



# WHAT'S THE BUZZ?: HONEY FOR A SWEET NEW YEAR

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*Apples and honey are a traditional Rosh Hashanah treat – but how does the honey make it to the Rosh Hashanah table? You're about to find out everything you ever wanted to know about honey!*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Throughout Jewish history, honey is referred to as a nourishing food, a useful medicine, a valued possession, a symbol of learning and wisdom, and an ingredient for a delicious drink. It is not clear, however, that the early Hebrews ever cultivated bees!

Many scholars believe that the historical honey of Israel was actually a thick syrup made from dates or other sweet fruits. This type of honey is sometimes called "wild honey," or *devash*.

When historical Israel is referred to as "the land of milk and honey," the sweetness and generosity flowing from the land probably came from dates, not beehives.

When dipping apples or challah in honey at Rosh Hashanah, honey from bees is preferred to the syrup of dates. Some rabbis say that this preference has an important meaning, as we wish for a particular kind of sweetness in our daily lives.

The sweetness of honey represents an intricate blend. Bees do not simply create a sweet product; they also have a fierce sting! In using honey to represent our wishes, we are asking the the sharp sting of judgment be tempered by the divine quality of mercy. If judgment is combined with compassion, the outcome - and the coming year - may be especially sweet.

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

The process by which bees create honey can offer an intriguing entry point to learning about Jewish dietary laws. The principles of *kashrut* forbid eating certain animals, and if an animal is *treif* (not kosher), then the product of the animal is also considered not kosher. Bee's, however, seem to present an exception to this rule!

Consider making a tasty bedtime drink, like warm milk sweetened with honey, and explore these mysteries together with your child:

- Is camel meat kosher? Is the milk of a camel kosher?
- Are catfish kosher? Is the roe of a catfish kosher?
- Are bees kosher? Is the honey from a bee kosher?

Children often enjoy knowing intricate and unusual facts. The differences in how mammals make milk, fish make eggs, and bees make honey mean that a camel and its milk are both *treif*, a catfish and its eggs (roe) are both *treif*, but the honey created by *treif* bees is actually kosher.

The rules of *kashrut* include such elaborate particulars as "even-toed ungulates" and "detachable" types of fish scales. Regardless of the dietary guidelines your family may follow, the highly specific details of *kashrut* are sure to fascinate many young people!