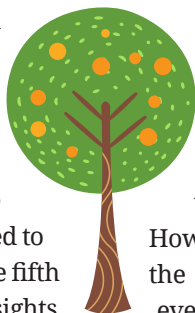




# Fortuitous Fruit

If you are lucky enough to have a fruit tree growing in your garden you may be familiar with the fascinating mitzvot of *orlah* and *neta revai*, mentioned in this *parashah* (*Vayikra 19:23-25*). Torah law prohibits eating the fruit of a tree for the first three years. One is then required to dedicate the fruit to Hashem in the fourth year and is only then allowed to enjoy the produce of his trees in the fifth year. Many commentators offer insights into the significance of these laws and parallels to our lives.



The Rambam views this mitzvah as a response to idolatrous practices. It was not uncommon for idolaters to use magic formulas to speed up the growth of fruit, thus we are commanded to desist from eating

a tree's produce for its first few years. The Ramban, however, sees this as an appropriate expression of gratitude to Hashem. In a tree's first few years its fruit is of inferior quality, and therefore we wait until it is more developed so we can offer the first quality produce as *bikurim* to Hashem before enjoying it ourselves.

Rav Moshe Feinstein in *Darash Moshe* explains that at first glance this mitzvah seems counter intuitive. The Torah goes to great lengths teaching us not to be wasteful or destroy any property. How are we to understand destroying the fruit of the first few years? However, notes Rav Moshe, this is exactly the point. We must recognize the limitation of our understanding and maintain our observance of Hashem's word even if it makes no sense to us. Upholding Torah and mitzvot is not dependent on how we understand things, rather on appreciating that there is a greater scheme way

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Rav Hirsch points out that these *pesukim*, according to Rabbi Akiva, are the source for saying blessings before partaking of food. Just as one brought his fruits in the fourth year to Yerushalayim to eat in the presence of holiness, likewise, we need to continually remind ourselves that we must eat in “the presence of Hashem.” Each time we say the word “*Baruch*” we create a stronger awareness of Hashem’s beneficence and the need to elevate our physical existence to serve Hashem.

The *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* sees a parallel here to man. The Torah teaches that “man is like the tree of the field” (*Devarim 20:19*). A child is preverbal his first three years and is so to speak ‘closed.’ In his fourth year we begin to teach “*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*” and other aspects of holiness. Only in the fifth year do we begin to teach the child Torah properly. This is the source notes *Nitai Gavriel* for an “*upsherin*” or “*chalachah*” on a little boy’s third birthday. We initiate the child into the realm of *kedushah* by giving him his first haircut and leaving his *payot* uncut. We clearly demonstrate a desire to raise him in the Torah’s ways, teaching him to dedicate his life to Hashem and His mitzvot. ■

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