

10 QUESTIONS FOR

Shabsi Goldman

Shabsi Goldman is the owner of Dedicated Inspection Services in Passaic, New Jersey. He is licensed in New York and New Jersey.

1 How did you get into home inspections?
I'm a handy guy, we've owned our home for 18 years and I do the repairs. When I was looking for a line of work, someone suggested home inspections, and I figured there aren't a lot of *frum* people who do it, so it's a good "in." Most of the people who get into this are engineers and contractors. I'm not, but it's a technical field and I'm a technical fellow. I took a course with a school that licenses almost half the home inspectors in the state, and they told me I got the second highest mark in their history — it's the technical mindset that counts.

3 Do I really need an inspection if I'm handy?
Even a handy fellow isn't trained for this. The buyer's there with his wife, he's more focused on: Will my furniture fit? Will my family fit? He's not thinking so much about the wiring, the plumbing, the AC. Yeah, the house feels cool, but is the system leaking? An inspector knows what to look for, and we come with the right equipment: a flashlight, obviously, electrical testers for the outlets, a moisture meter to see if moisture's getting in, a gas detector to see if there's a leak, probes to check for wood rot. Is the decorative molding in the mantle a safety hazard because it's too close to the fireplace opening? We check the appliances — does the oven heat up? Does the dishwasher leak? How do the interior structural components — doors, floors, walls, and ceilings — look? I could go on and on.

2 What's your busiest time of year?
It goes with the real estate market — now, summer. Most of the time, a buyer wants an inspection presale — when he's in contract, before closing — to know what he's getting into, to confirm his purchase is a good one. He wants to feel warm and fuzzy about it. Even someone buying a brand-new home might want one, because the buyer doesn't want to find out after the warranty is up that there's something wrong with the furnace. A seller might get an inspection in a tight market so he'll have an easier time selling. Not that the buyer will take your inspection at face value, but it's a selling point — you fix the problem with the roof, your buyer won't be scared away, because his inspection will show only minor issues.

4 How long does an inspection take?
Average is two to three hours. I strongly recommend that the buyer attend. This way if there's an issue I can show it to him — he'll see and understand and make an informed decision. And the inspection can be very educational for a first-time homebuyer. I show him how to care for his new home — where the central AC filter is and how often to change it, where the main water shutoff is, how to maintain the boiler.

5 What's the most common issue you find?
Often in older homes, the railing overlooking the stairway is short, 27 or 30 inches high. Current code is 36 inches. There's no requirement to bring an old house up to code, but you might want to for safety. I tell clients definitely ask your *rav* if you need a *ma'akeh* in that location and how high it should be — halachah might dictate a railing that's even higher than 36 inches.

7 What misconceptions do people have about inspections?
That it's all great, guaranteed for life. First of all, things break. Like a used car. You take it to a mechanic when you buy it, but that doesn't mean 1,000 miles later, the water pump isn't gonna go. Also, an inspection is visual; if I can't see it — in the walls, under the floor, in the ceiling — I can't report on it. And an inspection isn't an appraisal; that's a different job entirely. It's also not a code inspection; your house might meet minimum code, but there can still be safety issues.

8 What advice do you have for buyers?
Calm down. Don't get overwhelmed. It's standard for an inspector to write a report, like 40 pages with pictures, so don't think, "Oh, my goodness — there is *everything* wrong with this house!" Many things in the list are *kleinekeit* or if they're imperfections, they're things you don't necessarily care about enough to make a difference. And if it's a larger issue — say the foundation has a crack — a buyer might be able to work with the seller to fix it. I suggest correcting unsafe wiring, falling hazards, and missing smoke and carbon monoxide detectors — they'll be marked as safety issues in my report. And remember, maintenance takes time and money, but it's well spent. You'd rather fix the leaky pipe now than the pipe and the secondary issues it'll create later — the floor that flooded, the ceiling below that crumbled, and all the rebuilding, painting, and repairs involved.



6 When it comes to houses, what's a "big deal"?
Water is the biggest problem. People get it in the basement. And of course, the question is why? Sometimes, if it's coming from the ground, a sump pump will get it out. But usually it's a problem with the roof and gutter system and the grading of the ground sending water toward the house instead of away. Or there could be caulking issues, leaky sinks, toilets, or pipes. Water means mold, rot, softer wood — which termites like. Water is every house's enemy.

9 Have you ever "failed" a house or advised someone not to buy?
That's not my job, it's your decision. An inspection isn't a pass-fail test — it's a condition report about the house and its systems. Very rarely is there a house that has to be knocked down; most are fixable. Often there are one or two larger items that need work — a problem in the furnace and the AC — and a list of smaller items: this outlet in the playroom isn't wired correctly, the basement window's inner pane is broken, the second-floor railing is missing a spindle.

10 Which parts of the inspection do you like, and which parts not so much?
I get *hana'ah* educating people about their house, seeing them interested and learning. Not as fun is getting into a dirty crawlspace or a hot attic on a 95-degree day to check insulation and ventilation. The other day I was checking a fireplace — the damper was broken and, well, let's just say I looked like the chimney sweeper from *Mary Poppins*. And last week I was chased across a roof by a pack of angry bees after accidentally disturbing their hive. I got two stings.