

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat Vayelech – Why is this Land Flowing with Milk and Honey?

Land of Transformative Powers

I'm forever thankful to my parents for sending me to the only Jewish school in Denmark. Even if the school was rather secular, I still learned about "the Land flowing with milk and honey." One of the first Hebrew songs I learned was "*Eretz zavat chalav, bum bum, chalav u'dvash!*" Such teachings and songs was a great part of eventually bringing me back to the land flowing with milk and honey. Baruch Hashem we receive a weekly delivery of delicious *lebana* made from fresh goat's milk by a friend who lives here in Bat Ayin, and raw honey from bee-farms nearby which we savor slowly. Milk and honey are two foods that the Torah permitted although they derive from something forbidden. Honey is produced by non-kosher bees, and milk derives from the blood of an animal, which also is prohibited. About this, the Torah teaches, "Who can produce a pure thing out of an impure? No one" (*Iyuv* 14:4). In other words, who is able to transform the impure into pure, the forbidden into permitted? There is only One who is capable of this: G-d Himself. This transformative power – the power of *teshuva* and *tikun* (rectification) illuminates especially in the land of Israel. For this reason, this land is explicitly praised with milk and honey alluding to the purifying power that resides within the Holy Land.

"The extraordinary qualities of the land of Israel and the extraordinary qualities of the Jewish people are two halves of a whole" (Rav Kook, *Orot* 1:1).

On this extraordinary land, I have experienced my own transformation from confused hippie girl, sparingly dressed, searching for truth to become devoted woman, clad in modesty, raising a family, welcoming guests, spreading Hashem's Torah and healing to women from near and far. This transformation would not have happened in any other place on earth. The same goes for the countless students from all over the world who each experience their own personal transformation specifically in this transformative land!

The Land Flowing with Supernal Divine Lights

רמי בר יחזקאל איקלע לבני ברק חזנהו להנהו עיזי דקאכלן תותי תאיני וקנטיף דובשא מתאיני וחלבא טייף מנייהו ומיערב בהדי הדדי אמר היינו זבת חלב ודבש (תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות דף קיא/ב).

Rami bar *Yechezkiel* once paid a visit to B'ne-B'rak where he saw goats grazing under fig-trees while honey was flowing from the figs, milk ran from them, and these mingled with each other. "This is indeed," he remarked, "[a land] flowing with milk and honey" (*Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot* 11b).

The "land flowing with milk and honey" is an expression of the fertility of the Promised Land. The keyword in the verse is "flowing." Fruit trees grow in many different terrains, but their produce only overflow with nectar when the land is especially fertile, and when the trees are particularly well nourished. Similarly, livestock survives in many habitats, but only overflow with milk when they live in particularly fertile pastures. Milk symbolizes superior quality, richness of taste, and nourishment.

Honey represents sweetness. The goodness of the land of Israel is both nourishing and pleasant. Yet, there is an even deeper explanation for “the land flowing with milk and honey” – it is the land flowing with supernal Divine lights. Milk corresponds to the light of *Chesed*, while honey corresponds to the light of *Gevurah* (Ramchal, *Devarim*). In this land, we may learn to balance these opposite energies. The land of Israel is flowing with the holiness of her lights. It is for the sake of these lights that Hashem desired to bring us here to share His holiness with us on His personal chosen plot. The supernal lights spiraled down through many casings until they finally manifested as “the land flowing with milk and honey.” When we eat from the fruits of the land with humility and proper intention before our Creator, breaking our lusts with great awe-consciousness that we are sitting at Hashem’s table, we then merit to illuminate the lights from which these fruits emanated. These lights are encased in many layers of physical garments. Therefore, if we eat in a gluttonous way without holiness, forgetting that the fruits emanate from upper lights, then we partake from the shells that covers these lights. However, when eating in purity and holiness, surely it is possible to be blessed with endless supernal lights through the fruits of the land of Israel (*B’er Mayim Chaim, Shemot 3*).

Health Benefits of Combining Milk with Honey

Not only does the “land flowing with milk and honey” allude to its spiritual features, the winning combination of milk and honey actually has physical health benefits as well. As research on honey indicates, it acts as a carrier that transports the nutrients from food throughout the body. Honey especially facilitates the body’s assimilation of calcium, of which milk is a rich source. Therefore, consuming milk together with honey not only gives our body the necessary nutrient (calcium) to **benefit our bone health**, but moreover ensures its maximum absorption into our body. Honey has long been known as a source of prebiotics, (*J. Agric. Food Chem.*, 2005, 53 (8), pp 2914–2921). These are nutrients that stimulate the growth and development of probiotics – beneficial bacteria for our intestines and **digestive system**. Prebiotics have demonstrated a stimulatory effect on bifido-bacteria, a type of probiotic found in milk. The carbohydrates and oligosaccharides in honey promote the proper function of these beneficial bacteria that are essential for the healthy maintenance and function of the GI tract ([Journal of Food Protection®](#), Number 1, January 2002, pp. 5-237). When the bacterial balance in the digestive tract is good, it eliminates a number of irritating conditions, including constipation, cramps and bloating. It also prevents the development of detrimental bacterial growth! Milk and honey have traditionally been used as remedies for **insomnia** (<http://www.psy-journal.com/article/S0165-1781%2802%2900010-0/abstract>). Their effect on sleeplessness is strengthened when taken together. Honey is one of the rare sugary foods that causes a controlled increase in the amount of insulin being secreted, which also promotes the release of tryptophan into the brain that converts into serotonin, inducing a feeling of relaxation.

Furthermore, serotonin is commonly converted to melatonin, a well-researched sleep aid. Both honey and milk possess antimicrobial and **cleansing properties**, which are enhanced when combined. Numerous cleansers are prepared using milk and honey, because this mixture gives the skin a healthy glow. One can also enjoy a milk and honey bath, by mixing them in equal quantities in the water. This combination is often used in popular spas throughout the world. A glass of milk with honey every morning is known to improve a person’s **stamina**. While milk contains proteins, honey contains the necessary carbohydrates required for effective stimulus of the metabolism. Milk and honey provide a

boost in strength to everyone, including children and the elderly. The combination of milk and honey impacts not only the skin, but also the rest of the body, by making it agile and youthful. People from many ancient civilizations, including the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Indians, drank milk with honey to preserve their youth. The many antioxidant properties produced through the mixture of milk and honey is the source of their **anti-aging properties** that alleviate skin degradation, wrinkles, blotches, and general failing health of the skin. Since milk and honey can help to ensure long life, the combination was known as “the elixir of life.” The benefits of honey and milk on the human body are so enormous that the phrase “land of milk and honey” commonly refers to ‘a place which has plenty’ the world over (<https://www.organicfacts.net/health-benefits/animal-product/health-benefits-of-honey-and-milk.html>).

However, no other place can truly be called, “the land flowing with milk and honey” except the land of Israel. The Torah emphasizes this by repeating this phrase in reference to the Holy Land twenty times. Someone once told Rav Kook, “God willing, we will move to the land of Israel.” Rav Kook replied, “God is certainly willing. What counts is that you be willing” (*Shivchei Harayah*, p. 208).