

Separating Tithes from Fruits & Vegetables

Background

Any produce grown in the Land of Israel may not be eaten until tithes have been separated. Although many stores and restaurants separate tithes as a standard practice, one should verify this at the time of purchase. These laws apply even to Israeli-grown produce that is exported to the Diaspora -- e.g. Jaffa oranges, Carmel tomatoes, pomelos, olives and bell peppers.

For the home gardener, there is a unique opportunity to do this special mitzvah. It is best to separate tithes right after harvest, so that no one mistakenly eats untithed produce.

Vocabulary

- **Tevel** - untithed produce; forbidden to eat
- **Terumah Gedolah** - "The Big Donation"; for the Kohen to eat in a state of ritual purity
- **Ma'aser Rishon** - "First Tenth"; for the Levi
- **Terumat Ma'aser** - "Donation from the Tenth"; what the Levi gives to the Kohen
- **Ma'aser Sheni** - "Second Tenth" (for the owner to use in Jerusalem; given on the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th years of the Shmita cycle)
- **Ma'aser Ani** - "Tenth for the Poor"; given on the 3rd and 6th year of the Shmita cycle

The Coin

In order to redeem the various tithes, one should ideally have a coin called a "Pruta Chamura." (This coin has Torah-level produce already redeemed onto it.) Someone who has such a coin, and knows how to separate tithes, can take Terumah and Maaser from untithed produce. One who does not have such a coin should consult a rabbi for help.

In Israel, various organizations will sell you a "Pruta Chamura" coin, which is usually a 10-shekel coin. This can be used to redeem the tithes many times; when the coin is "full," you make a verbal declaration to "redeem" the 10-shekel coin onto another 10-shekel coin. The first coin can then be treated as non-holy, and future tithes will be redeemed onto the second coin.

The Pruta Chamura coin should be put in a very safe place (e.g. in an upper kitchen cabinet that is rarely used), because the coin must not be used for any mundane purposes.

On erev Pesach, in the 4th and 7th year of the Shmita cycle, the coin that's been used to redeem tithes must be destroyed. The procedure is to take your 10-shekel coin and redeem it onto a 5-agarot coin. The 5-agarot coin is then hammered down until it is useless, and then buried. You will then need to obtain a new Pruta Chamura.

Preparing for the Separation

Place all the fruits together. If there are several kinds, each kind can be in its own pile.

Take a little more than 1% of each species. Place it in a plastic bag, which should be touching the pile.

Ideally, the quantity of each tithe is calculated by weight, but it is valid if done through volume or number.

The actual tithing is achieved by verbally declaring the status of a portion of the produce. The tithing can be an actual separation of quantities, or it can simply be a designation that a specified section of the pile has a particular status.

More than one kind of produce can be separated at the same time with one declaration.

It is important to know where is north or south for the declarations. An easy way to tell is to face the direction where the sun rises in the morning. Your right hand will be south and your left hand will be north.

Separating the Tithes

Because eating untithed produce is a serious prohibition, many separate tithes out of doubt. In such a case the blessing is **not** said.

If one knows that the produce has absolutely not been tithed (e.g. it was just picked from your garden), first say the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ תְּרוּמוֹת וּמַעֲשָׂרוֹת.
Bâruch Atâ Adonoy Eloheinu Melech há'olâm,
asher kidishânu bi'mitzvo'tâv,
vi'tzivânu l'hafrish trumot u'masrot.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His mitzvot, and commanded us to separate Terumah and Ma'aser tithes.

*If you know for certain that these fruits are obligated in Ma'aser Sheni, say a second blessing, ending with the words **vi'tzivânu lif'dot ma'aser sheni**.*

In all cases, make the following declaration. (If one said a blessing, continue without interruption):

- The amount above 1% that is separated here is Terumah Gedolah, on the north side, each species separately.
- The 1% that is separated here, plus 9 portions like it on the north side, is Ma'aser Rishon, each species separately.
- The same 1% used for Ma'aser Rishon, is also used for Terumat Ma'aser, each species separately.
- Ma'aser Sheni is on the south side, each species separately. And if Ma'aser Ani is necessary, that is on the south side, each species separately.
- The Ma'aser Sheni should be redeemed onto a Pruta in the coin that I have designated. If there are fourth year fruits, they should be redeemed onto a Pruta in the coin that I designated. Whatever is not worth a Pruta - whether Ma'aser Sheni or fourth-year fruits - should be redeemed for its value onto the coin that I designated.



After the Separation

The Terumah and Terumat Ma'aser are supposed to be given to a kohen to be eaten in a state of ritual purity. Due to our exile, we do not presently have this state, so the Terumah and Terumat Ma'aser may be disposed of. They should be treated respectfully: wrapped in plastic bag and placed (rather than tossed) in the trash.

Ideally the Ma'aser should be given to a Levi. Today it is virtually impossible for one to prove they are a Levi, so due to doubt, the owner can keep the Ma'aser. Nevertheless, many give their Ma'aser to someone who has a family tradition they are a Levi; no harm is done either way, as even a non-Levi can eat Ma'aser.

The Ma'aser Ani should be given to a poor person.

The remaining produce is yours to eat. Enjoy it with the knowledge that you were able to do one of the very special mitzvot of the Land of Israel.