R’ Yitzchok 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 Binyamin Berkowitz, Rabbinic Coordinator with the Kof-K. Thank you Rabbi Berkowitz for joining us once again.

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: My pleasure.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: I'd like to talk to you today about a common question related to Amazon. People buy thousands, tens of thousands of items on Amazon. Many of them bear a kosher certification, at least online. And it's very hard for people to know if something is authentically kosher, if it's not. What have you found in your experience with regard to items, food items being sold on Amazon?

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: So first of all, it's not only a problem with Amazon. It's really any of the websites. I guess the reason why I always brought attention to it is because many of these products are coming from foreign countries, specifically China, because a lot of these items are more specialty items like herbal extracts or different types of sweeteners, health products that people are looking at are very often coming from China. And they can be very specific and very hard to find, things that are not as common.

So people look for them on all these different types of websites. Sometimes they're one of the bigger e-commerce websites. It can be a small website just for a company. And they'll often either have an old certificate or an old symbol, and they'll put it on their website and claim that they're kosher certified or think that's enough to make them kosher certified.

And then that could obviously lead to problems. Usually what happens is that somebody will either get the product and they'll see that the symbol's not on it or start wondering, does this make any sense? And then they'll contact whichever hashgacha happens to be on it.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: And then they'll find out that, let's say, it's not authentic, but there's really no way to know before you order an item, especially if a website is claiming that they're kosher certified.

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: There is a way. The way is for, let's say, all the national hashgachas. Let's say it says they're under the Kof-K.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: You can really call the Kof-K and first find out.

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: You can call the Kof-K, but if it's 12 o'clock at night, you don't even have to do that.

You can go onto our website. Every one of the big agencies has a website. You can do a product search and you can look for the product. And you can look based on the company.

It says this company. That's always the first thing a person can do.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: Do you recommend doing that for every single item that you buy online?

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: If it's an item online that's not a common recognized company, clearly coming from a foreign company, I definitely would recommend that a person does that. You're online anyways. Just opening up another website, doing a search. Not always is it so simple for the regular consumer to figure that out and go through it because sometimes the name could be a little bit different or it could be a distributor, so you don't really see the right name. Once you try that, then the next thing would be to call the hashgacha or email the hashgacha.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: Are there any rules online as regards to what websites may write when it comes to kosher? Or is it just totally unregulated?

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: The websites will definitely take action if they recognize that something was fraudulent. So they'll take something down, but you have to usually file a complaint. Some are better than others, but they will definitely take action, most of them, once you file the complaint. But there are so many of these out there that it's almost impossible for an agency to be the one to investigate. And this is one of the cases where the consumer really becomes the front line of hashgacha.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: Now you mentioned extracts. Is this issue more prevalent with, let's say, health products and things of that sort?

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: I do find that it's a little bit more prevalent because, like we said, those are things that are a little bit more, let's say, less common. If a person is looking for a specific extract, it's not necessarily something he'll find in a health food store. And if he does, it might be more expensive.

So he might be looking for something a little cheaper. So he'll say, look, I found a great deal on this. But then you have to wonder, does it make sense or does it not make sense?

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: Right, right, right. It's like we always say here on Let's Talk Kosher, an educated consumer is the best customer. And always check if you're not sure. That's the bottom line. Anything else to add on this topic?

R’ Binyamin Berkowitz: Yes. So consumers should realize that a lot of times the reason why you're finding, let's say, a symbol is because they have an old picture. Even on name brand websites that are reputable, but it could be old artwork.

Hashgacha does change and a symbol could come off. So besides questioning whether is this true or not, once you get the product, it's always worth it to check, double check and make sure that it has hashgacha. And like I said, you can always check the websites and see if it's still certified.

R’ Yitzchok Hisiger: Okay, Rabbi Berkowitz, thank you so much.