



PARSHAS EMOR – SH'TEI HALECHEM – MR GERSHON HEPNER

As we count up to Shovuos, this week's Sedra details one of the most unusual Mitzvos of the Beis HaMikdosh that takes place on Shovuos.

The Possuk commands us to bring a "Mincho Chadosh". This is a flour based offering that is defined as "new". It comes together with a group of animal Korbonos that are quite separate from the standard animal offerings that form the Yom Tov Korban Mussaf.

What is this "Mincho Chadosh", and what does it represent?

Prior to Shovuos, wheat is harvested, crushed and milled for the purpose of this offering. No fewer than twelve graded sieves are used to ensure that the flour is of the finest quality. From this flour, two individual loaves of bread ("Sh'tei HaLechem") are kneaded, and then baked in the Beis HaMikdosh bakery. They look quite different from anything we would see on sale today; being flat and oblong in shape, with protrusions at each of the four corners. The dimensions of each loaf measure 7 tefochim by 4 tefochim (which approximates to 56cm by 32cm).

The loaves are used in two separate "waving" rituals. In the first, a Cohen sandwiches two living lambs between them, and waves them rather like we wave our Arba Minim, in six directions. This procedure is repeated after the Shechita of the lambs; this time with the loaves sandwiching particular cuts of the meat.

One of the most remarkable aspects of these loaves is that they are deliberately baked as Chometz. Of all the thirteen different types of Korban Mincho, this is the only one that is baked as Chometz. As a direct corollary, no part of this Korban is burnt on the Mizbe'ach, rather it is eaten in its entirety by Cohanim within the confines of the Beis HaMikdosh. One loaf is given to the Cohen Godol, while the other is shared between all twenty four groups of Cohanim, on duty over Yom Tov.

The Ramban connects this Korban to that of a Korban Todah, the thanksgiving offering. Both of these are comprised of an animal offering combined with accompanying loaves. The Ramban explains that as Shovuos follows the agricultural harvest season, we express our gratitude to HaShem for providing us with a successful crop. Furthermore, on the anniversary of Matan Torah, we express our thanks to HaShem for the Eternal Gift that is the Torah.

The term "Mincha Chadosh" is a Halachic one. These loaves are the first Menochos of the season to be baked from the newly harvested crop. With the exception of the Korban Omer brought from fresh barley on the second day of Pesach, no other Mincha may be brought from the new crop until after these loaves are offered.

The Kli Yokor gives an additional insight into the term "Chadosho". As Shovuos commemorates the giving of the Torah, we are reminded of the saying that the Torah should not appear stale to us, but rather "Yiheyu Be'Eynecho KaChadoshin" - it should constantly excite us as something fresh and novel. This is hinted in the Torah's description of the two loaves as a "Mincho Chadosh".

The Kli Yokor adds that it is specifically on the anniversary of Matan Torah that we have a Korban Mincha made of Chometz. In Berochos (17a) the Yetzer Horah is famously compared to "se'or she'b'isa" - "the yeast in the dough". Like yeast increases the volume of dough by merely adding air, so too the Yetzer Horah can blow a situation out of all proportion, in order to make an Aveiro appear an attractive proposition. The Torah was presented to Bnei Yisroel as an antidote to our Yetzer Horah, and as a means to control it. When the angels challenged Moshe's right to the Torah, his winning argument against them was, "Do you have a Yetzer Horah?!". Matan Torah represents the subjugation of the Yetzer Horah, and it is on the anniversary of Matan Torah that these Chometz loaves are consumed.

The Oruch HaShulchon (Orach Chaim 489:3) explains the significance of the Sefiras HaOmer period commencing with the Korban Omer and ending with the Korban Sh'tei HaLechem. The Korban Omer is made from barley, while the Sh'tei HaLechem are baked from wheat flour. Barley is traditionally used as animal fodder, corresponding to the undisciplined and unschooled nature of B'nei Yisroel when they left Egypt. They had not yet received the Torah, and their character could be likened to that of an animal. Seven weeks later, they received the Torah at Har Sinai, and were instantly transformed into refined human beings. This is represented by the Korban Sh'tei HaLechem which is comprised of wheat, a food traditionally eaten by Man.

We look forward to the arrival of Moshiach, so that we may once again witness and be part of the Avoda in the Beis HaMikdosh.