As we look toward the beginning of the new year, we turn our thoughts to teshuva, and the hope that our tefillot will be answered for a sweet new year. This request has been symbolized for hundreds of years by Rosh Hashana. 

I. THE KASHRUS OF HONEY

A brief entomological review of this remarkable insect is necessary in order to understand the kashrus status of bee derivatives. Bees suck nectar from flowers with their proboscis (mouth). The nectar mixes with saliva and is swallowed by the bee. Upon the bee’s return to the hive, the honey is regurgitated and the saliva.  Upon the bee’s return to the hive, the honey is regurgitated and the water is evaporated, thereby thickening it into honey which is then sealed in the honeycomb. Beekeepers then extract millions of drops of honey from the cavities of the honeycomb by using a machine that applies centrifugal force to the comb.

The Gemara1 explains that honey is kosher since it is not an actual secretion of the bee; the bee functions only as a carrier and facilitator. Honey is kosher flower nectar, which enters the bee’s honey sac and is transformed into honey. The second opinion in the Gemara permits honey because of a g’ziras hakasuv, a deduction from a pasuk. Therefore, the halacha is that honey is kosher despite the fact that it comes from the non-kosher honeybee. One may purchase without a kosher certification 100% pure bee honey from Montana, North Dakota, or any state or country.

1 To Bee or Not To Bee”, written by this author, appeared in Kashrus Kurrents 15 years ago. The article above is based on this previous article and also addresses additional topics not discussed in the original article. For a full discussion regarding honey and other simanim on Rosh Hashana, see “Starting the New Year Right: A Guide to the Simanim on Rosh HaShana” by Rabbi Moshe Schuchman.

2Hayotzi mot haatem tamei
3 Raccour 7b
4 Mpeqi shemachnis oso ligyot v’ain mimutvei osan migufan
5 Vayikra 11:21. Ach es goh...
6 Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 81:8. The brocha on honey is Shemah. It should be noted that there is no issue of bishul akum with honey, as it is edible raw.
7 Honey is one of the seven moladot (liquids) that are maktir haifel tamah. This primarily impacts on Hilchos Tamah and Tahara (the laws of impurities and purities that were most relevant in the days of the Bas Hashabdil). But also has a practical implication on Hilchos Challah: Ideally, dough should be kneaded with water, honey or any

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Nevertheless, there are two important issues that one must bear in mind when purchasing honey. Honey is usually described by the flower from which the bees draw the nectar. One of the most popular varieties of honey, Clover Honey, has been processed by the bees from the nectar of the clover plant. Orange Blossom Honey comes from nectar that originates from orange groves, where the bees have sucked the nectar from orange blossoms and transformed it into honey. However, some companies flavor their honey with an orange flavor and call it “orange honey.” This orange flavored honey would require a hechsher, as flavors can be composed of various non-kosher ingredients. One should always check the label carefully to verify that the product is 100% pure honey with no added flavors.

The second issue relates to the use of pure honey on Pesach. Honey has the potential to be adulterated with additives, such as corn syrup. Corn syrup, a yotzei min hatamei yotzei min hatamei syrup sweetener, is derived from corn, which is a legume and may not be used by Ashkenazim on Pesach. For example, soda companies must substitute this sweetener with liquid sugar when producing Kosher for Passover soda. 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.” There are historical records that indicate the use of flour in the adulteration of honey. Sir John Hill in his 1759 book, The Virtues of Honey…, addresses this subject: “Beware of honey with a dishonest mixture of flour and other ingredients.” Although this practice is the exception, one should nevertheless purchase pure honey for Pesach with a reliable hechsher.

This problem does not impact the use of honey during the rest of the year.

II. OTHER PRODUCTS OF THE BEE

1. Bee Pollen - Bees have brushes on their legs which collect the pollen from the flowers. The pollen is brushed toward the back of the bee and is pressed into baskets found on their legs. The bees add traces of saliva and nectar to make a more effective “press,” because pollen is naturally dusty and requires a binding agent. This popular health food product is kosher.

2. Propolis - Another important product of the bee is propolis. Bees collect resins from the sap of trees and carry it in their proboscis. In its pure state, propolis is kosher and is used as an anti-bacterial and anti-fungal remedy, polishing agent, and preservative. However, companies commonly process the propolis with other ingredients such as alcohol. Therefore, such a product would require a reliable hechsher.

3. Royal Jelly - The most important bee in the hive is the Queen Bee, who attains her “royal” status by her constant extra nutritional diet of royal jelly. What is royal jelly? This product is a secretion from the hypopharyngeal and mandibular glands located in the head of the bee. It is rich in protein and vitamins, as well as fatty and amino acids. Royal jelly is readily available in health food stores, and is a common ingredient in various health food products and remedies. Because it is a yotzei min hatamei, an actual product that is secreted from the bee, royal jelly should not be eaten.35

4. Beeswax - Used to form the honeycomb in the hive, beeswax is secreted from wax glands located on the underside of the abdomen. Bees grow from larvae into mature bees in the cells of the honeycomb. They also store various other products besides honey.

In its original state, beeswax is used in non-food grade applications since the human body cannot adequately digest this material. It is commonly used in candles, lipstick, shoe and floor polish, as well as buffing wax for surfboards. Since it is not a “ma’achal”, a food, its status as a yotzei min hatamei (an actual product that is secreted from the bees) does not make it non-kosher. Therefore, beeswax is considered kosher provided that no non-kosher solvents are used in its processing, and it contains no non-kosher additives. Although pure beeswax is generally not eaten, its kosher status is important for various reasons. Beeswax may be extracted to create a chemical used in the flavor industry. This extract is a kosher chemical (provided that all additives and solvents are approved), since the actual beeswax is not considered food. It is even permissible for one to chew beeswax for its pollen content, or even to swallow it, with or without the honey mixed in.

5. Bee Bread - This is also known as ambrosia and is a mixture of honey and pollen. Therefore, this is considered a kosher food.

6. Bee Venom - This product is synthesized in the venom glands of the bee and is released when a bee stings. Using a machine, bee venom is collected from bees and is used as an anti-inflammatory agent or for the treatment of arthritis. It is non-kosher and may be taken orally only if it is batel bishishim. It may also be taken by a choleh she’ain bo sakana (one who is ill) for medicinal purposes if taken she’erach echila (in a abnormal manner). It may be used topically or by injection, even if the venom is not batel.

35 See Minchas Shlomo 2:64, who states that he cannot “mash krav a’arav” this product. Therefore, one should ideally not consume royal jelly. Also see Tzitz Eliezer 11:59 who allows it.


37 Since it is a yotzei min hatamei, an actual product that is secreted from the bee.

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*of the other seven maalot. A brocha is recited prior to Ha’afakos Chalilah (assuming there is enough dough to be obligated in this mitzvah) and the Chalilah is burned. It should be noted that when using more than 2 lbs of dough, one should Ha’afakos Chalilah not knead dough without any of the seven maalot in the dough (i.e. one should not knead dough using fruit juice as the only liquid). If one kneaded dough with only fruit juice, a brocha is not recited on the ha’afakos and one can not burn the dough after being majol Chalilah. For further details, see Shulchan Aruch and Rama Y.D. 329:10. For a list of the seven maalot and additional information regarding these Avelach see Shulchan Aruch - Hilchos Netilas Yadayim – O.C. 158:4.

9 This would obviously pose a serious problem for both Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

10 The purpose of this section is to address the kosher status of these bee derivatives. It is in no way intended to advise consumers as to whether a specific product is effective. Consult your physician or health advisor regarding the use of these products.

11 This does not compromise the kosher status of the pollen. See Piz Ta’ur 81:1. A similar issue relates to propolis, as well.
The kosher certification agency correctly and responsibly questioned whether there was Jewish ownership in the corporation. To their surprise, they found out that the corporation was a family-owned business, and that the sole owners were Jewish and non-observant. This can be a fatal flaw and major disaster in the liquor business, due to the fact that a Jew cannot possess *chometz* during Pesach. Optimally, a Jewish homeowner must rid himself of all *chometz* in his possession. In the event that the Jew's inventory is so great that it is impossible to discard it, the Rabbinim instituted a legal method of discarding the excess *chometz*. The *chometz* may be sold to an *aino Yehudi*, who takes full possession of the *chometz* during Pesach with the hope that after Pesach, the *chometz* will then be repurchased from the *aino Yehudi*. In the event that the *chometz* is not sold, and the Jew does violate the halachos of owning *chometz* during Pesach, the Rabbinim placed a penalty on that *chometz*.

They forbade one to eat or derive any enjoyment or benefit from the tainted *chometz*.

The halacha refers to *chometz* that has violated the Pesach mandate that *chometz* shevarav alav ha*Pesach*, *chometz* that has “passed” over Pesach. Failure to sell one’s *chometz* can be a nightmare if one owns a large inventory of *chometz*. The nightmare is compounded when liquor is stored in warehouses, where inventory has been aged in casks for many years. It can take many Passovers before the whisky sees the light of day. During that period, the distillery owners have little control over the *chometz* that is subject to the severity of the violation of *chometz* shevarav alav ha*Pesach*, except in cases of extreme financial loss where a raw or posek should be consulted. Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Regardless of one’s view on the subject, this was an outstanding example of *daas Torah* in action and kosher organizations working for the betterment of the Klal. Our job as a kosher certification agency is to try to bring the widest array of kosher products to the kosher consumer. At the same time, it is also our primary responsibility to certify quality kosher products and protect the kosher consumer from any kosher impurity.

7. **Bee Parts** - If one purchased unfiltered honey with bee parts, he would need to strain out the bee parts as they are non-kosher.14 Prior to filtration, the honey was heated (in kosher equipment) with the parts inside, the honey would not become *trei*.15 This is because the bee parts only impart a bad taste into the honey that did not compromise the kosher status of the honey (nosain ta’am lifgam).

8. **Apis Mellifica** - This homoeopathic remedy is derived from the body of the honeybee and is not kosher. In most homoeopathic remedies, however, the active ingredient is less than one sixtieth of the product and is therefore *batel* *brishim* (nullified).16 If the inactive ingredients are kosher, and the body parts of the honeybee are hotel and non-recognizable, this product would be halakhically permissible to ingest.

9. **Honey In The Honeycomb** - This product is Kosher. If one purchased honey in the honeycomb, one may not squeeze the honey out of the comb on Shabbos. The honey should be removed before Shabbos.17

The bee’s ability to produce such a wide spectrum of ingredients is quite fascinating. Appreciating these *nifilos haBorei*, wonders of our Creator, especially at the time of year when the world was created,18 enhances our emunah and bitachon in the Borei Olam, our Creator. It is also the key to understanding the kosher status of the many products that are derived from this fascinating insect.

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14 Although bee parts are not kosher, bee legs are considered inedible “atzemos” and are not *trei* (Pirke Chadash 1:9 81:27, based on Tosafos Avoda Zara 89a – “Hala”)
15 The Rokei (Avoda Zara 5:33) notes that bee legs and wings are “Veifar ‘Yisrael,” like dais, and are therefore not *trei*.
16 See Sheluchim Aruch YD 81:8.
17 See Sheluchim Aruch OC 321:13. If the honeycomb is attached to the ground, it is prohibited as it is similar to tovel. The Mishna Brura Sh 88:8 notes that even if the comb is no longer attached to the ground (e.g. it is in a jar), it is still prohibited to remove the honey from the comb on Shabbos because it is “mefarsh.” One would have to be “mezuzah” the comb before Shabbos in order to eat the honey on Shabbos.
18 As we say in Musaf on Rosh Hashana, “Zeh Hayom Teilels Marseches,” like the opinion of Rabbe Eliyozr – Rosh Hashana 10b – B’Tzibhe Nina Harevn.19
The text discusses the custom of eating simanim (items) during the holiday of Rosh Hashana. It mentions that the custom has origins in the Talmudic period and is associated with the hope of a sweet new year. The author references various sources to explain the reasons behind selecting certain items, such as their growth cycles, their association with specific plants, and their symbolic meanings.

The text also includes a note that Rashi explains that some of these foods, like pumpkins and leeks, have quick growth cycles and possess a sweet taste. Another ancient practice, as explained by Rashi, is to place one item on the table and recite an appropriate blessing.

The author emphasizes that the custom is valued not only for its symbolic significance but also for its concentration on the ritual of tefilla (prayer). The text concludes with a reminder to maintain this practice, despite the challenges posed by the current global circumstances.
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Q: Have I been invited to eat out on Yom Tov? The succah has canvas walls which shake in the wind. Is this a problem?

A: The Mishna states that a person can use the trunks of trees as a succah wall. This Mishna is referring to a scenario where the tree trunks are very close to one another or the space between them has been filled with some other material, and the overhang of the tree branches will not invalidate the s’chach. The Gemara states that this is true only if the tree trunks do not sway. If the tree trunks are supple and sway in a normal wind, the succah wall is not valid. The Shulchan Aruch codifies this halacha and adds that if the tree trunks are supple, one can tie them to each other in such a manner that they will no longer sway in the wind. However, he states that it is not ideal to do so, as it is possible that the ties will loosen on Yom Tov rendering the succah invalid.

How rigid do the succah walls need to be? The Chazon Ish suggests that a wall formed from tree trunks is invalid only if the trunks will sway more than three tefachim away from each other, or if the top of the wall will sway more than three tefachim away from the s’chach. There is a general principle in halacha called lavad, which means that any gap of three tefachim or less is not halachically significant and can be considered as filled. Therefore, if the top of the wall is within three tefachim of the s’chach, we would consider those three tefachim as filled by s’chach, thereby reaching the top of the wall. However, if the top of the wall sways more than three tefachim, one could not consider the wall to be connected to the s’chach. According to the Chazon Ish, three tefachim is approximately 11½ inches.

There is another principle in Hilchos Succah known as gad ask mechitzos. This means that, if a wall of a succah is halachically kosher, we would consider that wall to extend vertically for any distance. If the wall of a succah is ten tefachim high, which is the minimum height requirement for a succah wall, we consider that wall to extend upward towards the sky. Therefore, if a succah wall is ten tefachim high, the vertical distance between the top of the wall and the s’chach is immaterial, as long as the horizontal distance between the edge of the s’chach and the top of the wall is three tefachim or less. It would therefore follow, according to the Chazon Ish, that if the height of a succah the tree trunks are rigid enough that they do not sway more than three tefachim, the succah wall is kosher.

Furthermore, it would seem that according to the Chazon Ish, if a canvas wall was tied at the top and bottom, so that the bottom was always vertically within three tefachim of the ground and the top was always horizontally within three tefachim of the s’chach, the wall would be kosher even if the middle of the canvas moved in the wind. However, the Igros Moshe states that that no part of the canvas should sway more than three tefachim to each side in a regular wind, including the middle of the canvas.

The canvas succahs that are commonly used nowadays are tied at the top and bottom and do not sway more than three tefachim in the wind; therefore, such a succah would be kosher. However, as mentioned above, the Shulchan Aruch states that it is not ideal to use such a succah due to the concern that the ties might become loose. Therefore, the Igros Moshe says that such a succah should ideally be used only if the canvas would not sway more than three tefachim without the ties. It seems that the Igros Moshe would accept lechatchila a canvas wall, if the canvas has been sewn around a metal frame in such a manner that no part of the canvas sways more than three tefachim from the frame in a normal wind.

The Moadim Uzmanim suggests that nowadays, where the canvas succahs are very well attached, the concern of the Shulchan Aruch that the ties may become loose no longer applies; however, he concludes that it is advisable not to rely on this. He also questions the ruling of the Chazon Ish that the wall is kosher if it sways less than three tefachim from the s’chach. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Ovadiah Yosef shlit”a also pasken that the wall should not sway at all. The Mishneh Halachos points out that it is a commonly accepted custom to use canvas succahs. He suggests that the concern of the Shulchan Aruch that the ties will loosen is limited to a scenario where the tree trunks are tied only to each other, with no further structure supporting the wall. However, if a person constructs a square frame and securely ties the canvas to it, the resulting wall is kosher lechatchila.

The Chazon Ish quotes Gaon MiTchebin advising a person with a canvas succah wall to do the following: Tie a taut string from one edge of the canvas to the other, parallel to the ground and within three tefachim of the ground. Tie a second taut string likewise, above and within three tefachim of the first string. Tie a third string likewise, above and within three tefachim of the second string, and a fourth string above and within three tefachim of the first string. The strings should be distanced from each other so that the fourth string is more than ten tefachim above the ground. As the distance between each string is less than three tefachim, the rule of lavad allows us to consider the space as filled, thereby creating a wall with a height of ten tefachim. As the strings are taut and do not move in the wind, the Shulchan Aruch concurs that the ties may loosen does not apply, and the resulting wall is kosher lechatchila.

According to Rabbi Heinemann shlit”a, lechatchila one should follow the psak of the Igros Moshe, that no part of the canvas wall should sway more than three tefachim. Believed, one may use a succah if the canvas wall is tied at the top and bottom, in accordance with the ruling of the Chazon Ish.

Halachic queries regarding all topics may be presented to The Institute of Halachah at the Star-K by calling 410-484-4110 ext. 238 or emailing halachah@star-k.org.
Abudarham mentions two customs of how this is done. The first is to utter a short supplication with each siman. The second custom proscribes an entire prayer, “Yehi Ratzon Mil’fanecha”, complete with recitation of the Shem HaShem. It is permissible to use the Shem HaShem because it is in the context of a prayer. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would recite it for the first siman only, since one must have the proper concentration when uttering it. (If a particular siman is unavailable, the Kaf HaChaim notes that the bakasha, supplication, may still be recited.)

**BROCHOS**

Does one recite separate brochos on the simanim during the meal? Generally, the brocha of Hamotzi includes foods eaten during the course of a meal. However, since the apple dipped in honey is not a normal ‘meal’ food, it does require its own brocha. The minhag that places the apple at the beginning of the order raises a problem, since the simanim also include items belonging to the Shivas Hamanim such as dates and pomegranates, which take precedence in the order of brochos. Therefore, some Poskim recommend keeping fruits of the Shivas HaManim off the table or in a different room until after the brocha is made on the apple, while having in mind to include the other fruits with that brocha. There is halachic justification for those who leave the fruits on the table. The foods used for the simanim requiring a ho’adama, such as pumpkin and carrots, are usually in a form of a regular ‘meal’ type food and therefore do not require their own brocha. Those who use candies, such as jellyfish, should make a she’hecheyanu before eating them.

Another issue is when to recite the bakasha. If it is said between reciting the brocha and eating the fruit, this may constitute a kefsik (interruption) and invalidate the brocha. B’deved, if this was done, the brocha does not need to be repeated since the tefillah can be justified as relating to the brocha. To resolve this problem, the Rema writes that one should say the bakasha after eating the fruit. It is sufficient to eat only a small bit, less than a k’zayis. For those simanim that do not require their own brocha, it is proper to say the tefillah before eating them.

**WHEN TO SERVE THE SIMANIM**

Abbaye established having the simanim at the “beginning of the year.” Some Poskim maintain that this means that these simanim should be eaten at all four meals of Rosh HaShana. Eliezer Rabba and Matzeh Efrayim say that they should be eaten at both night meals, but not during the day. The B’nai Yissachtor derives from the words “Reish Shata” that the proper place is at the very beginning of the new year, on the first night only. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach would also eat the simanim on the second night, but without all of the fanfare accorded to them on the first night.

**SIMANIM OR SORCERY**

The P’risha (16th century, student of Maharash) raises a serious issue concerning the entire minhag of the simanim. The Torah prohibits any form of sorcery or divination. If, how can we suggest that using certain foods can influence our fortunes in the coming year? There are three different approaches to resolve this difficulty.

1) This problem was raised many centuries earlier by the Geonim. They were challenged by those who state that this minhag, as well as others (such as kapporos before Yom Kippur and gazing at the fingernails in the light of the havdalah candle) violate a Torah prohibition of divination. They responded that any action which is established in the written Torah or Oral Law cannot be considered nichush.

2) An opposite approach is taken by the Metzit. He holds that simanim do not have intrinsic power or benefit. The purpose of simanim is to simply awaken our hearts and inspire us to direct our goals for the new year along the proper path. To accomplish this, he explains that tefillos were instituted to accompany each siman.

3) A third opinion is offered by the Maharasha. He draws a distinction between simanim which are an omen for a positive outcome, and forms of sorcery where a negative result is understood to signify an ominous future. The latter may constitute nichush, interpreting a situation as a negative omen (e.g. food falling from one’s mouth or a deer crossing one’s path), something which is prohibited by the Torah. On the other hand, partaking of the simanim on Rosh HaShana is permitted since these actions symbolize a good future, while refraining from them is not indicative of anything at all.

**THE GREATEST SIMAN**

The simanim remind us that our every activity on Rosh HaShana is charged with meaning. If the foods we eat are so consequential, then certainly our conduct is critical. Accordingly, the Mishneh Berurah reminds us to spend these awesome days with a pleasant comportment in a mood of sublime joy. No less than abstaining from sour foods, any trace of anger or annoyance should be diligently avoided. Thus we will be insured a favorable judgment for a pleasant and sweet new year.

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22 Shukran Aruch Holov and Keter Shukran-Aruch omit mention of the Shem HaShem.

23 Halach Shlomo, Rosh HaShana, note 70.

24 See Chayei Oded, K’dos 5.

25 The honey requires no Afucha since it is safe to the apple, Sha’ar Yeshuah 583:2.

26 The Rosh HaShana (133) provides a justification for those who make the brocha on the apple even with the other fruits on the table.

27 Drori Hayezi places that in this context, even the ho’adama items, when eaten as simanim, will require their own brocha. This is also the view of the Edah HaMagen.

28 See Nagen Aravah 583:2. There are some who have this minhag Tzachilde.

29 Kaf HaChaim, Sha’ar Yitzchok.
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