

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



EMOR

The Shabbat Shuffle

I love to bake! So, this week's Torah reading immediately interests me. Bread baking is front and center. We have the Mitzva of SHTEI HALECHEM on Shavuot (Vayikra 23:18, and the only communal offering which was CHAMETZ). Then we have, one chapter later, the Mitzva of LECHEM HAPANIM. These were 12 loaves of bread, which were Kasher L'Pesach, and were placed every week on the 12 shelved table in the outer room of the Mishkan, and were eaten by the kohanim every Shabbat.

My favorite baking is CHALOT for Shabbat. It really adds to my ONEG SHABBAT (enjoyment) to consume my own CHALOT at our Shabbat meals. Generally, I have two CHALOT, which is pretty normal. This custom is based on the double portion of manna which fell every Friday during the 40 year trek through the desert. But once in a while I'm baking for a large crowd, and I make a pull apart Challah (also called 'tear and share'), which will always have 12 sections to it. Why 12?

There is a mystical custom in the writings of the ARI HaKodesh which

demands that Jews have 12 Chalot at Shabbat meals, because we should recreate the 12 loaves of the Lechem HaPanim from the Beit HaMikdash. I've only been at a couple of Shabbat meals where this custom was observed, but I incorporate it into my pull apart Challah, and it's from this week's Parsha.

Many commentaries are curious about why the Lechem HaPanim Mitzva is placed here, towards the end of the book of Vayikra, because it seems like it should have been presented back in Sh'mot when the intricate Table which held them was described. There are similar questions about the Mitzva of lighting the oil, which precedes it here, but let's stay focused on the Bread.

The Malbim suggests that the Mitzva appears here because it should be connected to the Mitzva of the Shte HaLechem listed with the holidays in the preceding chapter.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch insists that the Lechem HaPanim (and the frankincense powder sprinkled upon it) acts as a declaration before God, which states: Although God is Creator and Master of the entire world, and He is the Father and King of all humanity, which Shabbat teaches us, nevertheless, God has entrusted the Jewish nation to be God's trusted representative in this world. This role has become for Israel an eternal and unique covenant.

The 12 Loaves connect the 12-Tribe Nation of Israel to God in a unique bond. This same extraordinary connection is the topic of our festivals. The Torah calendar declares this distinctive relationship, and, so, too, the Jewish week. Therefore, we have this Mitzva directly after the chapter of the holidays. The CHAGIM and the Shabbat are two different declarations of the bond between God and Israel.

Cool! But it's the S'fat Emet who, I believe, best describes both the status of the Lechem HaPanim and its placement here in the Parsha of Emor. He begins by describing the unusual way in which the kohanim placed the loaves on this unique 12 shelved table.

The loaves were baked in casts which made them look U shaped when observed from the side. The kohanim would slide the new loaves onto their individual shelf while simultaneously slipping the previous week's loaf from its perch. This 'shuffling' of the loaves assured that there was not an instant that the shelf was bare.

Why? Because these loaves serve as testimony to the uninterrupted Divine flow of SHEFA (plenty, bounty) from Heaven to Earth. This SHEFA descends on Shabbat for the entirety of Creation. But it flows through US, the Jews, God's chosen People. That's why they are called PANIM

('face bread'), because God is always 'facing' us, paying attention to us and looking out for our needs.

Then the S'fat Emet explains why it is so imperative that the Lechem HaPanim be included in this week's Torah reading. There are three aspects, perhaps sources, for KEDUSHA (holiness). KEDUSHA can be found in human beings (ADAM), in specific places or things (MAKOM) and in specific times (ZMAN). According to Rav Soloveitchik, this is why the angels declared: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts (Yeshayahu 6:3).

So, in this week's parsha, we have laws about holy people, namely kohanim. Then we have laws about holy times, chapter 23, the section of MO'ADIM. So, we now have laws about holy things, namely the oil lamps and the Lechem HaPanim.

The Rebbe then explains that these exceptional sources of KEDUSHA also appear in specific number patterns, because in Jewish thought numbers are distinctive and instructive. The Rebbe elucidates:

In the aspect of holy time there are:

1. Three pilgrimage festivals,
2. Sevedn days of the week,
3. Twelve new months.

In humanity:

- 1. Three Patriarchs,**
- 2. Seven shepherds,**
- 3. Twelve tribes.**

And in place:

- 1. The Altar, Table, and Menorah,**
- 2. Seven lamps,**
- 3. Twelve loaves.**

And, then the Rebbe concludes: God entrusted all this structure of divine governance into the hands of Israel. Even now, though the Temple has been destroyed, through the Torah and our observing its Laws, it is still possible to draw down Divine flow of influence and blessing in holiness.

We, too, should, therefore, resolve that our actions and behavior patterns can also be conduits for Kedusha and Divine bounty descending into this realm. Therefore, be good and honest and kind to people. Also, make Shabbat and Chagim special and meaningful times. But, why not also find things which you can imbue with meaning and Kedusha? Like Challah! Get baking!

