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NOBLE NUTRITION: IS ROYAL JELLY KOSHER?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman
In our previous article, we noted that the Gemara offers two bases to permit consuming bee honey:

- Because they ingest [the nectar of flowers] into their bodies and do not excrete [honey] from their bodies (rather, their bodies transform the nectar into honey—Rashi).
- Based on a *drashah* from the *pasuk*, “But this you may eat from all creeping creatures that fly.”

Were it not for these bases, honey would be forbidden like the bees that produce it, because “whatever comes out of something nonkosher is nonkosher, and whatever comes out of something kosher is kosher.”¹

This issue is at the heart of a vigorous dispute that began in 5719/1959 and continued for decades about the *kashrus* of another substance produced by honeybees: royal jelly.

Royal jelly is a honeybee secretion that is used in the nutrition of larvae and adult queens...Royal jelly is secreted from the glands in the heads of worker bees and is fed to all bee larvae, whether they are destined to become drones (males), workers (sterile females), or queens (fertile females). After three days, the drone and worker larvae are no longer fed with royal jelly, but queen larvae continue to be fed this special substance throughout their development...²

In the Tishrei 5719 issue of the journal *Hama'or*, R' Zvi Hersch Kohn (rav of Kehal Tiferes Yisrael in Riverside, New York) wrote that on a trip to Eretz Yisrael, he was astounded to discover that royal jelly was in wide use there, “and there is no one who opens his mouth and objects to this, despite the fact that it is clear that it comes from the body of the bees and is not kosher.”³ He discusses some of the relevant *realia* and *halacha* and concludes:

It is clear that this royal jelly is not a type of honey at all and not the juice of fruits and flowers, but rather some sort of natural juice that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created in the abdomen of the bees, who use it for the perpetuation of the species.

Apparently, in the course of the next few years they will invent some process for the mass production of this nutrient to lower its price, and then it will turn into a general, popular nutrient and they will mix it into all their foods and drinks. It is therefore incumbent upon the *rabanim* and *morei hora'ah shlit"i* to go forth while there is still time and warn about this. In any event, they must determine the nature of this nutrient from the perspective of *halacha* and determine the stance of *halacha* on its use, both in ordinary nutrition and in various remedies.

In an article in the Adar 5719 issue of the journal *Kol*

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PARSHAS MATOS-MAS'EI

GETTING YOU NOWHERE

Excerpted and adapted from a *shiur*
by Dayan Yehoshua Grunwald

You shall not bring guilt (lo sachanifu) upon the land in which you are, for the blood will bring guilt upon the land; the land will not have atonement for the blood that was spilled in it, except through the blood of the one who spilled it.

Bemidbar 35:33

The Sifri, quoted by the Ramban, says we derive from this *pasuk* a prohibition on *chanufah* (flattery). The Yerei'im writes that *chanufah* is an *issur deOreisa*¹ and says one violates it if he sees someone commit an *aveirah* and either praises him for it or does not protest. (The latter, he says, is liable only if his silence is due to wickedness or fear of conflict, not if it's attributable to fear of either injury or financial loss.) The Chafetz Chaim offers two examples of *chanufah deOreisa* according to these *Rishonim* in the realm of *lashon hara*: a) Speaking *lashon hara* about someone you know your interlocutor despises, in order to gain his favor. b) Hearing *lashon hara* and

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¹It seems that the other *Rishonim*, who do not count *chanufah* as an *issur deOreisa*, hold that it is *asur mideRabanan* and understand the Sifri to be an *asmachta*.

Torah, R' Isser Yehudah Unterman advances a variety of arguments to permit royal jelly, and he concludes:

Based on all this, it appears to me that there are many reasons to permit it, even for a healthy person, and certainly for a sick person not in mortal danger (*choleh she'ein bo sakanah*) who needs it, for there is no room to be doubtful about this. So it appears in my humble opinion!⁴

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¹Mishnah Bechoros 12.
²Wikipedia contributors. Royal jelly. In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Royal_jelly&oldid=1341334623.

³*Hama'or shanah 10 choveress 1* (87) Tishrei 5719 p. 11.

⁴*Kol Torah shanah 13* (30) choveress 6 Adar (1-2) 5719 pp. 5-8.

Q&A from the
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Egg Pilaf

Q Can I leave egg salad in the fridge to eat for breakfast?

A The Gemara says (Nidah 17a) that someone who eats garlic, onion, or egg that sat peeled overnight is liable to pay with his life and is held accountable for his death. This is not a matter of *issur* but *sakanah*, as Chazal revealed hidden dangers caused by *ruach ra'ah*. The *Rishonim* and early *Acharonim* say that some of these dangers do not exist today, but those that do are codified by the *poskim*.

This particular *sakanah* is not mentioned by the Rambam, Shulchan Aruch, or Rama. But it is cited by later *poskim* including the Shulchan Aruch Harav (Hilchos *Shmiras Haguf* 7) and the Chafetz Chaim (Likutei

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But in Sivan of that same year, R' Elazar Brizel, a *talmid* of R' Isser Zalman Meltzer, published a vigorous and detailed rebuttal of Rav Unterman's analysis, in the course of which he repeatedly declares that because royal jelly was newly discovered, "no single *rav* has the power to decide that it is permitted or prohibited, and the opinions of all the *gedolei hador* are needed for this."⁵

In 5733/1973, R' Eliezer Yehudah Waldenberg published a long *teshuvah* on the subject in the eleventh volume of his Tzitz Eliezer, which he introduced with a lengthy citation of Rav Kohn's Hama'or article. He concludes:

In my humble opinion, it is permitted to take this medicine of royal jelly (which is mixed with 37 times its quantity of honey, and also mixed with vitamins, proteins, and other ingredients) for healing, even for a *choleh she'ein bo sakanah*, even to strengthen the foundations of his body and mind (*amudei haguf ve'eshtonosav*) that have weakened or to restore his freshness and delicacy (*ra'ananuso ve'adnuso*) and renew the strength of his youth.⁶

In the course of the *teshuvah*, he advances a number of bases for leniency:

1. The *drashah* that permits honey extends to royal jelly as well.
2. Even if royal jelly is prohibited, the *issur* is, for a variety of reasons, only *deRabanan* (particularly in its typical formulation, amid large quantities of other ingredients), and many authorities permit a *choleh she'ein bo sakanah* to eat an *issur deRabanan*. Chazal's characterization of honey as botanical material that passes through a bee's body—rather than the bee's excretion—applies to royal jelly as well. He reports having read that some experts maintain that "royal jelly, like honey, is created from flower pollen (sic; presumably, nectar), but the bee processes it in a different manner from honey, in a way that is appropriate for its particular purpose." (Rav Unterman, too, had previously written that in the course of his careful investigation of royal jelly, he had heard experts characterize it that way.)
3. Royal jelly is "bitter as wormwood" and only edible mixed with large quantities of honey, so

the mixture is not prohibited.

Upon receipt of that volume of Tzitz Eliezer, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach responded to Rav Waldenberg with a letter thanking him very much for his very important work but challenging his lenient position. He rejects out of hand the Tzitz Eliezer's first and third reasons, and he is uncertain whether royal jelly's taste is indeed foul enough for it to be considered inedible. But he concurs that a *choleh*, even a *choleh she'ein bo sakanah*, may consume it either mixed with honey or in pill form.⁷

(In response to the third reason, R' Shlomo Zalman writes: "We would absolutely not be able to say on our own that honey is not excreted from their bodies had Chazal not said so, so it is absolutely impossible to rely on experts that say about royal jelly that it is not excreted from their bodies..." Even Rav Unterman, despite citing experts characterizing it as no more a bodily excretion than honey, concedes that he does not accept this with absolute certainty and that perhaps the jelly is more of a bodily excretion than honey.)

R' Amram Edre'i notes the controversy about royal jelly and rules that it is permitted when necessary for health but should preferably be avoided otherwise.⁸ He reports that R' Mordechai Eliyahu ruled leniently.⁹

R' Shneur Zalman Revach (author of Tola'as Shani and head of *Machon Lamitzvos Hatluyos Ba'aretz*) rules:

Some permit it even for a healthy person, and some were concerned and prohibited it. The opinion of most authorities is that for therapeutic purposes it is permitted to utilize this nutrient, even for a *choleh she'ein bo sakanah* (and even a person who needs it for his male potency, for whom this substance is effective, is considered a *choleh* in this context).¹⁰

R' Yaakov Epstein, author of *Chevel Nachalaso*, after citing the *teshuvos* of Rav Waldenberg and R' Shlomo Zalman, asserts that "*lema'aseh*, the *Acharonim* rule permissively with respect to all products that emerge from honey (sic; presumably, bees), primarily because they are eaten mixed with honey and are inedible without admixture due to their taste." He accordingly concludes that it may be eaten to strengthen the body.¹¹

Rav Epstein seemingly means to be lenient even with respect to a non-*choleh*, but if so, his claim that the *Acharonim* rule permissively is quite questionable. The two that he cites directly are Rav Edre'i and Rav Revach, and while they are indeed both lenient for a *choleh*, they do not permit it to the healthy. Rav Edre'i says that one who does not need it for his health should refrain from eating it, and that one who is stringent will experience *bracha*.¹² Rav Revach, too, very clearly limits his lenient stance to a *choleh*.

⁷Shu"t Minchas Shlomo cheilek 2 (5759) siman 64. (The third section of the *siman* is a response to Rav Waldenberg and was also published in Tzitz Eliezer cheilek 12 siman 54; Rav Waldenberg there defends his position against R' Shlomo Zalman's objections.)

⁸Shu"t Ama Dabar p. 125; *Madrach Lekashrus Hamazon* pp. 122-23; *Entziklopedia Lekashrus Hamazon: mazon melachus* pp. 78-81 (and cf. *Entziklopedia Lekashrus Hamazon: mazon min ha'achai* p. 184).

⁹*Entziklopedia* ibid. p. 81.

¹⁰Tola'as Shani (Rav Revach) *keresh* 6 se'if 32 p. 80.

¹¹*Chevel Nachalaso* 11:28.

¹²*Madrach Lekashrus Hamazon* ibid.

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Halachos, Nidah ibid.).

Some have suggested that there is danger only if the foods are cooked (see Shu"t Bais Shlomo Y.D. 1:189). But this distinction is not widely accepted by the *poskim* (ibid.; see also Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:20, who doesn't mention the leniency).

Many later *poskim* write that there is no *sakanah* if the egg was left mixed with another ingredient (Bais Shlomo ibid.). R' Moshe Sternbuch (*Teshuvos Vehanhagos* 3:256) cites views that this works even with an admixture of only 2%, but he expresses reservations where there is too little of it to be noticed or if it is invisible, like salt or sugar. In another *teshuvah* (4:186) he notes that in Shabbos meals one may be lenient because of the rule that (Kohelles 8:5) "*shomer mitzvah lo yeida davar ra* (he who obeys a mitzvah will know no evil)."

The Gemara says that if the hairy root of the onion or garlic or a bit of eggshell remained attached, there is no danger.



The policies of the larger kashrus organizations in the U.S. generally treat royal jelly as *asur*, including the Star-K,¹³ OU Kosher,¹⁴ and the Chicago Rabbinical Council (CRC).¹⁵ It is important to note that even the numerous authorities from Eretz Yisrael (including R' Shlomo Zalman) who permit royal jelly to *cholim* seem to do so by taking at face value the claims of those who promote its health benefits. But as already pointed out by R' Nosson Nota Shore (*rav* of Bnei Avraham in Virginia, Minnesota)¹⁶ and Rav Brizel¹⁷ in 5719, those claims are not well founded. (Some governmental bodies, including the European Food Safety Authority in 2011,¹⁸ have concluded that evidence does not support the health claims.) A discussion of the standards of evidence required by halacha to override an *issur* for a *choleh* is beyond the scope of this article.¹⁹

¹³R' David Heber, Do Bee Don't Bee: A Halachic Guide to Honey and Bee Products, *Kashrus Kurrents* Fall 2010 (824).

¹⁴OU Kosher staff, Halachos of the Hive, and cf. here and here.

¹⁵Royal Jelly, Chicago Rabbinical Council.

¹⁶Hama'or ibid. *chovress* 4 (90) Shvat 5719 p. 33.

¹⁷Chukas Yisrael perek 7.

¹⁸Wikipedia ibid.

¹⁹See Shu"t Sheivet Halevi cheilek 5 siman 55 and our article Quack Attack: Folk Medicine or Fake Medicine? Jan. 25, 2024.

⁵Chukas Yisre'eli (Rav Brizel 5719) cheilek sh'eini kuntres 1.

⁶Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer cheilek 11 siman 59.

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nodding in assent or otherwise validating the report.² Rabeinu ai Teshuvah cites of *chanufah*,³

including praising a *rasha*, even for the mitzvos he performs. (R' Moshe Feinstein says this means praising him more than he deserves, and that even excessive praise may only be a bad *midah* rather than a true *issur*, so in case of great need, one

may, for example, have a *rasha* perform *psichah* in shul.) R' Chaim Kanievsky also permits praising a nonobservant Jew more than he deserves in order to encourage him to perform more mitzvos.

pasuk; it would seem he holds they are *asur mideRabanan*.

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