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HONEY and Other Animal Products

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Shellac and Carmine

The Gemara (Bechoros 5b) teaches that something produced by a kosher animal is kosher, and therefore we may drink milk produced by a cow. However, something similar which is produced by a non-kosher animal is not kosher, and for that reason horse milk is not kosher. This is known as “yotzeh” (literally: what comes out of), and includes the two-part rule that (1) *yotzeh min hatahor*; *tahor* (what comes out of a kosher animal, is kosher), and (2) *yotzeh min hatamei*, *tamei* (what comes out of a non-kosher animal, is not kosher).

A significant exception to that rule is that if the animal produces something that is classified as *pirshah* (literally: excrement) then it is permitted. The most obvious examples of *pirshah* are items which are inedible, and *Igeros Moshe* (YD 2:24) makes the point that if they are inedible at the time they leave the animal, they are permanently permitted even if they later become edible. The logic is that the decision of whether something is “yotzeh” (as opposed to “*pirshah*”) must be made when it leaves the animal's body, and if at that point it is inedible then it was not a *yotzeh*. Later, when it becomes edible, it is no longer leaving the body of a non-kosher animal, and therefore it remains permitted.

Igeros Moshe's example of this is shellac (a.k.a., confectioner's glaze), which

is an excretion of an insect. Insects are not kosher and *yotzeh* from an insect is also non-kosher, but since the shellac is inedible when it leaves the insect's body, it is classified as *pirshah* and remains permitted even though it can be processed for use in coating candies, chocolate, and other foods. [This ruling is accepted by most American *hashgachos*, but there are those – especially in *Eretz Yisroel* – who disagree, and therefore do not allow shellac in kosher foods; see, for example, *Kovetz Teshuvos* 1:73:f].

This is different than carmine which all agree is forbidden. Carmine is a coloring agent made by crushing cochineal insects, and even if it is inedible when it is crushed, it is forbidden. The difference between carmine and shellac is clear: carmine is made from the insect itself and has a stricter status than shellac which is just a *yotzeh/pirshah* from the forbidden insect.

Bee Products

HONEY: Bees are obviously non-kosher but nonetheless the Gemara (Bechoros 7b) says that honey which comes from bees is kosher, either because it is not considered a bee “product” at all (but rather a minimally changed version of the kosher nectar which the bee collects from plants) or because of a special Torah exception to permit honey.

An apparent practical difference



between these reasons is the case of honeydew honey (a.k.a., forest honey) which is produced by bees who feed on a secretion of aphids (a type of insect) rather than on nectar. The secretion itself is sweet and edible and therefore is forbidden as *yotzeh* from the aphid. What about the honey made from it? The Gemara's first reason to permit honey was that it is not a *yotzeh* from the bee but rather has the status of the nectar it comes from. If so, since honeydew honey's source is a forbidden secretion of the aphid, it is forbidden. [According to the second reason of the Gemara, honeydew honey is permitted like any other honey]. Some have suggested reasons why this logic is incorrect, but most *hashgachos* follow this strict interpretation and do not consider it kosher.

Thus far, we have discussed the reason why honey is inherently kosher even though it comes from non-kosher bees. However, we must consider a few issues when purchasing retail containers of honey.

Honey which is flavored requires *hashgachah* to ensure that the flavor is kosher. In this context, it is noteworthy that when honey is marked as “orange blossom” that just identifies the trees (i.e., “orange blossoms”) that the bees collected the nectar from and is not reflective of the honey being flavored.

Most honey is filtered to remove parts

of the bee's body that might be stuck in the honey. In some cases, a "raw" honey will be unfiltered, in which case any "spots" or particles that seem foreign to the honey should be removed as these may be non-kosher parts of a bee.

It is possible that honey is heated to make it easier to bottle, and this raises a concern that the bottling equipment might have previously been used for non-kosher. Some consider this unlikely, while cRc and others are more concerned and recommend that consumers only purchase retail honey with *hashgachah*.

ROYAL JELLY, POLLEN AND BEESWAX: Royal jelly is a creamy, bitter-tasting, bee secretion which is consumed by the future queen-bee (hence the name) and developing larvae. [All other bees eat honey]. Some contemporary *poskim* permit this product based on their understanding of being included in the "honey" which the *Gemara* permits. However, most assume that royal jelly is not kosher as it does not meet one (or maybe even both) of the *Gemara's* rationales for permitting honey.

Pollen is found in the "pollen basket" on the bee's leg, and since it is not processed at all nor changed by the bee, it is surely not a *yotzeh* and it is kosher. Bees mix pollen with nectar to create a mixture known as "bee-bread" (a.k.a. ambrosia). Since it is made of these two permitted substances, it too is permitted.

Beeswax is excreted by bees, but it is permitted since it is inedible excretion and qualifies as *pirshah* (see above). Lastly, bees collect plant resins on their legs, mix it with some beeswax and possibly a bit of bee-saliva, and use it as a "sealant" for the hive. This sealant is called "bee propolis." The only component of questionable *kashrus* status is the saliva, but there are only very tiny amounts of saliva in the propolis (just like there is a bit in honey), and the saliva is assumed to be *batel*. Accordingly, bee propolis is also kosher.

Eggs

The eggs of kosher birds are kosher, but there are very few bird breeds for which we have a *mesorah*/tradition that they are kosher. That *mesorah* includes the common ones used to lay eggs in the United States but does not include certain other ones such as the South American breeds (e.g., Araucana) which lay green or blue eggs. Accordingly, those eggs are not considered kosher. Similarly, there are some breeds of duck for which we have no *mesorah*, and therefore one cannot purchase duck eggs unless they can ascertain that they are from a breed which is known to be kosher.

There are many small birds which are colloquially referred to as "quail," and there are just a few of them which are known to be kosher. Most people cannot differentiate one quail from the next, and therefore should only purchase quail eggs that are certified kosher.



Lactose, Colostrum, and Vitamin D3

Shulchan Aruch (YD 81:5) rules that lactose which is isolated from cow's milk is permitted, but there is a disagreement as to why that is so. *Shach* (YD 81:12) understands that this is because the only *yotzeh* which is forbidden is one which comes from a non-kosher species, and since cows are kosher, anything which is *yotzeh* from a cow is permitted. *Rosh* (*Chullin* 8:51) argues that lactose is only permitted since it is a component of milk (and we have specific sources that milk and eggs from kosher animals or birds are permitted). However, any other byproducts of a kosher species are forbidden because all living animals – even cows – are themselves

"forbidden" until they undergo *shechitah*.

Thus, *Shach* and *Rosh* disagree about whether the prohibition of *yotzeh* applies even to excretions of a kosher animal, and the later *Poskim* are divided as to which of these opinions is considered normative halacha. [See, for example, *Chasam Sofer* YD 19 and *Chazon Ish* YD 12:6].

There are two items whose status appears, at first glance, to depend on this disagreement: colostrum and lanolin. Colostrum is a liquid produced by the mammary glands of a female animal (or human) just before and after it gives birth. It has a noticeably different color (more yellowish), more protein, and less fat, than regular milk. According to *Shach*, colostrum from a cow is surely permitted since it comes from a kosher animal. While one might think that *Rosh* would forbid colostrum, in fact, there are sources which clearly indicate that it is permitted, and we therefore must assume that *Rosh* will consider it to be "milk" (and therefore permitted) just like lactose is. [It is highly questionable if the leniency of "*chalav stam*" applies to colostrum, and therefore it may well require to be produced as "*chalav Yisroel*"].

The other item is lanolin, which is a wax found on unprocessed sheep's wool. It has several uses, and the most prominent one of them is as a precursor for Vitamin D3. Once again, the simple understanding would be that *Shach* would permit it (since sheep are kosher) while *Rosh* would not, since it is the *yotzeh* of a living sheep. It has been suggested that *Rosh* might agree to permit lanolin since it is inedible when it is washed off the wool and therefore qualifies as *pirshah* (see above). Most American *hashgachos* rely on this or other reasons to permit Vitamin D3 made from lanolin, but some *hashgachos* (and individuals) do not accept this position. ■

This article is excerpted from several volumes from Rabbi Cohen's series of seforim entitled "Imrei Dovid," including *Animal Products*, Chapters 10-14, 24, and 26.

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