

Bees & Honey in Jewish Sources

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The Nature of Honey - a Liminal Substance

בבא בתרא פ' א:ז' 80a:7

Abaye said: This halakha, that honey is considered neither food nor liquid, is necessary only with regard to those two combs mentioned in the mishna, which are designated for the sustenance of the **bees**

The Nature of Bees - Wild Yet Sometimes Domesticated

בבא בתרא פ' א:ד' 80a:4

The mishna teaches that one who buys the produce of a beehive takes three swarms and then the seller renders the **bees** impotent [mesares].

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Swarming:

בבא קמא קי"ד ב:ט"ו 114b:15

The Gemara explains: This is what it is saying: The halakha stated by the mishna applies even to a swarm of **bees**, which is the property of the owners via a rabbinic form of acquisition due to the fact...that one cannot effect a legal acquisition of **bees** by Torah law....It might enter your mind to say that in this case, since one acquires the swarm of **bees** only by rabbinic law, even where the owners' response is unspecified it can be assumed that they despair of recovering...the **bees**, and the finder may keep them....To counter this, the mishna teaches us that if it is known that the owners of the **bees** despaired of recovering them, yes, the finder may keep the **bees**; if they did not despair, no, he may not keep them

Smoking Bees:

משנה עוקצים ג'י"א 3:11 Mishnah Oktzin

Bet Shammai says: from the moment he begins to smoke the **bees** out. But Bet Hillel says: once he breaks up the honeycomb.