



GEULAS YISRAEL

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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Planting Redemption

Most of the mitzvot that govern agriculture apply only in Eretz Yisrael and not to produce grown outside the Land. One notable exception is the halachah of arlah, which applies in Chutz La'aretz as well. The fruit of a tree during its first three years is forbidden, while the produce of the fourth year is treated similarly to ma'aser sheini and is eaten in Yerushalayim. This prohibition applies both to trees planted in Eretz Yisrael and to fruit trees planted outside Eretz Yisrael.

It is striking, then, that the Torah introduces the halachot of arlah with the phrase, "When you enter the land and plant trees." This establishes that although the halachot of arlah apply in Chutz La'aretz, they do so with a different halachic status. The Gemara explains that the issur of arlah in Chutz La'aretz does not emerge directly from the pesukim, but from a Halachah LeMoshe MiSinai. That distinction accounts for several differences between arlah in Eretz Yisrael and arlah in

Chutz La'aretz.

Yet the Torah still anchors these halachot in our entry into the Land. By linking the laws of arlah to Eretz Yisrael, the Torah hints that the experience of arlah carries a message about life in Israel and about geulah.

The central message of arlah is that nature, though created by HaKadosh Baruch Hu, may still remain incomplete. Hashem intentionally left His world unfinished so that human beings could become His partners in perfecting creation. Something natural is not automatically sacred, nor is it automatically complete.

MILAH AND HUMAN COMPLETION

This same message surfaces in the other mitzvah associated with arlah, namely brit milah. The foreskin itself is called "orlah." That mitzvah sharply demonstrates that Hashem did not create a finished, perfected human form, but instead left the male body intentionally incomplete, to be completed through human action.

This idea stands at the heart of Rabbi Akiva's response to Turnus Rufus, a Roman governor of Judea who often challenged Jewish belief and practice. Roman culture celebrated the perfection of the human body and viewed circumcision as mutilation. Turnus Rufus asked: if a circumcised state is more complete, why did Hashem not create man in that form from the outset? Rabbi Akiva responded by

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shifting the conversation. He asked whether wheat or bread is superior. Bread is the more refined product, yet Hashem creates raw wheat and expects human beings to process it into something of higher caliber.

This perspective is embedded in our own berachah. We recite “hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz,” even though Hashem does not produce bread directly from the ground. We thank Hashem not only for those materials, but for granting us the capacity and responsibility to refine them. Hashem desires human partners in the completion of His world.

PATIENCE AND THE PACE OF REDEMPTION

Yet despite the similarities between milah and arlah, in teaching that we are tasked with perfecting a divinely imperfect world, there is a fundamental difference between them. The perfection achieved through milah is immediate, brought about through a single, decisive human act.

By contrast, the perfection of a tree’s fruit cannot be hastened. It requires three full years for the fruit to mature, and no human effort can accelerate that process. In this case, human beings are asked not to act, but to wait. The mitzvah of arlah thus teaches two lessons: the responsibility to bring the world toward completion, and the discipline to allow certain processes to unfold in their proper time.

This is precisely why the halachah of arlah is introduced with our entry into the Land. As we enter Eretz Yisrael, we carry expansive hopes. We imagine the fulfillment of prophecy, a world refined by the presence of Hashem as His people return to His land. Arlah tempers those expectations. It reminds us that redemption in Israel often unfolds slowly, across time. Unlike milah, it cannot be forced or accelerated through human intervention. There are moments in which our task is not

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to shape, but to wait, allowing the process of geulah to develop at its own pace.

We are, understandably, an impatient people living in an impatient era. An age of immediacy and rapid exchange of information conditions us to expect quick, tangible results. Furthermore, after waiting for thousands of years, and after the courage and sacrifice that brought us back to our land, it is only natural to expect swift and sweeping change in Israel. And we still have much to accomplish, both externally and domestically.

Arlah, stated as we enter the land, reminds us that entry itself demands patience and endurance. Even as we begin to build, we are asked to wait, to allow processes to unfold, and to recognize that not every stage of growth can be rushed.

HIDDEN

There is a second message about geulah embedded within the mitzvah of arlah. The

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term orlah literally means covered. In the context of an uncircumcised male, this terminology is straightforward, as a part of the body is covered by skin that milah removes. However, its application to forbidden fruit is less obvious. Rashi explains that something covered is distant and removed from a person's use. Covering, in Rashi's language, signals inaccessibility and restraint.

At a deeper level, the term orlah also suggests that the fruit's maturation is concealed. The future, fully ripened fruit has not yet emerged. It remains hidden behind earlier, less developed stages. The tree carries within it a more complete potential, but that potential is concealed by what is still immature. In this sense, orlah does not only describe prohibition, but a process unfolding beneath the surface, partially obscured from view.

Redemption often advances in similarly concealed ways. At times we can look back and identify moments that clearly carried redemptive weight. More often, however, the process remains hidden from us, beyond the reach of human calculation. Geulah unfolds through Hashem's intervention in history, beyond human capacity not only to shape, but even to fully understand.

This is why the mitzvah of arlah is introduced alongside our entry into the Land. It cautions us with two enduring lessons as we begin that journey. We must cultivate patience, allowing the long and demanding process of redemption to unfold in its time. And we must accept that much of that process will remain beyond our grasp. Redemption moves forward, but it does so under the cover of divine logic, not always within the clarity of human understanding.

FROM BROWN TO GREEN

The Midrash draws a third lesson about

geulah from arlah, not from the issur itself but from the way the Torah introduces it. The Torah does not merely state that when you enter the land the first three years of fruit are forbidden. Instead, it opens with a broader phrase: "When you enter the land, you shall plant trees." That language seems unnecessary. Fruit can only emerge once trees are planted. Moreover, the Torah's formulation does not read as a condition. It reads as a directive: ונטעתם כל עץ מאכל.

The Midrash understands this as an independent message. Hashem is not only legislating the laws of arlah, but is also encouraging us to take an active role in developing the land through planting and cultivation. Just as He planted trees at the beginning of creation, so too we are commanded to plant when we enter Eretz Yisrael.

This opening pasuk, which introduces arlah, establishes a message that extends beyond the halachah itself. Hashem expects us to build the land, agriculturally and otherwise. In the direct sense, this pasuk and the Midrash encourage agricultural activity in Eretz Yisrael. Planting trees in Israel has become a central part of reclaiming a once barren landscape, turning a brown and desolate land into one that is green and alive through cultivation and growth. When fires strike and forests are consumed, the loss is felt not only as a human tragedy, but as a setback in the long effort to restore life to this once-brown land.

In a broader sense, agriculture has always stood at the heart of the Zionist vision of renewing an infertile land. It serves as a visible sign that our return is part of a larger redemptive arc. A land that remained dry and neglected for generations is now producing and flourishing. Furthermore, Israel

has become a major innovator and exporter of agricultural technology, offering solutions in farming and water management to those willing to receive that blessing. In this way, we have fulfilled the divine expectation to plant, to build, and to develop His land.

FIELDS AND FOUNDATIONS

Beyond the agricultural dimension, the “mitzvah” of planting trees calls upon us to build the broader infrastructure of life in Israel: roads, cities, buildings, and the full range of services that sustain a society, including social, political, judicial, and welfare systems. For the first time in many generations, we carry both the responsibility and the privilege of building beyond the beit midrash and beyond the beit kneset.

The introduction to the halachot of arlah reminds us that this task is not merely practical or national; it reflects the will of Hashem. In calling upon us to plant, the Torah invites us to mirror His own act of creation. Just as Hashem formed and developed His world, He now calls upon us to shape and develop ours in Eretz Yisrael, walking in His path as partners in creation.

Arlah may at first appear to be a narrow issur. Yet both the prohibition itself and the way it is introduced convey important messages about returning to Eretz Yisrael. The process demands patience. At times it unfolds beneath the surface, concealed from view. Yet we continue to plant, and we continue to build, moving toward a future that may not always be visible, but remains assured. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.

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