

Lechem Hapanim Balancing the Creation-Emor

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

Toward the end of the Parsha of Emor we read about the weekly setting up of the Lechem Hapanim, the twelve special showbreads in the Mishkan and later in the Bais Hamikdash. The breads were to be baked of fine flour and placed lengthwise along the width of the special golden table, six on top of each other on either side. Frankincense was also to be placed on this table between the columns of the breads. They would be baked on Friday and placed on Shabbos, replacing the breads of the previous week. When the breads were changed, the frankincense was burnt on the altar. This was done after the mussaf korbon of Shabbos. The breads that were taken off the table were then divided among the Kohanim, both those who served the previous week and those who were going to serve for the coming week. Miraculously, though these breads had been left out for an entire week, they would taste as fresh if they had just come out of the oven. The proportion of the division is a discussion in the Mishna Sukkah as one opinion states that they are divided equally and the other opinion is the incoming kohanim get the larger share.

The Sefer Hachinuch [Mitzvah 97 in Parshas Terumah] states that we need to have a mitzvah involving bread constantly because bread is the main source of food for mankind and this Mitzvah involving bread is medium for bracha in our food. This is applicable both to the quantity as well as the bracha of satisfaction with what we consume. This is similar to what the Gemara in Rosh Hashana 16A states that we have mitzvah of omer on Pesach to bring a bracha to the grain in the fields and the mitzvah of *Nisuch Hamayim* pouring water on the altar on Sukkos in order to have that we receive rains in their proper time and quantity. In the case of the lechem hapanim, bracha is sent on a weekly basis from the mitzvah. The altar receives the frankincense and the Kohanim, Hashem's ministers receive the breads. The frankincense, which has only scent and no taste, logically goes totally to Hashem since smell is a pleasure of the otherworldly neshama. The total act of Seder Lechem Hapanim serves to bring these brachos on us.

Rabbeinu Bachaya al Hatorah understands the burning of the frankincense on the altar in a similar way but also adds another insight into this Mitzvah. He states a number of times in his commentary as well as here that everything we find in the Torah that has the number twelve such as the twelve tribes corresponds to the twelve camps of Malachim around the *kise Habkavod* [Hashem's divine throne] and the twelve constellations in the skies. In fact, Rabbeinu Bachaya states that the very reason for layout of three tribes on each of the four sides which we had in the desert for camping and marching is a replication of the arrangement of the camps of malachim. Here too, the twelve breads correspond to these constellations and the camps of angels.

We see from all of the above the impact that every Mitzva has on the entire creation. Through the performance of all of Hashem's Mitzvos, both in and out of the Bais Hamikdash, we merit Hashem's brachos in everything that we do in all areas of life whether physical or spiritual and also help maintain the proper metaphysical balance of the universe. Sadly, we do not have a number of these mitzvos today but we can still try to maintain many of them through the recitation of the portions in the Torah about them as we do with the other daily korbonos whose sources in the Torah are included in our davening. Chazal derived this concept from the Pasuk in Hoshea 14: 3 'And let our lips substitute for the bulls [of korbonos]'. Some have a minhag to recite the parsha of the lechem hapanim immediately after mussaf on Shabbos morning. This is certainly a meritorious practice to help maintain the balance in the creation.