

And you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground....and you shall put it in a basket...and you shall come to the Kohen. (26:2,3)

The *Torah* begins the *parsha* with the details of the *Bikkurim* offering. The Jew brought the first of his fruits to the *Kohen*, symbolically stating that he dedicated all that he had to the service of Hashem. In the *Mishnah Bikkurim* 3:6, *Chazal* describe the pomp and joy that accompanied this offering. “*The wealthy would bring their fruits in baskets made of gold; the poor in baskets made of cane.*” The *Kohen* took not only the fruits, but also the baskets. The *Yerushalmi* explains that the basket served an interesting function. In the event the fruits became *tamei*, ritually unclean, and therefore not edible, at least the basket would remain in the possession of the *Kohen*. If there were no fruits, the basket served as a replacement, so there would at least be some contribution.

A remarkable and timely lesson can be inferred from this concept. **Horav Moshe Swift, z”l**, observes that while everyone came to the *Bais Hamikdash* with something different, they all arrived with something. If not the fruit, then at least leave the basket. There are those who participated with fruits; others offered labor, their time, or their energy. Some came to Hashem’s Sanctuary to offer sacrifices, while others came to study *Torah*; some gave contributions, while some others contributed services. Everyone, however, gave something. While the nature of every individual’s gift was different, each person participated.

They recited a special *tefillah* after they gave the various gifts and tithes. They said: *npheav* "ktrah Ing ,t lrcu wohnav in lase iugn "Look down from Your Holy Habitation, from Heaven, and bless Your People, Yisrael.” *Chazal* tell us that this prayer implies to Hashem: We have performed our duty. We have brought what is to be brought. We, who have been able to give, have given. We, who have been able to serve, have served. We have done that which is in our power to do. It is now up to Hashem to do that which is in His power.

Religion is based upon reciprocity. We do not press buttons and passively watch blessings appear. We do not throw a switch so that gifts are showered down from Heaven. We give, and then we receive in return. He who comes empty-handed should expect to leave in the same state.

To paraphrase *Horav* Swift: We stand before Hashem on *Rosh Hashanah* and plead: “Give us, give us!” We ask for *parnassah*, livelihood; we ask for health and happiness; we ask for *nachas*. What are we giving in return? Better yet, with what are we coming to the table? Are we willing to heighten our observance, to strengthen our commitment; to bolster our support of communal needs? We must realize that *Yiddishkeit*, as in every aspect of life, is a give-and-take endeavor. We have no right to demand unless we have participated. We have no right to ask until we have demonstrated our conviction. We have no right to plead if we have not, in some way, merited that right. Let us hope that as we prepare for *Rosh Hashanah*, that Hashem will magnify our little deeds so that we shall all be worthy of His beneficence.