



- ▶ **Compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits**
- ▶ Reviewed by Rabbi Benzion Schiffenbauer Shlita
- ▶ All Piskei Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita
are reviewed by Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita

The Kashrus and Halachos of Honey

The *kashrus* of honey and products made from honey has been the topic of discussion from time immemorial. We will discuss the *halachos* regarding the *kashrus* of honey, and other honey products.

What is Honey?

Honey comes from a German words “hunaga” which means golden. Honey has long been recognized as a remedy for many ailments for thousands of years. Many times when one has a cold it is used as a remedy to cure a sore throat, among many other uses.

Honey is produced in the following manner. The bee flies to a flower, takes the nectar out of the flower and stores it inside their stomachs, and then returns to the hive. In the hive the bee regurgitates the nectar, adds enzymes to it¹ and then passes it to worker bees. These bees then fan their wings creating a strong draft which makes most of the water evaporate from the nectar. Bees get rid of the extra water by swallowing and regurgitating the nectar over and over. The finished product is honey. Its

flavors depend on the flowers from which the bees harvested their nectar.

According to the above it would seem at first glance that honey is the by-product of the bee since they swallow it. Therefore, it should be forbidden based on the *Gemorah* in *Bechoros*² which says anything which comes out of a non-*kosher* [animal etc] is *tomei*.

Why is Honey permitted?

The *Gemorah*³ mentioned above says two reasons why honey is permitted. 1. Honey is not a secretion of a bee it is just stored in the bee. According to this reason honey from other insects would also be permitted. 2. There is a *gezeiras hakusev* which permits honey from a bee. Based on this reason honey from other insects would not be permitted.⁴

According to these two reasons honey is a *kosher* product as codified in the *Shulchan*

¹ Refer to Bedikas Hamozon K’halacha page 146:footnote 26 who says this enzyme is not considered that the honey comes from the bee. See Hechsheiros 21:footnote 108.

² 7b, Chochmas Adom 37:1.

³ Ibid. Refer to Rambam Hilchos Machalus Asuros 3:3, Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 81:8, Aruch Ha’shulchan 6.

⁴ Refer to Levush 81:8, Aruch Ha’shulchan Y.D. 81:7. See Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 81:9 where the Rama says since it is not common to have honey from other insects it does not play a role if it is permitted.

*Aruch*⁵ (we will discuss later on *kosher* status for *Pesach*).

Beeswax

Beeswax is a substance which is secreted from the wax glands in a bee's stomach. This emerges as a transparent liquid that the bee chews and molds into the cell on their comb. The honey combs are melted and filtered to produce a clean wax. Its color may vary from white to yellow or brown which is because of the pollen that they may have eaten. The bees use this wax to create a honey comb in which honey is stored in. In the honey comb the bees grow and form a larva into mature bees. Beeswax is used in a wide variety of things. Such as a coating to fruits, jelly beans, candles, ear plugs, cosmetics, polishes, sewing, and soap making.

Is Beeswax Kosher?

According to the two reasons mentioned above why honey is permitted they would seem not to apply to beeswax since it is a secretion and it is not honey from a bee.

There are many sources in *Chazal* which would imply that beeswax although a secretion of the bee, is permitted.⁶

The *Levush*⁷ says the beeswax is the excretion of the processing of the honey, [and since honey is permitted so too is beeswax].

The *Tur*⁸ says in regard to *Hilchos Bedikas Chometz* that we check with a wax candle, but not with a candle made out of [animal] fat since it may drip on the utensil and make the utensil non-*kosher*. From the fact that we can use wax candles and there is no concern that the dripping will make the utensils non-*kosher* is a proof that beeswax is *kosher*.⁹ In addition many use a wax candle and extinguish it on a utensil and there is no concern about making the utensils non-*kosher*.¹⁰

The *Rama*¹¹ says the custom is to light with a wax candle for *neiros Chanukah*.

The *Mishpatim Yesharim*¹² was asked about the *kosher* status of a beverage made by boiling beeswax in water. He was concerned that maybe *chelev* was mixed in there but he does not mention a concern of beeswax being non-*kosher*.

Contemporary Opinions

It is possible to say that wax has no inherent taste,¹³ but is a waste product and therefore not subject to the *halachos* of "anything which comes out of a *tomei* is *tomei*." The opinion of *Harav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach zt"l* is that beeswax is permitted because it is not a food and is like dirt, and even if one were to chew it and extract honey from it, this is not considered an eating.¹⁴ This is the reasoning of *Horav Moshe Feinstein zt"l* to permit shellac which comes from a non-*kosher* insect.¹⁵

⁵ Y.D. 81:8, Mishnah Berurah O.C. 158:14, Aruch Ha'shulchan Y.D. 81:12, Yalkut Yosef page 148:footnote 38. The Aruch Ha'shulchan ibid says one should not eat honey without sifting it first to remove any bugs. See Kaf Ha'chaim Y.D. 81:71.

⁶ See Mordechai Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 2:836, Mishpatim Yesharim 2:272, Mishnah Berurah O.C. 158:14. Refer to OU document I-92 in depth where he quotes many sources in this *inyun*.

⁷ 81:8. See Rashi to Mesechtas Bava Metziah 40a "chafoo."

⁸ O.C. 433.

⁹ Bedikas Hamozon K'halacha page 148:footnote 27:3. Refer to OU Document I-64.

¹⁰ OU document Ibid.

¹¹ 673:1.

¹² 2:272.

¹³ Magen Avraham O.C. 321:16.

¹⁴ Bedikas Hamozon K'halacha page 148:footnote 27:5. Refer to ibid who quotes the opinion of Harav Elyashiv Shlita and Harav Wosner Shlita.

¹⁵ Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:24.

Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita maintains that beeswax is permitted to be eaten and this is the custom of *klal yisroel*, without anyone disputing the fact.¹⁶

Bee Pollen

Bee pollen is a yellowish or greenish substance. Pollen sticks to the many hairs that are on the bee's body when the bee visits the flower. The bee then moves the pollen to an area on its hind legs and is then pressed into pollen baskets. The bee adds traces of saliva to make a more effective press. The bee pollen is collected off the bees legs by special devices placed at the entrance to the hives. Bee pollen has many healthy vitamins and enzymes. In addition it rejuvenates the body, stimulates organs and glands, and brings about a longer life span.

Kashrus Status

Pollen is not a secretion of a bee and therefore does not pose any *kashrus* issues.¹⁷

Bee Bread

Bee bread is a mixture of honey and pollen and is a *kosher* food.

Royal Jelly

Royal Jelly is an extremely nutritious, thick, milky, white creamy substance located on the top of the queen bees. The bees produce it as food for a developing larva and as the unique diet for the queen bee. Without this the queen bee would fail to develop properly. It accounts for their incredible size and longevity. They live forty times longer than the worker bees, seven years as opposed to seven weeks. It is considered a health food due to its richness in protein, amino acids, vitamins, and fatty acids.

The following is a list of benefits that Royal Jelly offers: It increases life span, tones and strengthens your skin. It strengthens and stimulates your immune system, helps heal wounds, and gradually decreases pains. It also increases appetite, relieves weak and tired eyes, and many other benefits. Some want to say that royal jelly should be *kosher* since it is honey-like and it may apply to the *gezeiras hakusev* applied to permit honey.¹⁸ However, this is not true because royal jelly is a secretion from the bee, and it tastes different than honey. Some say it is not fit to be consumed by humans in which case the jelly would be permitted, but this is not the case.¹⁹

Bee Propolis

Bee propolis has been around for thousands of years and is sold as a health supplement. It offers effective antibacterial, antiviral, antiseptic, antifungal, and antibiotic properties. It heals burn wounds, it is effective in treating gingivitis, and bronchitis. It is sold as an ingredient in many products such as toothpaste, soaps, creams, mouthwashes, and lipsticks. One can see that bee propolis is very useful in many areas.

Propolis is a resin that bees collect on their legs from trees and use it in their hive as a sealant and for other purposes. They carry it on their hind legs. Some say that the bees add saliva and other secretions to the propolis. Propolis is comprised of resins (45-55%), waxes and fatty acids (25-35%), essential oils (10%), pollen (5%), and other minerals (5%). The above portion (until the minerals) of propolis is *kosher*, the question is in the other part of the

¹⁶ As expressed in OU document I-64.

¹⁷ Bedikas Hamoznon K'halacha page 148:footnote 29, Star-K, OU documents I-64, I-92.

¹⁸ Refer to Tzitz Eliezer 11:59 in depth, Teshuvos V'hanugos 4:188, Olos Yitzchok 2:265, Ohr Yisroel 15:pages 128-132 in depth. The Yalkut Yosef pages 159-162 is lenient and quotes this as being the opinion of Harav Ovadia Yosef Shlita but only if one needs it.

¹⁹ Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita. Refer to Minchas Shlomo 2:64, OU documents H-50 I-44, and I-45, Star-K.

chemical make up of propolis. Even if one were to assume that the other 5% which is minerals are from the non-kosher materials, since it is a non-food item it is *butel b'rov*.²⁰ Since it is a non-food item it is another reason to permit it just as beeswax.

If saliva is what the last 5% of the propolis are made from then it is permitted since honey is made with some saliva from the bee. However, if the saliva would be forbidden then the honey would be forbidden as well.²¹ The consensus among the contemporary *poskim* is that bee propolis is permitted.²²

Selected *Halachos* of Honey

Beracha

The *beracha* on honey is a *shehakol*,²³ and the *beracha achrona* is *boreh nefoshos*.²⁴ Some say the reason is because it is something which does not grow from the ground, to which one recites a *shehakol*.²⁵ Many times it is only eaten as a *tafel* and the *beracha* on the *ikkur* would exempt the honey from a *beracha*.²⁶

***Rosh Hashanah* and Honey Dipping**

We all know since we were young that we dip the apple and *challah* into honey on *Rosh Hashanah*. This custom is not mentioned in the *Gemorah*, or *Geonim*, but is nonetheless, the

overwhelming custom of *klal yisroel*.²⁷ A few points worth addressing is why do we dip the apple in honey as opposed to other fruits? When do we do the dipping? Should also dip the *challah* in salt as well as honey? Until when is the custom to dip *challah* into honey?

We will begin to discuss each one of the above in order as presented.

The reason for eating the honey on *Rosh Hashanah* is for us to have a sweet new year.²⁸ The custom of some is to dip an apple²⁹ into a bit of honey,³⁰ while others dip it three times.³¹ Some say that the dipping into the honey (and other *simonim*) is done on both nights,³² while others say it is only done on the first night.³³ The custom of most people is according to the first opinion quoted.

²⁷ Maharil Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 7, Rama 583:1, Darchei Moshe 3, Levush 583:2, Shulchan Aruch Harav 1, Yufei Leleiv 2:583:2, Aruch Ha'shulchan 2. Refer to Chai Adom 139:6 who says to eat some of the apple, then dip it into honey.

²⁸ Maharil Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 7, Darchei Moshe 3, Drisha 583. Refer to Shulchan Aruch Harav 4, Moadim L'Simcha 1:pages 87-88.

²⁹ Rama ibid. Refer to Emes L'Yaakov 583:footnote 538 who says one should use a sweet apple not a sour one.

³⁰ Sharei Teshuva 583:2. Some dip the apple in sugar (Moed Lechol Chai 2:16).

³¹ Moadim L'Simcha 1:page 88.

³² Harav Yisroel Belsky Shlita, Elya Rabbah 583:1, Sharei Teshuva 583:1, Moreh B'etzvah 9:266, Teshuvos V'hanhugos 2:266, Matei Ephraim 583:2. Ben Ish Chai Netzavim 1:8, Moed Lechol Chai 12:15, Yufei L'Leiv 2:583:8, Kaf Ha'chaim 583:4, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 322, Habayis Hayehudi 3:11, Refer to Ohr Yisroel 13:pages 123-132 in depth, see Leket Yosher page 124.

Some say to think the *beracha* on the second night (Eishel Avraham Butchatch 583).

³³ Eishel Avraham Butchatch 583:1, Matei Ephraim 600:9, Elef Hamugen 583:footnote 15, Bnei Yisoschor Tishrei 2:11:page 5, Aruch Ha'shulchan 583:3, Moreh Betzavah 9:266:footnote 15, Mikroei Kodesh Yomim Noraim 7. Refer to Matei Ephraim 605:18 regarding Erev Yom Kippur.

²⁰ Opinion of Harav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l as stated in Emes L'Yaakov 103:40. See OU madrich page 129.

²¹ Refer to OU document I-64. Some say that certain company's process the propolis with other ingredients such as alcohol, therefore one should make sure it is *kosher* beforehand (Star-K).

²² Refer to OU document ibid.

²³ Bais Yosef O.C. 204, Shulchan Aruch 204:10, Shar Ha'tzyion 208:2, Aruch Ha'shulchan 204:20, Kaf Ha'chaim 204:52. Refer to Igros Moshe O.C. 1:63, Shevet Ha'kehusi 4:61.

²⁴ Shar Ha'tzyion 208:2.

²⁵ Bais Yosef 204, Mishnah Berurah 49, see Bach, Taz 13 and Mishnah Berurah 50.

²⁶ Refer to Mishnah Berurah 583:3.

Some say dipping the apple in the honey is done after *kiddush*.³⁴ The custom of many is to do this after washing and eating some bread.³⁵ When we dip the apple in the honey no *beracha* is made on the honey since the apple is the *ikkur*.³⁶

Some say dipping the apple is based on the reason of *kabbalah*.³⁷ The *Ben Ish Chai*³⁸ says many reasons for this; one which is understandable and does not seem to be based on *kabbalah* is the following: An apple has taste, it looks and smells nice, and this is a good sign for us on *Rosh Hashanah*.

Many *poskim* say that the *beracha* on the fruit should be said and a bit should be eaten before reciting the customary *yihy ratzon* in order to avoid any *hefsek* between the *beracha* and the eating.³⁹ *B'dieved* it is not a *hefsek* if the *yihy ratzon* was said before eating the apple.⁴⁰

Many have the custom to dip the *challah* into honey on *Rosh Hashanah*.⁴¹ Some have the

custom to dip the *challah* into salt on one side and honey on the other.⁴²

The custom of many is to dip the *challah* into honey until *Shemenei Atzeres*.⁴³

Pesach

Potentially, honey can be adulterated with additives such as corn syrup (which is not eaten by those who do not eat *kitniyos*). Some honey producers have been found to mix the inexpensive corn syrup into honey, and illegally label and sell it as "pure honey," with no mention of this almost undetectable "filler." Although this practice is an exception, one should, nevertheless, only purchase pure honey for *Pesach*, with a reliable *Pesachdik hechsher*.⁴⁴ This problem does not impact the use of honey during the rest of the year.

Bishul Akum on Honey

There are two basic exceptions which if a food falls into any of these two categories⁴⁵ then the food is not subject to the *halachos* of *bishul akum*. The food may be cooked by a non-Jew and eaten by a Jew *l'chatchilah*.⁴⁶

³⁴ Maharil Hilchos Rosh Hashanah 6. Refer to Darchei Chaim V'Sholom 707:pages 242-243.

³⁵ Elya Rabbah 4, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 264 and page 322, Lekutei Maharich 3:page 618, Teshuvos V'hanhugos 2:266, Yechaveh Da'as 1:51.

³⁶ Magen Avraham 583:1, Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 1, Sharei Teshuva 2, Shevus Yaakov 2:27, Yosef Ometz 965, Mishnah Berurah 3.

³⁷ Taz 583:2, Elya Rabbah 3. Refer to Taamei Haminhagim 706:pages 310-311.

³⁸ Netzavim 1:4.

³⁹ Magen Avraham 2, Taz ibid, Elya Rabbah 3, Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 2, Shulchan Aruch Harav 3. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:9, Chai Adom 139:6, Mamer Mordechai 583:3, Mishnah Berurah 4, Aruch Ha'shulchan 2, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:9. Refer to Moadim L'Simcha 1:pages 90-91. See Zichron Yehuda 1:236, Teshuvos V'hanhugos 2:266, Yechaveh Da'as 1:51. *B'dieved* it is not a *hefsek* if the *yihy ratzon* was said before eating

⁴⁰ Elya Rabbah 4.

⁴¹ Magen Avraham 583:1, Shulchan Aruch Harav 4, Siddur Yaavetz 2:page 264, Mishnah Berurah 3, Aruch Ha'shulchan 3, Zichron Yehuda 1:236, Bnei Yissochor

ibid:13, Kaf Ha'chaim 583:4, Teshuvos V'hanhugos 2:266. Refer to Shevus Yaakov 2:27 who says to eat the apple and bread at the same time with honey. However, the custom is not like this opinion (Sharei Teshuva 2).

⁴² Refer to Kaf Ha'chaim 583:4, Salmas Chaim 1:346 (old).

⁴³ Orchos Rabbeinu 2:page 173:6.

⁴⁴ Star-K Kashrus Kurrents Refer to Rama 467:8, Taz 6, Magen Avraham 7, Chok Yaakov 17, Mishnah Berurah 29, Aruch Ha'shulchan 13-4,

⁴⁵ This is expressed in Tosfas in Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a "ika," "dagim," and codified by the *poskim*. Refer to Rosh Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 2:28:page 83, Ran page 15, Rashba Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a, Toras Habayis 3:7, Meiri Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a, Rambam Hilchos Machalas Asuros 17:14-15, Bais Yosef 113, Bach, Shulchan Aruch 113:1, Levush 2, Aruch Ha'shulchan 5. Refer to Mordechai Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 830:page 42.

⁴⁶ Chelkes Binyomin 113:3.

1. A food which can be eaten raw is permitted for a non-Jew to cook since the cooking is not changing the food⁴⁷ because it can be eaten without the cooking.⁴⁸

2. The *issur of bishul akum* is limited to foods which are served on a king's table⁴⁹ (a.k.a. *olah al shulchan melachim*) to be eaten with bread or as an appetizer.⁵⁰ The reason is since if the food is not fit to be served on a king's table one will not invite someone over to eat we are not concerned for intermarriage⁵¹ and since one will not invite someone over we are not concerned of a non-Jew mixing non-*kosher* into the *kosher* food.⁵²

Since honey is edible raw there is no concern of a non-Jew cooking it.⁵³

⁴⁷ Rashi Mesechtas Beitzah 16a "ein," Chochmas Adom 66:1, Chelkes Binyomin 113:3, 5.

⁴⁸ Mesechtas Shabbos 51a, Avodah Zarah 38a, Ran Beitzah page 8b "im tzlyon." Rosh Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 2:28, Rif page 14, Issur V'heter 43:2, Tur 113, Shulchan Aruch 113:1, Toras Chatos 75:16, Levush 2, Chochmas Adom 66:1, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 38:6. Refer to Tosfas Mesechtas Avodah Zarah "dagim."

⁴⁹ Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a, Rosh 2:28, Ran page 15, Rashba Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a, Rambam Hilchos Machalas Asuros 17:15, Tur 113, Shulchan Aruch 113:1, Levush 3, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 38:6, Chochmas Adom 66:1, see Ritvah Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a.

⁵⁰ Rambam Hilchos Machalas Asuros 17:18, Issur V'heter 43:2, Tur 113, Bais Yosef, Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 113:1, Toras Chatos 75:16, Shach 112:5, Chochmas Adom 66:1, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 38:6, Chelkes Binyomin 113:12, Bishul Yisroel pages 180-181.

⁵¹ Rashba Toras Habayis 3:7.

⁵² Chelkes Binyomin 113:3. Refer to Bishul Yisroel pages 130-131.

⁵³ Tosfas Mesechtas Avodah Zarah 38a "ika," Rosh 2:28, Rambam Hilchos Machalas Asuros 17:23, Issur V'heter 43:5, Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 114:7, Aruch Ha'shulchan 113:13, Yalkut Yosef Y.D. 2:page 149, Shevet Ha'Levi 6:109.

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**Wishing all of *Klal Yisroel*
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Sweet New Year!!!**

כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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Halachically Speaking

► Halachically Speaking is a bi-weekly publication compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits, a former *chaver kollel* of *Yeshiva Torah Vodaath* and a *musmach* of *Horav Yisroel Belsky Shlita*. Rabbi Lebovits currently works as the Rabbinical Administrator for the KOF-K Kosher Supervision.

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KASHRUS CONNECTION

Compiled by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits

Volume 1 Issue 1



POLICY/ UPDATES

Policy

Ezekiel Bread is Hamotzei and Pas Yisroel. For more on this topic email mlebovits@kof-k.org

Update

The KOF-K is proud to welcome Rabbi Avram Ossey to our rabbinic staff. Rabbi Ossey brings with him 10 ½ years of experience in kashrus. Rabbi Ossey originally specialized in kosher certification for the dairy and vitamin industries. He coordinated and organized many Kashrus program presentations to companies and internal review programs.

Born and raised in Chicago. Rabbi Ossey was educated at the Yeshivas Brisk in that city, where he received *semicha* from Harav Hagoan Rav Aharon Soloveitchik Z'TL. Subsequently, he taught in New Haven, CT and continued his rabbinic studies at the Yeshiva Ohr HaChaim in Queens, NY and the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY.

KASHRUS CORNER

Re-packing Foods

If the item in question is individually wrapped with the *hashgacha* on the wrapper (hard candy, taffy, chewing gum...) of course there is no concern. Often stores will purchase loose items in bulk and repack them using their own labels stating the original *hechsher*. It is advisable to purchase these items only from stores that have a reliable *hechsher* supervising the repacking. This verifies that they are indeed packing the product stated on the repackaging. Many consumers opt to only purchase loose products from merchants whose entire store is properly certified by a reliable kosher agency. With such certification, the kosher status of the repacked product, as well as any other product in the store that it could come in contact with, can be assured.



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