

Honey “Devash” study

By Yochanan Zaqantov

Is the Honey in the Tanakh just date honey or bee honey? Is it any sweet liquid regardless of the source? Are Live Bees unclean and thus Honey from them unclean? These are some of the questions we will explore as we look into the word in Hebrew known as Devash.

Honey 1706 masculine noun devash (Dalet-vet-shin) as found in the Brown driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon (BDB) on page 185 and in the New Englishmen’s Hebrew Concordance (NEHC) on page 334.

Bereshit/Genesis 43:11

11 Yisrael their father said to them: If it must be so, then, do this: Take some of the produce of the land in your vessels and bring them down to the man as a gift: a little balsam, a little **honey (Devash דֶּבֶשׁ)**, balm and ladanum, pistachio nuts and almonds.

Here we see honey/devash used as a gift but there is not indication whether it is bee honey or date honey.

Shemot/Exodus 16:31

31 Now the House of Israel called its name: Mahn. -It is like coriander seed, whitish, and its taste is like (that of) a wafer **with honey (bid’vash בִּדְבַשׁ)**.-

Here it talks of Manna being like wafers in Honey.

Vayikra/Leviticus 2:11

11 Every grain-gift that you bring-near to YHVH, it is not to be made leavened, for any fermentation **and any honey (v’kol-devash וְכֹל־דֶּבֶשׁ)** you may not turn (any) of it into smoke as a fire-offering to YHVH;

Here Honey is not to be used any offering. It still does not indicate what type of Honey but indicates instead there are various types.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 8:7-9

7 When YHVH Eloheykha brings you into a good land, a land of streams of water, springs and Ocean-flows, issuing from valleys and hills; 8 a land of wheat and barley, (fruit of the) vine, fig, and pomegranate, a land of olives, oil **and honey (udevash**

וְדִבְשׁ), 9 -a land in which you will never eat bread in poverty, you will not lack for anything in it- a land whose stones are iron, and from whose hills you may hew copper:

Here in a list of agricultural products that are produced in Yisrael and Honey is listed. This could be referring to Date Honey but it could be referring to any Honey.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 32:13 (13-14)

13 He had them mount on the high-places of the land, he fed them the crops of the field;

he suckled them with honey from a boulder (vayeniqehu devash missela וַיִּנְקֵהוּ

דִּבְשׁ מִסֵּלַע), with oil from a flinty rock; 14 on curds of cattle and milk of sheep, along with the milk of lambs and rams, of the young of Bashan and he-goats, along with the kidney fat of wheat, and blood of grapes, you drank fermented (wine).

Literally says, “And suckled honey from rock” and though this is a song and it may not be literal. We know that Honey from date would not be stored in a rock.

Shofetim/Judges 13:6-7 and 14:8, 9

13:6 The woman went and told her husband, “A man of Elohim came to me; he looked like an angel of Elohim, very frightening. I did not ask him where he was from, nor did he tell me his name. 7 He said to me, ‘You are going to conceive and bear a son. Drink no wine or other intoxicant, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy is to be a nazirite to Elohim from the womb to the day of his death!’

Number 6 – a Nazirite must not become unclean.

14:8 Returning the following year to marry her, he turned aside to look at the remains of the lion; **and in the lion’s skeleton he found a swarm of bees, and honey (edat**

עֵדַת דְּבוּרִים בְּגִיַת הָאֲרִיָּה וְדִבְשׁ).

9 He scooped it into his palms and ate it as he went along. When he rejoined his father and mother, he gave them some and they ate it; but he did not tell them that he had

scooped **the honey (hadevash הַדִּבְשׁ)** out of a lion’s skeleton.

What was left of the carcass was the bones after a year. Normally a carcass of a pad foot animal would be unclean. Yet, no mention is made of him doing this. Was he still under the Nazirite requirements? Was the honey unclean? It does not say. Yet we know they ate it so it was a practice of the people was to eat bee honey.

Shemuel Aleph/I Samuel 14:25-27

25 Everybody came to **flowing comb** (ba'u baya'ur בָּאוּ בַּיַעַר) where some **honey** (devash דְּבַשׁ) had spilled on the ground. 26 When the troops came to the flowing comb (el-haya'ar אֶל-הַיַּעַר) and found the flow of honey (devash דְּבַשׁ) there, no one put his hand to his mouth, for the troops feared the oath. 27 Jonathan, however, had not heard his father adjure the troops. So he put out the stick he had with him, **dipped it into the flowing comb of honey** (vayit'bol otah beya'rat hadevash וַיִּטְבֹּל אוֹתָהּ בַּיַּעַר הַדְּבַשׁ), and brought his hand back to his mouth; and his eyes lit up.

Here Yonatan dips his staff into the tree where the honey was dripping to the ground.. He dips it into the ya'arah (forest/tree). The JPS uses Beehive yet the word that Ya'arah is derived from is forest or woods - ya'ar – which is the masculine form of the word and ya'arah is the feminine form. The assumption is made that honey dripping out of a tree would be from a beehive (Honeycomb).

Shemuel Bet/2 Samuel 17:29

27 When David reached Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbath-ammon, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim 28 presented couches, basins, and earthenware; also wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans, lentils, parched grain, 29 **honey** (udevash וּדְבַשׁ), curds, a flock, and cheese from the herd for David and the troops with him to eat. For they knew that the troops must have grown hungry, faint, and thirsty in the wilderness.

One of the supplies is honey yet no mention of what type.

Melekhim Aleph/I Kings 14:1-3

1 At that time, Abijah, a son of Jeroboam, fell sick. 2 Jeroboam said to his wife, “Go and disguise yourself, so that you will not be recognized as Jeroboam’s wife, and go to Shiloh. The prophet Ahijah lives there, the one who predicted that I would be king over this people. 3 Take with you ten loaves, some wafers, and a jug of **honey** (devash דְּבַשׁ), and go to him; he will tell you what will happen to the boy.”

Honey is brought in a jug but no mention of what type.

Divrei HaYamim Bet/2 Chronicles 31:5

4 He ordered the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to deliver the portions of the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the Teaching of Yehovah.
5 When the word spread, the Israelites brought large quantities of grain, wine, oil, **honey**

(**udevash** וּדְבַשׁ), and all kinds of agricultural produce, and tithes of all, in large amounts.

Here honey is listed as an agricultural product. This is another reference which could very well point to date honey also.

Tehillim/Psalms 19:10-11 (11-12)

10 The fear of Yehovah is pure, abiding forever; the judgments of Yehovah are true, righteous altogether, 11 more desirable than gold, than much fine gold; sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb.

Here we have honey used again but this time the linkage is with the comb. The honeycomb is a clear reference to honey from a beehive.

Tehillim/Psalms 81:16 (17)

17 He fed them the finest wheat; I sated you with **honey** (**devash** דְּבַשׁ) from the rock.

From the rock, is honey used literally here.

Mishlei/Proverbs 16:24

24 Pleasant words are like a **honeycomb** (**tzuf-devash** צוּף־דְּבַשׁ), Sweet to the palate and a cure for the body.

Flowing with Honey are pleasant words and those word are a healing to the body.

Mishlei/Proverbs 24:13

13 My son, eat **honey** (**devash** דְּבַשׁ), for it is good; Let its sweet drops be on your palate.

Literally says: Eat, sons honey for good and comb is sweet on your mouth. Here honey is mentioned that honey is good for you. Also this is a reference again to the comb so this is referring to bee honey.

Mishlei/Proverbs 25:16, 27

16 If you find **honey (devash דִּבְשׁ)**, eat only what you need, Lest, surfeiting yourself, you throw it up.

Literally says: Honey have you found? Eat your fill less you be full and vomit it out. More likely it is satisfied beyond ones limits so that you get sick.

Yeshayahu/Isaiah 7:14-16

14 Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel. 15 (By the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good, people will be feeding on curds **and honey (udevash וּדְבַשׁ)**.) 16 For before the lad knows to reject the bad and choose the good, the ground whose two kings you dread shall be abandoned.

The time a person learns to reject bad and choose good is twenty years of age. (Bamidbar/Numbers 14:29, 32:11) The people will be eating curds and honey.

Yermiyahu/Jeremiah 41:8

8 But there were ten men among them who said to Ishmael, “Don’t kill us! We have stores hidden in a field—wheat, barley, oil, **and honey (udevash וּדְבַשׁ)**.” So he stopped, and did not kill them along with their fellows.

It is not clear what devash it was.

Yechez’qel/Ezekiel 3:3

3 as He said to me, “Mortal, feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll that I give you.” I ate it, and it tasted as sweet **as honey (kid’vash כִּידְבַשׁ)** to me.

If tasted like honey must mean he knew the taste of it.

Yechez’qel/Ezekiel 16:13, 19

13 You adorned yourself with gold and silver, and your apparel was of fine linen, silk, and embroidery. Your food was choice flour, **honey (udevash וּדְבַשׁ)**, and oil. You grew more and more beautiful, and became fit for royalty.

Here we see in a figurative sense the woman is not only eating honey but wearing silk from a silk worm. Meshiy is the word for silk here which is from Mashah or to draw out.

19 The food that I had given you—the choice flour, the oil, and the honey, which I had provided for you to eat—you set it before them for a pleasing odor. And so it went—declares Yehovah Elohim.

Yechez'qel/Ezekiel 27:17

17 Judah and the land of Israel were your merchants; they trafficked with you in wheat of Minnith and Pannag, **honey (udevash וּדְבַשׁ)**, oil, and balm.

Judah and Israel were merchants in Honey.

Honeycomb 5317 Feminine noun nofet (Nun-Fey-Tav) 833 NEHC, 601b BDB. Nofet is most likely dripping like from a honeycomb.

Tehillim/Psalms 19:10-11 (11-12)

10 The fear of Yehovah is pure, abiding forever; the judgments of Yehovah are true, righteous altogether, 11 more desirable than gold, than much fine gold; **sweeter than honey, than drippings of the comb (midevash v'nofet tzufim**

מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת צֹפִים).

Literally translated, From honey and dripping overflowing. A figurative sense but one the Yisraelim would have had to understand.

Mishlei/Proverbs 5:3

3 For the lips of a forbidden woman **drip honey (nofet titof'na נֹפֶת תִּטּוֹף־נָחַל)**; Her mouth is smoother than oil;

For dripping overflowing (honey implied) the lips of strange woman and smoother oil her mouth.

We have seen many references to devash and while we see devash associated with the honeycomb (nofet). Yet the word for date associated with honey does not directly appear in the Tanakh. The word for date is Tamar.

Tamar (Tav-Mem-Resh) Reference number 8558 pg. 1351 NEHC and page 1071 in the BDB. It is a masculine noun.

Shemot/Exodus 15:27

27 They came to Elim; there were twelve springs of water and seventy **palms (tamarim תַּמְרִים)**, and they camped there by the water.

The Palm tree referred to here is the date palm. Date Palm - (TAMAR) תַּמְרַר
Phoenix dactylifera Linnaeus. You can see a picture of it on
<http://www.tau.ac.il/lifesci/botany/judaism.htm>

It is suggested that in the cases where honey is referred to as a product of the land that what is referred to is date honey (devash). If devash can refer to both date as well as bee honey then the meaning of devash would be more in line with any sweet syrup which would also include today syrups that they would have not known about like corn syrup or maple syrup.

Other places where we see tamar used are:

Vayiqra/Leviticus 23:40

40 You are to take yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of **palms (tamarim תַּמְרִים)**, and boughs of thick tree-foliage, and willows of the brook. And you are to rejoice before the presence of YHVH Eloheykhem for seven days,

The branches of dates were to be used for our sukkot.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 34:3

3 the Negeb; and the Plain—the Valley of Jericho, the city of **palm trees (hatamarim הַתַּמְרִים)**—as far as Zoar.

Valley Jericho is called the city of date trees.

Shofetim/judges 1:16

16 The descendants of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, went up with the Judites from the City of **Palms (hatamarim הַתַּמְרִים)** to the wilderness of Judah; and they went and settled among the people in the Negeb of Arad.

Here we see a similar reference to a city of date trees could this also be the Valley of Jericho.

Divrei HaYamim Bet/ 2 Chronicles 28:15

15 Then the men named above proceeded to take the captives in hand, and with the booty they clothed all the naked among them—they clothed them and shod them and gave them to eat and drink and anointed them and provided donkeys for all who were failing and

brought them to Jericho, the city of **palms (hatamarim הַתְּמָרִים)**, back to their kinsmen. Then they returned to Samaria.

Nehem'yah/Nehemia 8:15

15 and that they must announce and proclaim throughout all their towns and Jerusalem as follows, “Go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles, **palms (tamarim תְּמָרִים)** and [other] leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.”

Again a reference to using branches of the date palm as sukkah materials.

Tehillim/Psalms 92:12(13)

13 The righteous bloom **like a date-palm (katamar כַּתְּמָר)**; they thrive like a cedar in Lebanon;

Here we see the metaphoric usage of the righteous blooming like a date palm.

In the Tanakh there is no direct linkage to tamar and devash.

Tomar which is reference 8560 and a masculine noun is from 8558. It more references the tree.

Shofetim/Judges 4:5

5 She used to sit under the **Palm (tomar תְּמָר)** of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would come to her for decisions.

Yisraelim came to Shofet Devorah for her decisions under the date tree of Devorah.

We also see timorah which is also date palms. It is reference 8561 from 8558. It is a feminine noun.

Melekhim Aleph/I Kings 6: 29, 32, 35

29 All over the walls of the House, of both the inner area and the outer area, he carved reliefs of cherubim, **palms** (v'timorot **וְתַמְרוֹת**), and calyxes,

32 The double doors were of olive wood, and on them he carved reliefs of cherubim, **palms** (v'timorot **וְתַמְרוֹת**), and calyxes. He overlaid them with gold, hammering the gold onto the cherubim and **the palms** (**הַתַּמְרוֹת** **hatimorot**).

35 On them he carved cherubim, **palms** (v'timorot **וְתַמְרוֹת**), and calyxes, overlaying them with gold applied evenly over the carvings.

Here we have them as decoration of the temple which was built by Melekh Shlomoh/ King Solomon.

Yechez'qel/Ezekiel 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37

16 The recesses—and their supports—had windows with frames on the interior of the gate complex on both sides, and the interiors of the vestibules also had windows on both sides; and the supports were adorned with **palms** (**תַּמְרוֹת** **timorim**).

22 Its windows and [those of] its vestibule, as also **its palm trees** (v'timorayv **וְתַמְרוֹ**), corresponded to those of the gate that faced east. [From the outside] one had to climb 7 steps to reach it, and its vestibule was ahead of them.

26 Its staircase consisted of 7 steps; its vestibule was ahead of them, and its supports were decorated on both sides with **palm trees** (**תַּמְרוֹת** **timorim**).

31 Its vestibule, however, gave on the outer court. Its supports were adorned on either side with **palms** (**תַּמְרוֹת** **timorim**), and its staircase consisted of 8 steps.

34 and its vestibule gave on the outer court. Its supports were decorated on both sides with **palm trees** (**תַּמְרוֹת** **timorim**), and its staircase consisted of 8 steps.

37 Its supports gave on the outer court; its supports were decorated on both sides with **palm trees** (**תַּמְרוֹת** **timorim**); and its staircase consisted of eight steps.

These are referencing the adornment of the temple seen in a vision of Yechez'qel. If you look at the rest of the references for this word it seems to be exclusive of those decorations of date palms. Other references are Yechez'qel 41:18-26 and Divrei HaYamin Bet 3:5.

Through all of these we see that while tamar and devash are only alluded to in the Tanakh and stated in literature outside of the Tanakh that we can clearly see that bee honey was also used by the Yisraelim. Thus, the produce of the field processed by Bees does not make the honey (devash) unclean. Neither does the Bee an unclean when dead creature does not make honey/devash unclean unless dying in it.