

## Dvar Torah - Parashas Terumah

**Rabbi Lawrence Teitelman**  
**Young Israel of Jackson Heights, NY**

This week we begin the series of parshiyos containing the architectural blueprints of the Mishkan and its constituent parts. In contrast, however, to ordinary construction plans that focus solely on aspects of engineering and design, the Torah herein addresses the purpose and functionality of the commissioned holy utensils. Concluding its description of the Shulchan (Shemos 25:23-30), the Torah prescribes that the Lechem ha-Panim (showbread) -- as its name implies -- be continually displayed upon this sacred stand: "Ve-nasata al ha-shulchan lechem panim lefanay tamid." Moreover, this divine instruction, recorded for posterity among the 613 Commandments (Sefer ha-Chinukh 97; Rambam, Aseh 27 and Temidin u-Musafin Ch. 5), seemingly exists not merely as an independent obligation but rather as the Shulchan's *raison d'être* in the Mishkan. (See Minchas Chinukh who observes that the mitzva is the arrangement of the loaves, while the Shulchan is "mi-dinei ha-mitzva," just one detail in the performance.)

That the loaves require perpetual presence merits significant attention within the Halakha, and the policies instituted to absolutely guarantee this continuum are rather astonishing. The Talmud Bavli (Chagiga 26b) cautions us to avoid contact with the Shulchan lest it become ritually impure, as total immersion in mikva waters would necessarily displace the loaves from their designated positions. The Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:3) deems a temporarily abandoned Shulchan as such a serious deviation that, in the absence of fresh bread, it permits the reuse of the old loaves despite denoting them as *pesulim* (unfit). Finally, in an effort to ensure the uninterrupted occupancy of the Shulchan, the Mishna (Menachot 99b) outlines a procedure by which the new loaves actually discharge the previous ones, thereby eliminating any potentially vacant moment.

The Sefer ha-Chinukh asserts that any preoccupation motivated by a desire to fulfill G-d's word generates good fortune in that area. Citing parallels from the *nissukh ha-mayim* (water libations) and *korban ha-omer* (barley sacrifice) and their respective connections to an abundance of rain and grain, he argues that since mankind's staple item of sustenance is bread, it is essential to actively and consistently engage in a related mitzva. Thus, the Lechem ha-Panim offers us an ongoing opportunity to physically sustain ourselves in this fashion.

The Sefer ha-Chinukh's observation about the prominence of bread suggests yet another insight into the symbolism of the Lechem ha-Panim in general, and the insistence on constancy in particular. The intense human desire for bread - as the paradigmatic food staple - must serve not only as an incentive for our involvement in mitzvos, but also as the standard to which we must hold our involvement. Just as the proverbial "man of the street" ceaselessly toils to "put food on the table", a "man of the Torah" must direct his every moment to the pursuit of his religious ideals.

It has been noted that Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayyim, the authoritative body of law governing our daily affairs, commences with "shivisi Hashem le-negdi samid" (Rema 1:1, citing Tehillim 16:8) and concludes with "tov lev mishteh samid" (Rema 697:1, based on Mishlei 15:15). While a religious imperative to be completely aware of G-d's omnipresence and simultaneously obsessed with parties may at first glance appear paradoxical, there is one obvious element in common: the need for *temidus*, constancy. If the Torah demands of us certain fundamental patterns of thought or modes of behavior, then they must be indelibly embedded in our minds and personalities and not subject to the ebbs and tides of personal whim.

While "man does not live on bread alone" (Devarim 8:3), the constant and compulsive quest for "bread" is an effective model for our Avodas Hashem -- "for by all that emerges from the mouth of G-d does man live."