



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Baskets With Sacred Meaning

The mitzvah of *bikkurim* features prominently in our *parashah*. The Torah instructs the farmer to put his first fruits in a basket and bring them to the *Beit Hamikdash*. The Mishnah tells us that the wealthier people would make beautiful baskets of gold and silver, while the poorer people would weave baskets of reeds. The Mishnah further describes how the people would adorn their baskets with wreaths and organize beautiful, joyous processions to bring the fruit to Yerushalayim. (*Bikkurim* 3:2-8) After taking the fruits, the Kohanim would return the costly baskets to their affluent owners but would keep the fruit and the simple wicker baskets of the modest ones. Why was it necessary to beautify the baskets at all? What are we to

learn from this seemingly insignificant detail?

“*Zeh keli v'anvehu*” beautifying mitzvot is a fundamental value in Judaism. When people brought their first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash, they were filled with abounding gratitude, and they expressed their overwhelming thanks by embellishing the baskets to carry the fruit. This furthers the question of why the Kohanim only kept the baskets of the poor people.

Rav Aharon Baskt *zt”l, hy”d*, offers a beautiful insight into this inconsistency. The rich person’s fruits were of the finest quality and were certainly presentable even without a basket. Since the Kohanim did not need the gold and silver baskets, they only kept the fruit and returned the baskets. However, the poor person’s fruit was of a lower grade. Had the Kohen taken the fruit and returned the basket, the poorer person would have been deeply embarrassed, at least the basket elevated the presentation of his offering! Further, the Kohen shared the message that whatever a poor person gives is beloved to Hashem, no matter its status.

Rav Scheinerman in *Ohel Moshe* adds another important lesson. One can only imagine how impressive the gold and silver baskets were and how they naturally would have given the well-to-do people a sense of pride and gratification. Thus, by returning the fancy baskets, the Kohanim were highlighting the importance of the mitzvah itself rather than the container. Hashem does not desire a haughty heart; arrogance and conceit, however slight, have no place in the *Beit Hashem*. Humility, modesty and unpretentiousness,

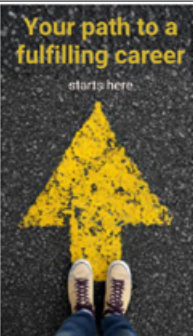


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reflected in the simple wicker baskets, are cherished qualities to be safeguarded and celebrated in Hashem's holy dwelling.

In his famous letter, the Ramban likens one who is haughty to one who rebels against Hashem. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, we ought to focus on accepting the Kingship of Hashem upon ourselves from a place of humility. The bent shofar suggests our fragmented, broken parts. Let us desire for Hashem to accept our *bikkurim* and our basket, the tefillot to offer Hashem our best selves, as we stand before Him on the New Year with new aspirations for growth and connection. ■

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