

TERUMAT MAASER

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After separating teruma gedola, we need to set aside ma'aser rishon (first tithe, 10%) of what is left for the Levi. The Levi, in turn, gives 10% of what he receives to a Kohen; that is, 1% of all of the original produce (after the teruma gedola is separated). This tithe is called terumat ma'aser by Chazal and ma'aser min hama'aser by the Torah (tithe of the tithe; Bamidbar 18:28).

The Gemara (Gittin 31) states that a Yisrael may also set aside terumat ma'aser instead of the Levi, and this is what Rambam (Hilchot Terumot 3:12) and Shulchan Aruch (YD 331:28) rule in practice. This separation is included in our text for separating terumot and ma'aserot.

It is forbidden to separate terumat ma'aser before ma'aser rishon is set aside. There is a negative injunction against changing the order of separating the gifts (Sefer HaChinuch, Lo Ta'aseh 72; Rambam, Introduction of Hilchot Terumot: "one should separate [terumot and ma'aserot] according to the appropriate order"). For this reason, we need to first separate teruma gedola, then ma'aser rishon, and only then terumat ma'aser. Separating both teruma gedola and terumat ma'aser together and only then separating ma'aser rishon constitutes a transgression of this injunction. Many opinions hold that the produce would still be considered tevel (untithed), since terumat ma'aser must be given from the ma'aser rishon only after the latter is set aside.

The laws governing terumat ma'aser are identical to those applying to teruma gedola. As they are both sacred and we are all ritually impure due to contact with the dead, today both terumot cannot be eaten by Kohanim. Most of the teruma that we separate from our produce today is terumat ma'aser and not teruma gedola (which is "kolshehu", "a little bit", as we explained last week).

