When ma'aser sheni is worth less than a peruta

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Sometimes we pick one fruit from the garden, bring it into the house, and need to take terumot and ma'aserot. In this case, the ma'aser sheni (9%) of the amount of fruit will be worth less than a peruta (today approx. 5.2 agorot).

Standard cucumbers weigh 100g and cost 5 NIS/kg; that is, 50 agorot per cucumber. The amount of ma'aser sheni (9%) is about 4.5 agorot, which is less than a peruta. This scenario is especially common with herbs where a few leaves are picked each time.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 53b) says: "The Sages taught: 'And if a man will redeem of his tithe and he will add one-fifth' (Vayikra 27:31) [infers]: Of his tithe, but not all his tithe. This excludes the second tithe that does not have the value of one peruta."

There is a machloket as to the Sages' intent: in Yerushalmi (Ma'aser Sheni 4:2) and Rambam (Ma'aser Sheni 5:4-5) it seems no chomesh should be added, but it is possible to redeem it. Rashi and Tosafot, though, understand that it is not possible to redeem such ma'aser sheni. A peruta is the coin of the least value that halacha considers for this purpose.

However, Chezkiya provides a solution: "when ma'aser sheni is not worth a peruta, it and one-fifth its value are redeemed on the original coins." That is, if I transferred ma'aser sheni sanctity from produce worth more than a peruta, I can continue to use it for ma'aser sheni worth less than a peruta.

Tosafot Rosh explains that new coins cannot "absorb" ma'aser sheni sanctity from produce worth less than a peruta; if a coin was already used for this purpose, however, the sanctity in the coin can join the less-than-peruta sanctity, which together redeem the produce.

More next week.