

# MESHECH CHOCHMAH

## Parshas Ki Savo

### Blessed Fruits

בְּרוּךְ פְּרֵי בִטְנֶךָ וּפְרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ וּפְרֵי בְהֵמָתְךָ

*Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land and the fruit of your animals (28:4)*

#### **MILAH AS MAASER**

The Midrash<sup>1</sup> comments on the different “fruits” mentioned in the pasuk:

הקיש פרי אדמה לפרי הבטן, לאמר לך מה פרי אדמה צריכה עישור, אף פרי בטן צריכים עישור – וזו המילה

*[The pasuk] equates the fruit of the land with that of the womb, to tell you that in the same way that the fruit of the land needs to be tithed, so, too, does the fruit of the womb – this refers to the milah.*

The Meshech Chochmah explains that the background to the Midrash’s statement is the fact that the terms in the pasuk appear out of order, for first it mentions the womb (i.e. human life), then land and then animals. We would have expected animals to be mentioned before land!<sup>2</sup> To this, the Midrash responds that the fruit of the land has been placed directly after the fruit of the womb in order to teach us that they are similar, i.e. that they both need to be “tithed.”

Why is *milah* considered to be a form of *maaser* – tithe? The Meshech Chochmah explains that this is based on a statement of Chazal<sup>3</sup> elsewhere that there are ten “shalitim” – powerful or influential limbs of the body: the hands, the feet, the eyes, the ears, the mouth and the organ upon which *milah* is performed. Since the *milah* is performed on one of the body’s ten shalitim, the Midrash informs us that it has the qualities of the mitzvah of maser.

However, the question persists. Why should this lesson necessitate altering the intuitive order of the terms in the pasuk? After all, is it not the case that the fruit of one’s animals

1 Devarim Rabbah 3:5.

2 See e.g. Devarim 7:13.

3 Nedarim 32b.

also needs to be tithed? The Torah explicitly states that one of every ten newborn animals must be sanctified and brought as a korban – known as *maaser beheimah*! Is the tithing of a child through *milah* any more similar to the tithing of produce than to that of animals?

The answer, says Meshech Chochmah, is – yes, it is.

### **PRODUCE AND ANIMALS: LIFE BEFORE MAASER**

Although there is a mitzvah to tithe both animals and agricultural produce, the effect of these two mitzvos is not the same. Prior to being tithed, the produce is forbidden for consumption. As such, the maaser affects not only the tenth that is tithed, but also rectifies the other nine parts. This is not the case with regards to the maaser of animals. Although there is a mitzvah to offer the tenth as a korban, it does not affect the other nine, for they are permitted for consumption even prior to being tithed.

In comparing the maaser of *milah* specifically to that of produce, the pasuk is informing us that this form of “maaser” is one which affects and elevates *the entire body*, raising the status of the child. The Meshech Chochmah quotes the Terumas Hadeshen,<sup>4</sup> who demonstrates this idea from the halachah that a newborn Kohen is not allowed to have Terumah oil applied to him prior to him having undergone *milah*, for the *milah* effects a change in his status. Thus, the Gemara<sup>5</sup> derives the halachah that *milah* overrides Shabbos from a pasuk, stating that it would not otherwise be permitted simply based on its designation as *kilkul* – a destructive act, for it is, in fact, a *tikun* – an enhancing act. The Terumas Hadeshen explains that this *tikun* refers not just to the fact that a mitzvah has been performed, but to the enhanced and elevated status of the child.

As such, we understand that the mitzvah of *milah* is not only a form of maaser, it is moreover specifically similar to the maaser of produce, and hence the pasuk arranged the order of terms in a way which juxtaposes the two.

### **PERMISSION TO TEST – AND REQUEST**

Taking this idea further, the Meshech Chochmah explains a most unusual element within the bracha which we recite after performing *milah*. We begin by praising Hashem for giving us the mitzvah, and then proceed to say:

על כן בשכר זה א-ל חי חלקנו צורנו צוה להציל ידידות שארנו משחת למען בריתו אשר שם  
בבשרנו

*Therefore, in reward for this..., O Living God, our Portion, our Rock, command to save the beloved soul within our flesh from destruction, for the sake of His covenant that He has placed in our flesh.*

This is most irregular! What other mitzvah do we follow with a request for reward for its performance? Is this approach not antithetical to the one that we are meant to have toward doing mitzvos?

The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, is that indeed, as a rule, mitzvos should be performed without any thought of reward – but there is one well-known exception:

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4 Siman 265.

5 Shabbos 106a.

The Gemara<sup>6</sup> states that although it is generally forbidden to test Hashem and expect to see tangible benefits from one's mitzvos in this world, when it comes to the mitzvah of maaser, one may do so. The Navi says:<sup>7</sup>

הָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצֵר וְיְהִי טָרֵף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֲנוּנַי נָא בְּזֹאת אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת אִם לֹא אֲפַתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרִכָּה עַד בְּלִי דִּי

*Bring all the tithes to the storage house... and test me with this, says Hashem, Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour upon you blessing without end*

An expression of the permission granted to test Hashem in the area of taking maaser is the permission to actively request reward for its performance. This is something which we can see earlier in our parsha concerning the declaration which a person is required to make every three years, stating that he has fulfilled his obligations regarding dispensing the various forms of maaser for those years. That declaration concludes by the person saying:<sup>8</sup>

שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֵי, עָשִׂיתִי כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי. הִשְׁקִיפָה מִמְּעוֹן קִדְשֶׁךָ, מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבִרְךָ אֶת עַמֶּךָ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל

*I have heeded the voice of Hashem, my God, I have done all which You have commanded me to do. [Therefore]: look down from Your holy abode, from the heavens and bless Your nation, Israel.*

Normally, we do not follow up a declaration regarding having performed a mitzvah with a request for reward, but when it comes to taking maaser, we do. Therefore, since *milah* is also understood as a form of maaser, it likewise partakes of this quality, and thus the bracha which follows it expresses a request for protection in reward for performing the mitzvah!



This week's Divrei Torah are dedicated le'ilui nishmas

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לאה בת אברהם שמחה



6 Taanis 9a.

7 Malachi 3:10.

8 Devarim 26:14-15