

א ביסל תורה!

May 9, 2025

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

י"א אייר תשפ"ה · אחרי
מות/קדושים

ערלה in the Diaspora

By Eitan Orkaby '27

In between the flurry of מצוות that are introduced to us, in this week's פרשיות, the מצוה of ערלה is given. The תורה begins by making a statement of "וְכִי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ" "and when you enter The land (Israel)" (ויקרא י"ט:כ"ג). Usually, this would mean that all of the upcoming מצוות only apply in the land of Israel, as they only begin when you enter Israel. ערלה is the exception. In רמב"ם's collection of the מצוות, number 192, he states that ערלה applies in Israel and in the diaspora. What makes ערלה different from other agricultural מצוות, which only apply in Israel?

To answer this question we first have to understand what ערלה is. The תורה's prohibition of not eating the fruit of a tree is in its first three years. In the fourth year one must only eat the fruit in ירושלים. Only on the fifth, and following, year is one allowed to eat all of their fruit without having to go anywhere. The whole reason for this מצוה is to understand that everything comes from Hashem. Even though we might put effort into growing fruits, one still must wait, in order to appreciate that Hashem is the One in charge and not man. Another reason, given by רמב"ן, is that in the first three years the fruit is not good enough to bring to Hashem, and since the first of everything must go to Hashem, one must wait until the fourth year, when the fruits

are nice, to bring them to eat in the presence of Hashem.

Becoming closer to Hashem through ערלה could be the reason why it also applies in the diaspora. In חלק ג פרק ל"ז, מורה נבוכים ס'רמב"ם, he talks about how idol worship and ערלה are connected. He says that one of the types of idolatry that the תורה prohibits is that of an אשרה tree, which involves worshipping a tree and thinking of it as a god. ערלה, similarly, is based around the growth of a tree. One could, therefore, connect the two by saying that if one holds by the מצוה of ערלה, one can understand that the tree comes from Hashem before the tree completely grows. This would stop any notion of believing that the tree is god, as it was made, and nourished, by G-d Himself. The whole purpose of ערלה is to stop people from worshipping idols. And, since idol worship is prohibited no matter where in the world someone is, so too should ערלה, which should stop people from worshipping idols all over the world.

If one were to just read the תורה and follow that, just like the צדוקים, one would come to the conclusion that ערלה applies only in Israel. We learn, however, that ערלה applies even in the diaspora. This came about from interpreting the תורה through connecting multiple topics and then coming to a conclusion. This is the way the rabbis interpret the תורה. Through this way of

learning, one may come to understand the תורה on a much higher level. This is very similar, in a way, to ערלה. At the beginning of one's path of learning תורה one must start on the ground level, learning the תורה and the basics of learning itself. While this may bear fruit, the fruit is not ready to be understood as הלכה until more תורה is learned. Once one learns both תורה שבעל פה and תורה שבכתב, one can begin to understand הלכה, but only with a Rabbi. Once even more תורה and knowledge has been amassed may one begin bear fruit of הלכה. May we all merit to reach this incredible level of understanding in תורה through ערלה of מצוה.

Living With Purpose and Presence

By Ezra Weiss '28

פרשת אחרי מות begins with a sobering reminder: the tragic deaths of אהרן's sons, נדב and אביהו. The תורה then outlines the sacred service of יום כיפור and continues with laws surrounding holiness and ethical living. A key פסוק says: "וַיִּשְׁמְרֵתֶם אֶת-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אִתְּם הָאֲדָמָה" "וְיָתִי בָהֶם אֲנִי ה'" "and you shall keep My statutes and My laws, which a person shall do and live by them" (ויקרא י"ח:ה).

רש"י explains: "וְיָתִי בָהֶם" "and live by them" as a command to not die by them, being the מצוות. The מצוות are meant to enhance life, not end it. But on a deeper level, the verse teaches that תורה is not just about rules; it is about how we live

life. The מצוות are not there to restrict life, rather, to fill life with meaning, mindfulness, and moral purpose. What lesson can we take from this?

In a fast-moving world full of distraction, אחרי מות challenges us to live deliberately - to step back and ask: am I living in a way that brings holiness into my everyday choices? Am I cultivating honesty, compassion, and integrity - in my relationships, work, and inner life? We are reminded that every moment offers a chance to choose life - not just to exist, but to live fully and meaningfully, guided by values that transcend the moment.

This week, try to pause once a day - before a conversation, a decision, or a reaction - and ask yourself: what choice here will help me live by the מצוות? That small moment of awareness can transform the ordinary into sacred.



Receive A Bisl TORAH
on WhatsApp

A Bisl TORAH

is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Avi Abbett '25
Eitan Orkaby '27

EDITORS

Theo Fraenkel '28
Eliana Goldenholz '26

FACULTY ADVISOR

Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe

FOUNDERS

Binyamin Orkaby '24
Ephraim Fischer '24
