.

Lastly, we all know that when Hashem created the tree, the original intent was that the tree itself should be edible, as it says “eitz pri”. Today (possibly as we are getting closer to the days of Mashiach), we are finding more and more usages for different parts of the trees. This is especially evident when we are able to eat part of the tree stem itself! May Hashem grant that we merit the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days. Surely then we will be able to see the fulfillment of “eitz pri”, as well.
PECAN, CHOCOLATE, & RASPBERRY RUGELACH

By: Shifra Klein - Joy of Kosher Magazine.
Subscribe at www.joyofkosher.com/subscribe

This is a healthier version of my favorite pecan, chocolate, and raspberry rugelach recipe. Feel free to substitute other flavors of jam and other nuts to make this recipe your own. Prepare the dough a day in advance, as it needs to freeze overnight.

MAKES 3 ROLLS, SERVES 16

COOK TIME 30 MIN
PREP TIME 20 MIN
SERVINGS 36

DOUGH
1 cup (2 sticks) pareve margarine, or coconut spread
8 ounces soy cream cheese, at room temperature 30 minutes, plus extra for dusting
1 cup white whole wheat flour
1 1/4 cups oat flour
1 tablespoon confectioner’s sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

FILLING
1 cup raspberry jam
1 cup pecans, chopped into 1/4 inch pieces
1 cup mini chocolate chips
1 teaspoons rose water

PREPARATION

1. To make the dough, place the margarine, cream cheese, white whole-wheat flour and oat flour, confectioner’s sugar, and vanilla into the bowl of a mixer fitted with the paddle or a food processor fitted with a metal blade, and mix just until the dough comes together.

2. Divide the dough into thirds; enclose each piece in plastic wrap and flatten. Freeze overnight. Remove from freezer and let thaw until you can press it and make a small indentation.

3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. To roll out the dough, place a 10 X 15-inch sheet of parchment paper on the counter. Sprinkle with flour and place one dough disc on the parchment, sprinkle with more flour, and then top with a second sheet of parchment. Roll on top of the parchment to roll out the dough until it is 10 X 14 to 15 inches. Peel back the top parchment a few times while rolling and sprinkle some more flour on the dough. Remove the top parchment but reserve to cover the second disc of dough.

4. Use a silicone spatula to spread one third of the jam over the dough to the edges. Sprinkle 1/3 cup of the pecans and 1/3 cup of the mini chocolate chips over the dough. Using the parchment to help you, roll up the long side, working slowly and rolling as tightly as you can and end with the seam on the bottom. Slice into one-inch pieces and place on a parchment-covered cookie sheet. Repeat with the other two pieces of dough, slice, and place on the cookie sheet.

5. Bake for 30 minutes, or until the bottoms are lightly browned, but the tops can be light.

6. Store, covered with plastic or in an airtight container, at room temperature for up to five days or freeze for up to three months.
An Age-Old Drink
With a Modern Twist

A Conversation with Terressentia Corporation CEO - Earl Hewlette
By Pamela Graham Anderson

Earl Hewlette is the CEO of the South Carolina based Terressentia Corporation. Since 2007, Hewlette has been instrumental in the growth of the innovative technology company. The distilled spirits company’s revenues have grown from $7,000 to more than $20 million. Hewlette is a South Carolina native and decorated Marine officer with a diverse business background in law, real estate development, and hospitality management.

Terressentia Corporation was formed in 2006 and is located in North Charleston, South Carolina; tell us a little about the company:

Our company was founded with the idea that technology can improve both the quality and taste of distilled spirits. We apply our patented TerrePURE® process to a wide variety of distilled spirits (bourbon, gin, vodka, whiskey...) for the private label, private brand, and global bulk spirits markets.

Tell us more about the patented TerrePURE® process:

In 1999 O.Z. “Ty” Tyler and his stepson Edward Bailey, were looking for a way to mature whiskey in a shorter period of time as compared to spending years in a barrel. They discovered a safe, sustainable way to use ultrasonic energy to remove harsh-tasting impurities and reveal a better taste and aroma. Our company was founded around this
natural process and the result is that we can produce great tasting spirits in less time and at a lower cost than traditional methods. That savings is passed on to the consumer.

**The bottling facility in North Charleston is kosher certified, when did that begin?**

In 2012 one of our private brand customers who markets an award-winning Chinese haijou spirit under the brand name Bye Joe initially asked us to obtain Kosher certification for his brand. Paula Dezzutti, who was our then brand manager and majority owner of our affiliate Local Choice Spirits, saw the larger benefit of kosher certification and put in place a program with Kosher which enabled us to offer the certification to all of our private brand customers and also to our private retail customers. Today Local Choice Spirits creates award winning spirits for the hottest names in the music and TV industry.

**Your spirits can be found worldwide; how can we identify your kosher certification?**

Many of our products prominently feature the Kosher symbol on the back label.

**What has been the reaction to the kosher certification for your private label and bulk spirits customers?**

The response has been very favorable. Gone are the days when food and drink are purchased indiscriminately, merely on the basis of taste or eye appeal. Consumers examine the ingredient panel on products, concerned about what they consume, as well as manufacturing procedures. The kosher symbol, with the monitoring and care it represents, ensures the highest quality standards to the largest and most diverse consumer audience.

**I understand Terressentia Corporation has also purchased a bourbon distillery in Kentucky?**

Yes, in 2013, we began looking for long term supply of bourbon whiskey because global demand was so high. We became aware of an opportunity to acquire a closed distillery in Owensboro, Kentucky and made the purchase in 2014. We renamed the distillery the O.Z. Tyler Distillery, in honor of the co-inventor of the TerrePURE® process. For the last two years we have been renovating the historic 26 acre facility and began making Kentucky bourbon in August. The distillery will annually produce one million cases of Kentucky bourbon.

**Will the O.Z. Tyler Distillery be kosher certified as well?**

Yes, we think that is an important distinction and we will seek kosher certification. We believe the Kosher symbol is an extremely useful indication of quality by consumers of our products and, consequently, we are implementing the use of the symbol on the majority of the products we produce and label.

**Finally, do you see Terressentia Corporation releasing more of its spirits as kosher certified?**

We do. We anticipate that more private brand and private label customers will appreciate the certification. In 2017 we will be releasing our first national commercial O.Z. Tyler brand and one of our goals for that product is for it to be kosher certified.
PIONEERS ONCE AGAIN: HOW THE K HAS ENTERED UNCHARTED TERRITORY TO ACHIEVE INSECT-FREE PRODUCTS

BY MAAYAN MEIR
Producing insect-free food products is one of the most challenging issues for kosher organizations. The main problem is the unique halachic status of insects and bugs.

Bugs and insects are different, according to Rabbi Ahron Haskel, Director of K Israel. They are living creatures – beriya, and so – according to halacha – the concept of bitul doesn’t apply to them. “It doesn’t matter how few bugs there are or the size of the end product – it is still not kosher. Also, eating bugs and insects is actually worse than eating pork! The Torah prohibited pig products only once, but there are 5 specific prohibitions – lavim – which forbid eating bugs and insects.”

Despite the seriousness of the challenge and the many difficulties in trying to cope with it, the K has decided not to shy away from tackling these issues. For about a decade, for instance, K Israel had certified, with great investment and care, the frozen herbs produced by Dorot Garlic and Herbs. But this project, as well as others which focus on certifying herbs and products containing them, seem easy in comparison to the latest tasks undertaken by K Israel.

The most prominent example is the pioneering project of producing kosher, insect-free corn on the cob.

“Corn on the cob is very problematic – usually when you cut one you will find worms and bugs hiding between the kernels and the cob,” says Rabbi Haskel. “In the past we didn’t know that this infestation was so ubiquitous. In recent years it has become common knowledge in Israel and so most kosher agencies will not certify corn on the cob as kosher. The problems there are just too well-known. Today, corn on the cob is considered ‘muchzak benegius’ – assumed to be infested with bugs.”

The K, however, has decided to enter that uncharted territory, following a request from Strauss Group to find a way to import insect-free corn on the cob.

Rabbi Haim Ben Hamu, the head mashgiach of Strauss Group, tells us: “About a year and a half ago, the company applied to the K and asked for its help in importing corn on the cob to Israel. The Chief Rabbinate didn’t allow it because of the insect issue and no agency agreed to undertake kosher supervision of the project. Rabbi Haskel agreed to try, even though it’s the riskiest kosher issue. Unlike with other products, it is very easy to check the quality of the certification by checking the produce to see whether it contains insects.”

“Rabbi Haskel sent me to Thailand with another mashgiach to find out more about the possibility of producing kosher corn on the cob. We first visited the cornfields and found out that most insects enter the corn ears through the open part. Consequently, the younger and closer the corn ear is to the stalk, the lower the degree of infestation. So, we reached two conclusions: first, the corn should be harvested relatively early; and secondly, the upper third of the corn ear, which is near the opening, cannot be used.”

“The local facility was unhappy with our conclusions and at first refused to cooperate, but their client – Strauss – insisted they had to listen to us. So they did.”
To achieve insect-free corn on the cob, every production in Thailand begins with a mashgich visiting the fields, checking that pesticides are being used properly, and ensuring that the bigger, drier, corn ears are not being harvested. Then, once the trucks with the corn ears reach the facility, they are checked again to make sure that the right kind of corn was harvested.

Each production is attended by four mashgichim. The ears of corn undergo various methods of cleaning. Later, they are cut into three parts; only the two bottom parts are used for the kosher production. They are cleaned twice more before packing. Throughout the production, the mashgichim sample the corn, checking each time that the cleaning procedures have indeed worked and the corn is free of infestation.

Once the products reach Israel, a significant sample is sent to the lab of infestation expert, Rabbi Vaye. “So far the results have been very encouraging,” says Rabbi Ben Hamu. “We haven’t yet started marketing it as 100% insect-free, but I think we are very close to reaching this goal.” Indeed, during the very week we interviewed Rabbi Haskel, he sent us the new report from Rabbi Vaye’s lab: the last sample was found to be 100% bug-free!

If corn on the cob has been a clear no-no for frum people in recent years, strawberries have posed their own unique problems. While there no complete ban on consumption, the current kosher recommendation in Israel is to peel the entire strawberry before eating. This, however, proved a major obstacle for one of the R’s biggest clients in Israel, Tara/Muller, a part of Coca Cola Israel Group. One of the most popular Muller products is a yogurt with strawberry pieces.

“Certifying this yogurt was a challenge,” says Rabbi Yanki Hoffman, the rabbi in charge of the strawberry project. “In recent years we have learned that strawberries come replete with tiny bugs, which are very hard to detect.”

As usual, though, the R decided to try. The first stage was sending Rabbi Hoffman to the strawberry fields in Europe, from which Muller purchases its strawberries. “We found out that some fields were considerably less infested and so we only approved those field. In Europe there is a tracking system which makes is easy to know from where produce comes, and we have taken advantage of that.”

Once the strawberries are in the facility, they go through a number of cleaning processes, each designed to get rid of a specific insect. At the end of the process, says Rabbi Hoffman confidently, “there are zero insects in the strawberries.”

In every production, three rabbis who are experts in this field are present and they take a huge sample of the strawberries to check for any bugs. “There is no bitul when it comes to bugs, but there is a halachic term which means ‘not common’. If bugs are not common in a certain food, then one is allowed to eat the food. The most stringent kosher agencies in Israel will certify strawberries as kosher if they find no more than 3 bugs per 300 strawberries. We find no more than one in a thousand!” says Rabbi Hoffman.

“These kosher projects are indeed unique,” says Rabbi Haskel in conclusion. “Sometimes, the differences between lamehadrin kosher agencies are subtle. People might avoid a certain certification, but they know they will not be violating Torah laws if they ever do eat something certified by that agency. The case is very different for fruits and vegetables that are infested with bugs. For instance, you can break 5 lavim with every bite of infested corn on the cob.

“These projects are not easy for us. They are extremely costly – which is why only big companies can afford them. And they demand huge effort and investment on our part. But, in the rare cases when the client is fully committed, we will undertake the task, as hard as it is, in order to save Jews from eating insects. These difficult kosher productions are really leshem shamayim.”
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LIVE FREELY. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.
On the west coast of Africa, a six hour flight from Johannesburg, in a world where modern day technology and where even less modern inventions, like a post office, are impossible to come by, lies the city of Accra, Ghana. Jewish population: 150. Here, in this small, rural community, in the midst of one of the world’s lesser known third world countries, the Jewish population is slowly growing and thriving. Kosher food may be difficult to come by, but it is not impossible to find. With a bit of ingenuity and creativity, a kosher lifestyle can be found even in the far-flung locations.

The Jewish population of Ghana, mainly Israeli and French businessmen and women, are drawn to Accra because of its low labor and living costs. Here, a job as a contractor, engineer, computer technician, and more are easily found and offer a better pay than in Israel or France. Other resources, such as kosher food, are not as easily accessible as the job market. Up until 2015, the Jewish families within the community were served by bochurim and young shluchim who frequented Ghana for the high holidays, Purim, and Pesach. “Not only was kosher food minimal,” shared an Israeli woman, whose family has been living in Ghana for three years, “food is minimal. The grocery stores
here have a policy: They will not restock on basics—flour, eggs, sugar—until the entire store has emptied out.” For many years, the community struggled to keep the kosher spark alive, resorting to a vegetarian lifestyle. That is, until Rabbi Noach and Alti Majesky and their three children arrived on the scene.

The Majeskys moved to Ghana during the summer of 2015 and went straight to work to provide a sustainable kosher atmosphere for the dozens of families that had made Accra their home. Not only were they shocked by the lack of food in town, but by the sheer depravity of the community as a whole. “There are no post offices here. Our homes don’t have addresses. We can’t have food shipped from Johannesburg to Accra. If we want food, someone has to bring it to us in a suitcase.” Kashrus in Ghana is no easy feat, but it is one that the Majeskys tend to with pride. Rabbi Majesky shechts imported chickens, which is the main source of protein. Meat and dairy products are a treat reserved for special occasions and holidays. The Majeskys rely on visitors and businessmen arriving from South Africa or Israel for the bulk of their food. Travelers and tourists are sparse in Ghana, as the country itself is not a hotspot or tourist destination, but sometimes, they get lucky.

Chabad of Ghana currently serves the local Jewish community with a Hebrew School, weekly Shabbat dinners, holiday events, weekly Torah classes, and much more. When it comes to dishing up the meals for each event, Mrs. Majesky has her hands full. “When we first moved here from Crown Heights, I almost forgot that I couldn’t just walk down the street to the bakery to buy a box of cookies. If we want anything, we have to make it ourselves from scratch with whatever we have on hand.” Once the food has been procured, the next challenge comes in storing it. Blackouts are fairly common in Ghana, often times occurring once a day. Many of the families have equipped their homes with generators, but still; some days, all they can do is pray that the food won’t spoil until the electricity returns.

Holidays in Ghana are something to behold. Every holiday was celebrated at the Chabad House this year, with an array of dishes and treats ranging from four course meals for Rosh Hashana, to homemade latkes and doughnuts on Chanukah. Even Pesach, a holiday that often proves to be tricky in the easiest kosher accessible cities, was done in style. Friends and family arrived from around the world to help the Majeskys prepare, bringing over ten suitcases worth of food in tow. The preparations for each holiday begin well over two weeks in advance, with food being prepared and stored in the Chabad House freezer, which luckily stayed cold until Passover! This year’s seder fed close to one hundred people of varying backgrounds and affiliations—one big happy, well fed Jewish family.

Regardless of the extra effort kosher food requires, many feel that kashrus in Ghana itself is much less difficult than they expected, especially considering where they are on the map. “There are no playgrounds, no gyms; it’s so hot that we spend most of our time in school or outside,” Mrs. Majesky shared. “Because we can’t spend much time outside, we spend most of the day in the kitchen. I think we’re better fed and healthier here than we would be anywhere else.”
L’chaim, anyone? Kosher consumers have long enjoyed a l’chaim after shul, to commemorate a yarzheit, to celebrate simchos, or just to relax at home. Whether it’s a glass of wine, a bit of schnapps, or a lowball glass of whiskey or vodka, there have always been an array of options available.

Recently, there has been much talk concerning whiskey production and the implications for kosher consumers. Most of the controversy has centered on scotch, both straight and blended. Originally, it was assumed that wine or glycerin was used to blend the whiskeys; both of which could present kashrus issues. Today, we know that the main issue with whiskey is the wine casks used in the aging process.

But, what about vodka? Does vodka have similar issues to whiskey? Are there other potential issues that affect the kosher consumer? First, let’s review the vodka production process in brief. The origin of vodka is assumed to be either in Russia or in Poland (for many years Poland was actually part of Russia) and I have visited vodka production facilities in both countries. Historically speaking, it is reported that vodka was made from potatoes. In other places, vodka was made from wheat. There are other sources, as well, which we will discuss later on in this article.

In order to produce any type of alcohol, one needs a carbohydrate, in a sugar form, and yeast. Wine, for example, is produced when the natural yeast on the grapes and the sugar content in the grapes reacts and causes fermentation. The percentage of alcohol in the particular wine will depend on the sugar content in the grapes.
For vodka, one takes the source carbohydrate (potatoes or wheat), grinds them up, adds water and heats the mixture. This will convert the starch to sugar. Then, yeast is added to the mixture. The yeast used in vodka production is manufactured yeast, as opposed to the natural yeast found on grapes. Of course, we have to verify that the yeast is kosher certified. During the fermentation process the mixture often foams, so anti-foam agents might be used to quell the foam. These anti-foams must be kosher, as well.

The fermentation will produce up to 12-14% alcohol. In order to produce whiskey, which contains 40-45% alcohol, the alcohol is distilled to remove the water until it reaches the desired alcohol content.

Vodka, however, is distilled until it reaches almost pure alcohol. This takes usually at least three distillations. Hence the terminology “triple distilled” found on vodka bottles. The vodka is now “cut”, or diluted, with pure distilled water to bring it down to the desired alcohol content.

The distillation process removes most of the impurities in the vodka, so a side benefit of drinking vodka is the possibility of less of a “hangover” after drinking, as opposed to wine or whiskey. Vodka is sold as pure and colorless. If it were aged in barrels, it would turn brown, so the issue of wine casks for aging (like whiskey) does not occur with vodka production. Very few types of vodka are aged, but it’s atypical and would be obvious due to the brown coloring.

In some countries, sugar or glycerin is added to the vodka in order to improve the smoothness of the vodka, but in Poland this is illegal and all vodka is required to be totally pure. In Poland, potatoes are used to make the vodka. I had hoped that there would be a possibility of producing kosher for Passover vodka, but the equipment used in the production is also used for wheat-based alcohol, so at present this is not possible. In Russia, I have seen that they actually add other ingredients to the vodka, so Russian vodka should not be treated as pure vodka.

Another big issue with vodka is that not all vodka is made from potatoes or wheat. There are many companies producing vodka from wine alcohol or whey (which is dairy and usually not Cholov Yisroel).

I have done some research and so far have found at least 18 companies in the United States producing vodka from grape alcohol. (By the way, some American whiskey is also produced from grape alcohol.) Over the years I have also found vodka produced from whey in the United States. In France, I found three companies producing vodka from grape alcohol, as well as four companies in Australia, and one each in Denmark, Poland, Belarus and Canada. In New Zealand, I found three companies producing vodka from whey. Usually, the bottles will state the source carbohydrate used to produce the vodka.

As we can see, to make a blanket statement that all vodkas are inherently kosher is not correct. The source of the alcohol must be kosher and we must ensure that no other ingredients are being used in the vodka.
Interview with Rabbi Arye Taub

KS: Where did you grow up? Where did you go to yeshiva?

AT: I grew up in Petach Tikva, which is a large city with a very diverse population: Chassidish, Chabad, Litvak, Mizrahi, Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Yemenite, etc. All the communities shared true kindness and friendship; it was a good place to grow up.

I went to Birkas Yosef Yeshiva in Bnei-Brak; a small, welcoming place, where one could forget about outside concerns and devote oneself to Torah studies.

KS: What did you do after yeshiva?

AT: I married Chana Shendl Stefansky in 5766. I had always been interested in computers, so when I started working it was evident that I would be taking that direction. At first I worked as a tech support representative, and soon became a networking equipment field rep. After leaving the IT world, Rabbi Haskel, Director of OK Israel – with whom I daven on Shabbos – offered me a kashrus job doing Cholov Yisroel supervision in California for a whole month. I had never seen so many cows and had never traveled for work, even for a single day, but that was the beginning of my kashrus career. Soon after, Rabbi Prizant, a Rabbinic Coordinator at OK Israel, recruited me to assist in the China department, where I worked for 4 years before taking on my current responsibilities.

KS: What is your current position at the OK?

AT: I work in OK Israel as a Rabbinic Coordinator for companies in Europe, Scottish distilleries, and shaatnez issues. I am also the Israel office liaison to the main OK office in New York.

KS: What prepared you the most for your current position at the OK?

AT: Working in the OK requires countless abilities. In my opinion, human relations, aka middos, is the key to success. While working as a field rep in the networking world, I came across many companies and facilities. The clients I deal with now are obviously different, but all companies have something in common: If you have a good approach, enough assertiveness, and Siyata Dishmaya, you can get through to them and succeed in working together.

KS: What is best thing about working at the OK?

AT: The best thing about working at the OK is the opportunity to grow and become a better person through the influence of so many great colleagues, as well as being able to utilize what I learn with colleagues and clients.
If you have a good approach, enough assertiveness, and Siyata Dishmaya, you can get through to them and succeed in working together.

KS: How would you describe the @ today?
AT: The @ is an ever-growing organization, with a devoted, caring, active team who drives the @ to a place where no other global organization has probably ever been: seeking to set up and maintain facilities at a kashrus level equal to a frum balabista’s kitchen with all of those stringencies. It is an amazing goal, directed and driven by Rabbi Don Yoel Levy, who applies this goal to each and every certified facility.

As I mentioned, I work in the @ Israel office. The Israeli branch could have never grown as it has without the leadership of Rabbi Haskel, who respects and encourages each and every person in our office. This is the fundamental core of the Israeli branch: because of Rabbi Haskel, everyone knows that the sky’s the limit, and that we should never stop trying.

KS: Tell us something interesting about yourself that we don’t know
AT: I am as emotional as it gets, a Classical music fan, and I love my family more than anything else in the world.

KS: Can you share an interesting experience that you had while working at the @?
AT: Sometimes, language, even body language, is just not enough. During my 2nd job at @ Kosher, I was part of a team in Bulgaria, which worked filtering and bottling wine. I was just about to start the pump when I asked the local worker if he could see whether the top of the 15-ton vat was open, so that the pump pressure wouldn’t destroy the vat. He shook his head.

I was very upset, because that meant that someone had touched it without my consent and that’s a big deal. So I asked him again, and once again he shook his head. I had to run upstairs to check the top, but it WAS open, as it should have been. At the same time, I saw another worker, standing next to the first, laughing out loud for no obvious reason. I asked him what the matter was, and he explained to me: “Bulgarians shake their heads to signal ‘yes’ in exactly the way the rest of the world uses for ‘no’, and vice versa.” Moral of the story: Even the most basic, common assumptions can sometimes be deceptive. And that’s more or less the gist of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev ZT”L’s lessons.
Restraint
Complied by Dina Fraenkel

AT THE END of the month of Tishrei, congregations around the world will read Parshas Bereishis, which is first portion in the cycle of Torah readings and filled with teachings relevant for a new year.

This parsha contains the first command issued by Hashem – the command for Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. According to the Midrash, the ban was only for three hours, until the commencement of the first Shabbos. Unfortunately, even for this short time, Adam could not restrain himself.

How could Adam, who was created by G-d himself, and heard the command directly from Hashem, not hold back for even this short time? The answer is: the yetzer hara (evil inclination).

The job of the yetzer hara is to make a person stumble and transgress Hashem’s commandments. He argues, he entices, and he tricks – all to cause a Jew to violate one of the Torah’s laws. When the mitzvah is greater or particularly important at a specific time, then the yetzer hara works harder.

According to Chassidus, each neshama has certain mitzvos that have a greater connection to that neshama’s mission on earth. Therefore, the yetzer hara makes those mitzvos more difficult for that person to perform. In addition, Chazal says, “Whenever a person is greater than a colleague, his yetzer hara is greater than he is.”

From these explanations, it is easy to see why Adam faltered and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Adam was so great, made by the hands of Hashem, Himself, so his yetzer hara was uniquely powerful. Even more so, the prohibition against eating from the tree had great importance and far-reaching consequences that would be suffered by Adam and all of his descendants; therefore, the yetzer hara, under the guise of the serpent, worked doubly hard to cause him to falter.

There is a teaching from the Baal HaTanya that the yetzer hara is best overcome when two friends join forces. Each person has his own nefesh habahamis (instinctual soul) that is concerned only with itself. But each person also has a nefesh haElohist (G-dly soul) that is concerned with the welfare of his friend. When you band together with a friend who is genuinely concerned about your growth in Torah and mitzvos, you have TWO G-dly souls, which can jointly battle the yetzer hara and come out on top.

May we all be blessed with a partner to help us overcome our yetzer hara and together may we be successful in fulfilling Hashem’s commandments and bring the final redemption imminently!

Adapted from Likkutei Sichos, Simchas Torah, 5723

1. Bereishis Rabbah 21:7. Also commentary of the Sifsei Cohen to this Torah reading, and the explanations given in Likkutei Torah, at the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim.
2. Bereishis Rabbah 24:5.
4. Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh, Epistle 7; Kuntres Yud-Beis Tammuz, 5708 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5708, p. 240ff); Sefer HaSichos 5708, Sichos 1400, Purim.
5. Sukkah 52a.
On Shemini Atzeres we start saying the blessing,”...mashiv haruach u’morid hageshem.” If a person wants to do teshuva and return to the spiritual (mashiv haruach), then he needs to lower his focus and desire for physical things (morid hageshem). Alternately, one can say to Hashem, “...mashiv haruach” - accept all of the ruach, the spirituality, we have given to you this month - and “morid hageshem” - send down all the gashmius, the physical things, that we need.

It’s interesting to note that on Hoshana Raba we change a word in the reading of the Torah portion of the day. On the other days of Sukkos we say “kamishpot” (as prescribed/like the decree) but on Hoshana Raba we say “kamispotom” (like their decrees), changing the meaning to the past tense because the deadline for teshuva is extended after Yom Kippur until Hoshana Raba.

Why is Hashem so bothered if we do even a little sin?

A Yid is the apple of G-d’s eye.

A sin is like a grain of sand in the eye...and tears remove the sand.

The word הושענא hoshana can be split into two words: hosha nah הושע נא - help us on נ-א .נא is Gematria 51 and Hoshana Raba is 51 days after Rosh Chodesh Elul. We ask Hashem to forgive us in the merit of the 51 days that we just spent in prayer, teshuva and joy.

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