



TORAH VEHA'ARETZ

INSTITUTE

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# Pruning Peaches During Shemittah Within the Otzar Beit Din Framework

Recently, the rabbis of Machon Torah VeHa'aretz set out for the Golan Heights for a tour marking the end of *shemittah*.

One of the stops involved pruning peach trees. During *shemittah*, the farmer, Avraham Sadeh, a religious Jew, grew *otzar beit din* peaches, near Moshav Avnei Eitan.

Normally, in the summer, after the peaches are harvested, the branches are pruned. The goal is to stimulate growth and promote general tree vigor, in order to cause the young shoots to sprout branches and fruit during the following year. Furthermore, pruning the exterior branches exposes the interior branches to much-needed light. Without pruning, the quality of the following year's crop will be extremely poor.

Last summer, during *shemittah*, the farmer approached us with a question, we headed up north to see for ourselves. The issue was how much damage would be caused to the tree – both short term

(during the eighth year) and long term (in subsequent years) – if the trees were not pruned during *shemittah*. We consulted with Rav Yaakov Ariel, Torah VeHa'aretz's head, about this difficult question.

In the end, the farmer decided to be *machmir*, and he did not prune his trees. As a result,



this year's harvest was large but of extremely poor quality. Since too many branches remained on the trees, the peaches were all very small, and thus the farmer earned significantly less than in previous years. In addition, due to the large number of branches, the fruit and branches in the middle of the trees did not get enough sunlight, and therefore they did not develop properly.

"I don't regret that I lost money during the eighth year because of *shemittah*," Mr. Sadeh told us.

We are currently working on precise guidelines, which will be published before *Shemittah* 5789, for farmers, *kashrut* supervisors, and the Ministry of

Agriculture's professional advisers.

This question was only one of the hundreds of halachic-practical questions facing the rabbis of the *beit din*, when growing fruits and vegetables within the *otzar beit din* framework while strictly adhering to all the *shemita* laws and the permitted and prohibited *melachot* of *shemita*.

*Baruch Hashem* that we were privileged to do so! ■

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