



The final section of Parashat Korach outlines the mandatory "gifts" that *Benei Yisrael* are required to give to the *kohanim* and the *Levi'im*. Included in this list is *teruma*, a portion of agricultural produce given to a *kohen* (18:12), and *ma'aser rishon*, an annual tithe of produce given to a *Levi* (18:21). The *Levi* is required to separate a portion from the *ma'aser* he receives and give it to a *kohen* as *teruma*; this portion is generally referred to as *terumat ma'aser*.

The *Sifrei*, commenting to this section (18:28), infers from the Torah's discussion that *kohanim* who grow their own produce must separate *teruma*, despite the fact that they may eat it themselves. A *kohen* who grows produce must designate a portion as *teruma*, which he then eats in accordance with the regulations governing the consumption of *teruma*. *Levi'im* must likewise separate *ma'aser rishon* from their produce, which they may then partake of themselves. Of course, a *Levi* who separates *ma'aser rishon* from his own produce and wishes to keep it for himself must first separate a portion for *terumat ma'aser*, just as he must from all *ma'aser rishon* that he receives.

Maimonides codifies these *halakhot* towards the beginning of Hilkhos Ma'aser (1:3), but appears to draw a distinction between a *kohen's* separation of *teruma* from his own produce, and a *Levi's* separation of *ma'aser* from his produce. With regard to a *Levi*, Maimonides writes that a *Levi* must separate *ma'aser* in order that *terumat ma'aser* may then be given to the *kohen*. Essentially, it seems, a *Levi's* own produce is not subject to the requirement of *ma'aser rishon*; it is only to facilitate a *terumat ma'aser* donation to the *kohanim* that the Torah requires a *Levi* to separate *ma'aser rishon*. With regard to the *kohen's* separation of *teruma*, by contrast, Maimonides codifies this *halakha* without any explanation, indicating that a *kohen's* produce is subject to the *teruma* requirement intrinsically, and not merely due to some external concern.

Rav Asher Meir (www.ou.org/torah/tt/5761/korach61/specialfeatures_mitzvot.htm) explains Maimonides' comments on the basis of a general distinction between *teruma* and *ma'aser*. In describing the *teruma* obligation, the Torah writes (18:12) that *Benei Yisrael's* first produce "which they give to the Lord – I have given to you [the *kohanim*]." *Teruma* is a gift given to God, which He then transfers to the *kohen*. When a Jewish farmer gives a portion to a *kohen* as *teruma*, the *kohen* receives it not from the Jew, but from the Almighty. The *teruma* portion is separated as an expression of the farmer's recognition of the Almighty as the true owner of his land, and God then transfers the produce to the *kohanim*. *Ma'aser*, by contrast, is given to the *Levi'im* directly. The Torah explicitly

describes *ma'aser rishon* as a "salary" paid to the *Levi'im* in exchange for their service in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* (18:21). A *Levi* receives *ma'aser* not from the Almighty, but directly from the Jew who pays him as his employee.

This distinction easily explains the difference suggested by Maimonides between the two cases of a *kohen* separating *teruma* and a *Levi* separating *ma'aser*. A *kohen* must separate *teruma* from his produce just as every Jew is required to separate *teruma*, as a symbolic "donation" to God made for the purpose of expressing one's awareness of His authority and ownership over the entire earth. When it comes to a *Levi*, however, there is no inherent reason for him to separate *ma'aser rishon*; there is no sense in a person paying himself a salary. Therefore, as Maimonides writes, a *Levi* separates *ma'aser rishon* only for the purpose of facilitating *terumat ma'aser*, to give the *Levi* the opportunity to make an additional "gift" to the Almighty, which God then transfers to the *kohanim*.