

What Visitors From Abroad During Shemittah Need to Know

Rav Avrohom Yeshaya Cohen, Rosh Kollel of Kollel Ohel Yitzchok and Posek at The Bais HaVaad

Question: I hope to visit *Eretz Yisroel* this year. What do I need to know as a resident of *chutz la'aretz* visiting *Eretz Yisroel* during the year of *shemittah*?

Answer: The short answer is that whenever one buys any produce in *Eretz Yisroel* during *shemittah*, he must make sure you buy it from a store with a reliable *hashgacha*.

In reality, that is always the case in *eretz Yisroel*. In America, one may buy any type of produce in any store (provided there are no issues of infestation), but in *Eretz Yisroel* one must be concerned about various *mitzvos hateluyos ba'aretz*, such as *orlah*, *terumos* and *ma'asros*. For this reason, one should always be careful to only purchase produce with a good *hechsher* whenever in *Eretz Yisroel*. During the *shemittah* year, one has to be extra concerned about *shemittah* issues.

If land is worked on in a forbidden manner during *shemittah*, the crops that grow as a result of that work are called *ne'evad*, and may not be consumed. If the field is guarded in a forbidden manner, the crops are deemed *shamur*, and are also forbidden. Furthermore, the Rabbanan decreed that if certain crops grow on their own, even though no forbidden work went into their growth, they may not be consumed. This prohibition is known as *sefichin*. The Rabbanan enacted this decree because they saw that some people were illicitly working on their fields during *shemittah* and falsely claiming the crops grew on their own. The prohibition of *sefichin* primarily applies to vegetables and not to fruit.

Because of all these concerns, when in Eretz Yisrael one should not purchase any produce without a reliable *hashgacha*. When a *hechsher* is given during the *shemittah* year, the *hashgacha* is certifying that the produce is permitted to be eaten. This is possible in several ways.

1. The *hashgacha* may be certifying that the produce grew outside the borders of *Eretz Yisroel*, and is, therefore, not subject to *shemittah* concerns. (It is important to point out that the Biblical borders of *Eretz Yisroel*, as delineated in Parshas Masei, are not the same as the borders of the modern-day State of Israel.)
2. The second way that produce grown during *shemittah* may be permitted is dependent on a *machlokes* between the Bais Yosef and Mabit. The Bais Yosef rules that crops grown on land in *Eretz Yisroel* that is owned by non-Jews is permitted to be eaten and has no *kedushas sheviis*. For hundreds of years, the *minhag* in Yerushalayim has been to rely on this opinion of the Bais Yosef. Thus, a *hashgacha* may be certifying that produce was grown on land owned by non-Jews. The Mabit, however, says that such produce is forbidden and does have *kedushas sheviis*. The Chazon Ish was a strong proponent of this opinion and many people in *Eretz Yisroel* are stringent to follow this view.

Finally, one should be aware that even some produce that is permitted for

consumption may contain *kedushas sheviis*, which means that it must be treated in a very specific way. A visitor to the land must be familiar as to how to treat such produce.