R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Hello everyone and welcome back to Let's Talk Kashrus presented by the Kashrus Awareness Project in conjunction with Torah Anytime. Today I am privileged to be joined by Rabbi Sholem Fishbane, Executive Director of AKO and Kashrus Administrator of the Chicago Rabbinical Council. How are you Rabbi Fishbane?

R’ Sholem Fishbane*: Baruch Hashem*, thank you for having me.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Thanks again for being here.

I'd like to discuss a topic that people may have a cursory knowledge of. They've heard the terms, but they don't really know what it is. So let's delve into it. And that is what we'll call shellac, otherwise known in the field as resinous glaze or confectioner's glaze. It's used very often in candies. Sometimes you'll even find it on fruit, which I hope you'll get into. Tell us, number one, what it is and why there's a Kashrus concern regarding its use.

R’ Sholem Fishbane: Okay, yeah, sure. It's known in the industry as E904, but you're right, better known as shellac, confectioner's glaze, etc. And it comes from a lac bug. It actually comes from a bug where there's these little insects, female lac bug, that they suck the sap of the tree. It's found in India and Thailand. And it takes about 50,000 to 300,000, depending on the bug, to make about 2.2 pounds of it. Believe it or not, the word shellac doesn't mean shel lac from a lac. That's Hebrew now. Actually, the word lac in the Indian numbering system is 100,000. So it takes about 100,000 of these to get a small amount. And it was actually used for many years to help with the phonograph and the old record players.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Really, is that right?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: Yeah, and wood finishing and that type of thing.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: They would coat it. Right. That's where the word shellac of like a shine, shellac on the floor.

R’ Sholem Fishbane: Right, so that's where it comes from. But then they discovered, hey, this could go well, does a great job if you put it on fruit, like you said, or candies and whatnot. And in order to do it, now, please know when it comes out, it's terrible tasting. So they have to put stuff into it in order to make it like a coating. And they put in water. They put in alcohol. They put in oleic acid or fatty acids, which could be a kashrus issue, soy or even dairy protein and whatnot to make it. And then they spray it on. And then it does. So there's really two *sheilos*. One is the actual shellac itself. And then there's the other things that go in. Because once it's dried off, some of these things are way over shishim it’s like 11% on the fatty acids. Those are the two *sheilos* in *halacha*.

Now, as you said, it's in candies. It is in candies. And believe it or not, there's a pretty long list of fruits that they'll spray it on to give it. It does two things. It makes it shiny, appealing to eat. And it holds in the water. It's water retention. Like a sealer. So here we go. Ready? I'll try to go through some of them. Apples, avocados, bell and hot peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, grapefruit, lemons, limes, mangoes, melons, nectarines, oranges, papayas, parsnips, passion fruit, peaches, pears, pineapple, plums, pumpkins, rutabaga, squash, sweet potatoes, tangerines, tomatoes, turnips, yucca, *aseres bnei haman.*  So that's a long list.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: So these are all fruits and vegetables that are generally coated with shellac?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: And it could be with shellac. And especially the ones that you're going to find being sold to consumers where it has to look nice and seasonal and whatnot. So there are some that use a petroleum-based wax, which is fine. But the problem and the most common is the shellac one. And the question is, how does *halacha* look at that? So there's a basic *machlokes*, we'll call it, between *Rav Moshe* and *Rav Elyashiv*. *Rav Moshe* says, the *halacha* is called *hayotzei min hatamei tamei*. And the question is, what about something called *pirsha*? Like, *mei raglayim* is called, is that *pirsha*? *Hayotzei* is that *pirsha*? *Pirsha*, which we have much more room to work with. So *Rav Moshe* says that since shellac comes out and it's rock hard, he says, *miskasheh ke'etz sheba la'avir olam, v'lo hayah davar ochel*. It's nothing. It's *pirsha*. Just ignore it. It doesn't have a *din* of *hayotzei min hatamei*. *Rav Elyashiv* has a *chiddush*. He says, wait a minute. *Pirsha* is only a *svara* and *mutar* when it comes from a pleasant-tasting animal, like the *mei raglayim* of a *beheima temeiah*. And then the *chazal* says, okay, don't worry about that. But if the insect is inherently inedible, so it's still *assur* because the *pirsha* has the same *din* as a *yotzei*. So that's an inherent *machlokes*. And we could be here all day. It's very *gishmak*. *Svaros* back and forth. And, therefore, most of the major *hashgachos* follow *Rav Moshe*. And, therefore, we'll not only allow it on products, but they'll even certify it. Okay? We'll certify the actual shellac. I've seen it with *hashgacha*, even if it comes from a lac bug.

We'll call it more the *heimishe* and *Eretz Yisrael*. They're saying, you know, stay away from it. And you know why it came back to light. It was actually after October 7th. So after October 7th, there were many things that happened, obviously a terrible tragedy to *Klal Yisrael*. But one of the things that happened was they couldn't get to the farms that they were used to getting their produce from. So they were bringing produce from the United States and other countries. And what happened was the *Badatz* *Eidah Hachareidis* issued *Raboisai*. There's stuff coming in from overseas. It's talking about produce, your apples, whatnot. Make sure that you get rid of it before you eat it because, you know, it's *assur*. Now you'll ask how do you get rid of a coating because it's pretty stuck. It's pretty hard to get off.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Unless you peel it?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: So you can peel it. You can peel it. Another possible way is you can actually rub it off. It won't come off. But you can throw it in boiling water for 10 seconds, which will loosen it. Then you can take a *shmata*.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Really?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: Yeah.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: And you can actually see it come off?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: You'll feel it. It's a waxy thing. So, you know, that's something that is a possibility. You can't do that with the candies, though. You can't do that with the candies. So someone asked, like, okay, so if I want to be *machmir*, like, which one should I do? It's going to be hard for me to do one. What about the candy? Like in Chicago, we had a store, a candy store, where they had a whole section shellac-free, confectionery-free. So if someone wanted to be *machmir*. They go and they know they can get the candies from that area that were okay. Yeah, so we did that. So, you know, there's interesting stories. On one hand.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Just to clarify before you go further, you're talking about someone wanted shellac-free, they were being *machmir*. Now, if I pick up a box of kosher candy and I say it's kosher because it has national certification, or even sometimes a *heimeshe hechsher* on the box, isn't that telling me that either it doesn't have shellac or that the shellac is not a problem?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: The latter. Most agencies that write that, if it, let's say, candies, if it has a national *hechsher*, it usually means, well, saying it's shellac, and it's true.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Because they hold *halachically* like R’ Moshe?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: Right, yeah. That's not a problem. Not a problem. I have reached out to some of the *heimeshe hechsherim* to understand what goes into maybe a sticker on a candy that has it, and so far, my research is that they're basically saying we also agree with *R’ Moshe*, that they are not removing the shellac, at least the ones I've contacted. So there you go. I haven't seen that they're going into these massive candy companies and making them remove it for their small run.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Is there a way for the layman, for the man on the street, the kosher consumer, when he picks up a box of candy and he sees that certification, is there a way for him to discern, okay, this candy does have shellac, but the kashrus agency is saying that it's okay, or that this box of candy does not have shellac, and therefore he could rest easy because he's not relying on any *kulos*. Is there any way to determine that?

R’ Sholem Fishbane: So, if it's a national *hechsher* and it says the word shellac, or some of the other words it comes up with, then it would be relying on *R’ Moshe*. If it would be a, let's say, a *badatz* *Eidah Hachareidis*, obviously that means that they put in something special. A lot of the in-between, the *heimeshe*, call them.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Could you check the ingredient panel? Yeah, it will be there. And it will be there either as shellac or as confectioner's glaze. E904, confectioner's glaze, resinous glaze. Resinous glaze and so on.

R’ Sholem Fishbane: That's what will be over there, right. So that would be the best way. Call them. And that's what I did. I called. What are you, what's your standard exactly? So just one thing that I heard from *R’ belsky*, interesting. *R’ belsky* had a *geshmak sevara*. He says the candies, when you suck it, so the coating is the first thing that comes off. And *R’ belsky* was actually more worried about those other fatty acids that went into it than maybe the shellac itself because, you know, *R’ Moshe* is *R’ Moshe*. But he said, interesting enough, when you bite a fruit, so you have *shishim*. Because it's a very small amount. And when you take a bite, you have all sorts of other parts going on, including the apple or, you know, if you like biting into, you know, a parsnip or whatever it is, then you're okay. So that was one, that was a very interesting thing. And at the same time, as we said earlier, the fruit, you possibly could have an *eitzah*, and that is you could put the fruit in the boiling water for 10 seconds and scrub it off. The bulk of the wax will come off. Now, again, the major agencies, including the *CRC* and all the other agencies do rely on *R’ Moshe*.

I think the point of *kashrus* awareness is to just, like you asked, what's this all about? What's behind it? It sounds pretty scary, coming from a lac bug. A lot of lac bugs that get a small amount. But it's a fascinating sugya, and our goal today is just to give some information, and then, of course, every consumer should ask their own *shaila*.

R’ Yitzy Hisiger: Okay. Thank you for the education. Thank you for the information. And like you said, everyone should speak to their *Rav*, their *Posek*, their *Moreh Hora'ah*, and, you know, do what's appropriate. But thank you for the background.