Honey: A cure for mankind?



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Honey, a sweet liquid made by honey bees from the nectar of flowers, is highly regarded by many as a pure and nutritious food. Among Muslims, it has a special significance as the Holy Quran denotes it as a cure for mankind. It states in chapter 16 (Surah al-Nahl, the Chapter of the Bee), verses 69-70:

"And thy Lord has inspired the bee, saying, 'Make thou houses in the hills and in the trees and in the trellises which they build. Then eat of every kind of fruit, and follow the ways of thy Lord that have been made easy for thee.' There comes forth from their bellies a drink of varying hues. Therein is cure for men. Surely, in that is a Sign for a people who reflect."

Previous religious scriptures have also mentioned honey. Prophet Solomon[as] is reported to have said:

"My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off." (*Old Testament*, Proverbs 24:13-14)

It is for this reason that many Jews believe that eating honey can lead to mental keenness. Prophet Jesus[as] is reported to have eaten fish with honey comb along with his disciples when he appeared before them after surviving the crucifixion:

"While they were still in disbelief because of their joy and amazement, He asked them, 'Do you have anything here to eat?' So they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honey comb, and He took it and ate it in front of them. (Luke 24:42)

Honey is 80% sugar, so it has high energising properties, and along with fish which provides protein, Jesus[as] had all the necessary food to recover after his ordeal.

Honey has had a role in healing and medicine for mankind throughout the ages as the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Muslims used honey for curing various ailments and also as a curative salve to cure infections, heal wounds and better digestion.

At the time of the Holy Prophet[sa], honey was used to cure diarrhea.

Hazrat Abu Saeed al-Khudri[ra] narrated, "A man came to the Messenger[sa] and said, 'My brother has pain in his stomach', so the Messenger[sa] said, 'Give him honey to drink.' The man came back and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! It only increased his illness!' So the Messenger[sa] said, 'Give him honey to drink.' The man came back and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! It only increased his illness!' The Messenger of Allah[sa] said 'Allah spoke the truth and your brother's belly has lied. Go and give him honey to drink.' He went and gave him honey and was cured." (*Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim*)

The Holy Quran has used the word *shifa* (cure) for the holy book itself and for honey only. This is why the Holy Prophet[sa] has also stated:

"Make use of the two cures: Honey and the Quran" (*Sunan Ibn Majah*)

In Europe, the use of honey was prevalent as a healing agent. It had a great role in saving many soldiers from infected wounds in World War I as poultices of honey were used to heal wounds after battle. However, after the discovery of antibiotics, and their miraculous effects in World War II, the use of honey as a cure declined and it was virtually forgotten as a cure in modern medicine.

A few decades ago, after the rise of antibiotic resistance, where bacteria no longer respond to antibiotics, there was a renewed interest in honey. This was mainly led by research performed in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, which found that honey had a very strong antimicrobial effect and bacteria were unable to develop resistance to it. Further research showed that honey could kill bacteria through multiple pathways, so developing bacterial resistance was very unlikely.

Honey was also found to improve healing through modulating the repair mechanism and the inflammatory and immune response of the body. These findings proved the usefulness of honey as a powerful antimicrobial agent and a repair agent of wounds, and it started being used in hospitals to cure non-healing infected wounds and for burn victims for quicker recovery.

However, it must be noted that the anti-microbial effect of honey is limited to its application topically, and no evidence exists that it can treat systematic infections. These days, Manuka honey, which comes from New Zealand prepared by honeybees from the nectar of the Manuka tree, is used as a medical grade honey. While Manuka honey has shown to possess the highest anti-microbial effect of all tested honeys, there is no evidence yet that suggests that Manuka honey is better than other honeys for other health conditions.

Recent research has now shown that honey can be useful for a childhood cough being comparable to standard cough medicine. Honey can heal burns, cure specific eye infections, sore throat, improve ulcers in the mouth and might also help treat diarrhea if used as an oral rehydration. There is only weak evidence that honey might be protective against stomach ulcers and seasonal allergies. This is the sum total of the curative work of honey discovered by modern science.

The big question remains: Is honey the cure for mankind as described by the Holy Quran? Unfortunately, till now, honey has found no role in treating the major chronic diseases of modern times like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, obesity, gout, cancer, arthritis etc. Though this has not stopped people from consuming honey in the hope of a cure, in our knowledge, there are no published cases of cures using honey for any of these major diseases in the scientific literature.

While there are numerous studies performed in animals, which show a promising potential of honey for a vast variety of disease models, however there

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Engagements of Sri Lanka Jamaat



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Seeratun Nabi celebrations were held in Colombo on 14 December 2019 at Bait-ul-Hamd and was organised by the Colombo chapter of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya Sri Lanka.

Nasir Ahmad Sahib, National President of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya Sri Lanka; Nizam Khan Sahib, National Vice President; Mushthaq Ahmad Sahib, Missionary-in-Charge and MA Anis Ahmad Sahib, Sadr Colombo Jamaat addressed the event.

An introductory speech about the Sinhala Translation of the book, *Life of Muhammad* written in Urdu by Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmud Ahmad, may Allah be pleased with him, was the main feature of the event.

81 books were handed out among the members and a total of 228 members participated.

Ansar Ijtema

Majlis Ansarullah Sri Lanka held their Ijtema on 24 November 2019 at the Ahmadiyya Jubilee Hall, Negombo, Sri Lanka. The event started with Tahajud prayer and the opening session started at 9am with flag hoisting, followed by the Ansarullah pledge being read out by Shafiullah Sahib, Sadr Majlis Ansarullah, Sri Lanka and repeated by all members present.

Nasir Ahmad Sahib, National President of Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya Sri Lanka and Musthaq Ahmad, Missionary-in-Charge and others addressed the event.

A leading newspaper, *Veerakesar* covered the event and published a story.

Tabligh Seminar

A tabligh seminar was organised by Negombo Jamaat on 15 December 2019 at the Ahmadiyya Jubilee Hall. The subject was "Islamic purdah: Its significance and the Islamic concept of Jihad".

A question and answer session was also part of the event in which a large number of Ansar and Khuddam attended.



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are questions about the direct relevance of animal results in humans and many of these mechanistic findings need replication and translation in human trials. Lack of relevant research is one problem but there is another fundamental reason why honey in its current form is lacking in its promised potential as a "cure for mankind".

The main issue in the field of honey research is that serious consideration has not been taken that the Holy Quran guides towards. The Holy Quran makes three specific points about honey, which should be considered, and only when we follow them, can we find true cures in honey.

Firstly, the Holy Quran states "There comes forth from their bellies a drink of varying hues" i.e. it is of different colours. The major determinant of honey colour is its floral origin, which means the flower nectar honeybees use to make the honey. Honeys that are predominantly from one flower are known by that floral origin. Acacia honey is light and sweet, while Manuka honey is dark and less palatable in taste. There are more than 40 different floral honeys sold across Europe e.g. Manuka, Acacia, Tupelo, Clover, Thyme, Lavendar, Rosemary, Lotus, Citrus, Pine, Thyme, Alfalfa, Borage, Buckwheat etc. People in some European countries like Germany and Italy prefer these types of "monofloral" honeys, while the majority of honey sold in the UK, USA and Canada is usually blended at origin (polyfloral) or by honey packers.

This point was raised by Hazrat Khalifatul Masih I[ra] who, when explaining this verse, said:

"Of varying hues": The Arabs have found 400 types of honey because in the Arabic language, there are 400 different names for it. (*Badr*, 10 February 1910)

What the Holy Quran is telling us is that the research on honey must be performed on each unique floral honey to find its properties and health effects. A blended honey from the supermarket shelf might have some general beneficial properties but its specific effects would have been diluted by the blend. Manuka honey is a prime example of a success story of research on a single flower honey.

The late Dr Peter Molan, a research scientist in New Zealand found that Manuka honey had antibacterial effects and after long and arduous research spanning two decades, he showed that its effects were very specific for killing bacteria without any resistance. This honey was then chosen for use in hospitals as a medical grade honey and the production of Manuka honey is a billion-dollar industry for New Zealand. Research on other unifloral honeys is severely lacking and there are thousands of honeys from different flowers whose potential is yet to be discovered.

Hazrat Musleh-e-Maud, Khalifatul Masih II[ra] emphasised this point during Jalsa Salana Rabwah on 28 December 1955. He said:

"Different types of honey are cures for different diseases. This is why the Holy Quran does not only say that within honey is cure but it also says 'in that is a Sign for a people who reflect', meaning He has given the clue, now it is our task to undertake the research. If we ponder over it, we will find that different coloured honeys are cures for different diseases." (*Sair-e-Ruhani*, Vol. 9, pp. 8-9)

Secondly, the Holy Quran states, "Therein is cure for men", where the word *fihi* or "therein" denotes honey or the colours of honey. When we focus on what is inside honey and the properties in honey that determine its colours, a new vast world opens for research.

The latest review on honey published in 2018 by De-Melo et al from Spain states:

"Pigments are responsible for the color of honey. The most important are polyphenols, carotenoids, xanthopylls and anthocyanins that can be grouped in water soluble and lipid soluble pigments. Other compounds that can contribute to honey color are sugars, minerals and amino acids." (*Journal of Apicultural Research*, 2018)

Many of these pigment compounds are plant derived with some contribution by the honeybee. The second most important compounds that determine colour are sugars in honey. In fact, sugars are the largest component, with 80% of honey comprising of only sugars, while pigment compounds comprise of only about 1%. Honey is a complex sugar solution with 80-85% sugars comprising of regular sugars like fructose and glucose, while around 15% of sugars in honey are rare sugars. These rare sugars make honey unique as no other natural foods offer a large percentage of rare sugars. Rare sugars are types of sugars that are present in limited quantities in nature and thus, are difficult to study. There has been a recent interest in rare sugars as they can provide alternative to regular sugar without the harmful effects. In addition, these rare sugars have shown to have beneficial effects, separating them from other regular sugars. These benefits include fewer calories, lower glucose response than glucose, no harmful effect on teeth, improvement of sugar digestion and metabolism, lower adiposity by improving the body's ability to oxidise lipids, stimulate gut hormones, being beneficial for gut bacteria and immune modulatory effects.

Rare sugars now present a promising new avenue of research on honey. Several dozen rare sugars have been identified in honey, and except for a few which are characterised, very little is known about the vast majority of rare sugars in honey and their metabolic and health benefits.

The Promised Messiah[as], more than a century ago, highlighted the difference between normal sugar and honey by stating:

"Honey is made by the revelation of God and therefore, it should not be like other sugary things at all. If it (honey) were like these then all sugary things would have been called 'cure for mankind' but this (phrase) has only been reserved for honey. Thus, this property of honey is the proof of its benefit and because it is prepared according to revelation, the bee must only take beneficial substances when it sucks the nectar from flowers" (*Badr*, Vol. 3, pp. 44-45 [1904])

Finally, the Holy Quran states, "Surely, in that is a Sign for a people who reflect." It behoves Muslims to reflect and research on this topic. Alas, very few Ahmadi Muslims are working in this field. Hazrat Khalifatul Masih IV[rh] once lamented this fact and in a Friday Sermon on honey, said:

"I am hopeful that [Ahmadis] will ponder over this grand design [of honey] and benefit from it. And as I had mentioned once before also, they will perform experimental studies on them because there are many types of honey, of different times, with various effects, of various colour – all this is hinted at in the Holy Quran, but detailed studies are desperately needed. I hope that *Insha-Allah* Ahmadi researchers will focus on honey and perform very detailed studies on them. Do not leave this research to non-Muslims. It is a strange injustice that the teaching is given by the Holy Quran and those acting on it are non-Muslims." (Friday Sermon, 31 March 2000)

Hazrat Khalifatul Masih V[aa] has also urged Ahmadi Muslims to go into this area of research when discussing honeybees:

"Ahmadis should go into [honeybee and honey] research. As the system of revelation is linked with the honey bee, therefore Allah will help those [researchers] who are specially linked with the oneness [of God] and revelation" (Friday Sermon, 19 December 2008)

Young Ahmadis who read this article should consider going into this area of research. By following the guidance of the Holy Quran, they can discover new undiscovered secrets about honey and their research will benefit mankind and provide further evidence of the existence of God. *Insha-Allah*.

