

EMOR

THE BLASPHEMER'S BATTLE

The most familiar section of *parashas Emor* is the synopsis of the Jewish holidays. Perhaps lesser well-known is the description of the *Lechem HaPanim* (showbreads), the twelve breads prepared weekly in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) that miraculously stayed fresh for up to nine days before the *cohanim* would eat them. Immediately following the *Lechem HaPanim* section, we read the fascinating story of the *mekalleil* (the blasphemer). The narrative reads as follows:

The son of an Israelite woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man – among the Children of Israel; they fought in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and an Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name [of G-d] and blasphemed – so they brought him to Moshe; the name of his mother was Shelomis daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan. They placed him under guard to clarify for themselves through Hashem.³⁰²

This enigmatic anecdote poses many questions. Who is this individual that cursed Hashem? What actually happened? What motivated this individual to commit such a shocking offense against G-d? The sequence of the *parashah* is also puzzling. Why does this vignette immediately succeed the description of the *Lechem HaPanim*? What lessons can we glean from this incident?

Whodunnit?

One fascinating aspect of this account is the noticeable omission of the blasphemer's name. However, his family background is hinted to in the *pesukim*. The text states, “*vehu ben ish Mitzri* (he was the son of an Egyptian man).”³⁰³ The word “*Mitzri*” implies an Egyptian male, since an Egyptian female is called “*Mitzris*.”³⁰⁴ Therefore, the word “*ish* (man)” appears redundant. Rashi explains³⁰⁵ that the phrase “*ish Mitzri*” alludes to the individual labeled “*ish Mitzri*” in a previous incident in the Torah: “*Vayar ish Mitzri makeh ish Ivri mei’echav* (and [Moshe] saw an Egyptian man striking an Israelite man, of his brothers).”³⁰⁶ The blasphemer in *parashas Emor* is the son of that *ish Mitzri*, the Egyptian man Moshe killed before fleeing to Midyan.

The *pesukim* also divulge the antagonist's mother by name. “*Vesheim immo Shelomis bas Divri lemateh Dan* (and his mother's name was Shelomis daughter of Divri from the tribe of Dan).”³⁰⁷ Rashi elaborates³⁰⁸ that the Torah singles her out in order to praise *Bnei Yisrael* for their family purity; throughout the years of slavery in Egypt, this woman was the only Jew to have relations with an Egyptian. Mentioning her name bears noteworthy testimony to the morality and loyalty of the Jewish people during their years in *Mitzrayim*.

By revealing her name, the Torah exposes some of her character flaws. Her father's name, Divri, relates to the term *devarim* (words); this connection also alludes to how she would speak with everybody, a habit that ultimately led to her immoral

303 *Vayikra* 24:10.

304 *Gur Aryeh* on Rashi.

305 Rashi's Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:10, quoting *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:4.

306 *Shemos* 2:11.

307 *Vayikra* 24:11.

308 Rashi's Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:11.

behavior.³⁰⁹ The name Shelomis hints at her immodest tendency to talk to men without discretion; she was too free with her greetings, addressing everyone with “*Shalom, shalom.*”³¹⁰

In two short verses, the Torah discloses the dishonorable family roots of the blasphemer in our story. His father is “*ish Mitzri,*” the merciless Egyptian taskmaster that Moshe foresaw would never bear worthy offspring. *Ish Mitzri* died instantly when Moshe pronounced Hashem’s name.³¹¹ The blasphemer’s mother was Shelomis *bas* Divri, an immodest Jewish woman who engaged in conversations with men, the only woman to have relations with an Egyptian during the sojourn in *Mitzrayim*. The blasphemer in our *parashah* is the child born out of wedlock to these two individuals.

With background information about the main character, we are better prepared to analyze this incident in depth. Note the unusual introductory words of the narrative: “*Vayeitzei ben ishab Yisraelis* (and the son of an Israelite woman went out).”³¹² It would be more natural for the text to begin with an account of the argument that preceded the cursing. Instead, the passage begins with “*Vayeitzei,*” implying that the “going out” was the impetus of the whole incident.

The verb *vayeitzei* remains ambiguous. Rashi presents our question: “From where did he go out?”³¹³ He offers a three-part explanation, based on the *Midrash*. The first answer is as follows: Rabbi Levy says, “He went out of his world.” This approach connects the last word of the previous verse with the first word of our verse. Verse nine ends with the word “*olam* (world).” Rabbi

309 *ibid.*

310 Rashi quoting *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5.

311 Rashi’s Commentary on *Sbemos* 2:12.

312 *Vayikra* 24:10.

313 Rashi’s Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:10.

Levy concludes that “*vayetzet*” relates to “*olam*”: he went out from his world – he left it.

Rashi’s second answer is as follows: Rabbi Berechyah says, “He went out of the passage above. He scoffed and said, ‘On the Sabbath he shall arrange it?! It is the practice of the king to eat warm bread every day. Might [a king eat] cold, nine-day old bread?’ [He said] in astonishment.” This approach explains the juxtaposition of the blasphemer incident and the description of the *Lechem HaPanim*. This individual mocked the practice of the *Lechem HaPanim*, that it was baked on Friday and eaten more than a week later. His irreverent remark caused the argument in the camp.

The third position offered by Rashi uncovers more details of the story: “A *baraisa* (a *mishnah* not included in the six *sedarim* of the *Mishnah*) says that he went out (i.e. left) [of] the court of Moshe with a guilty verdict. He attempted to pitch his tent in the camp of Dan. They said to him, ‘What is your relevance here?’ He said to them, ‘I am from the sons of Dan.’ They said to him, ‘Each man at his banner, by signs, to their paternal house – it is written.’ He entered the court of Moshe and he went out guilty. He got up and he blasphemed.”

This individual wanted to claim his place in the tribe of Dan, since his mother was a Danite. The tribe of Dan proved to him, from a *pasuk*, that tribal association is determined by the paternal lineage. An argument ensued, and this individual appeared before Moshe to claim his right to pitch his tent in the area allotted to the tribe of Dan. He lost the case, and subsequently cursed G-d.

Rashi typically offers multiple explanations in the form of “*davar acher*” (alternative explanation). When the first answer seems incomplete, Rashi offers another. Interestingly, on this verse, Rashi provides the three above answers without this disclaimer of *davar acher*. Rabbi Shimon Schwab elaborates³¹⁴ on how these three seemingly diverse approaches are actually not alternative

314 Rabbi Shimon Schwab, *Ma’ayan Beis Hasho’evah*, p. 291.

interpretations, rather the interconnected parts of one complete explanation.

This individual “left his world,” meaning he left a place of *emunas* Hashem. Only a person who believes in Hashem is able to appreciate His wonders; such as the miracle of the *Lechem HaPanim*, that nine-day-old bread can be hot and fresh as the day it was baked. This individual left his world of *emunah* and adopted a heretical perspective, denying Hashem’s miracles. The tribe of Dan refused to accept him, not just on *halachic* (legal) grounds but for ethical reasons. They did not want to be exposed to his negative influence, and Moshe agreed with their position. The rejection then caused this individual to curse Hashem.

Point of Departure

From where does Rabbi Schwab deduce that “*vayeitzei*” means metaphorically leaving his world of belief in Hashem? As was mentioned above, Rabbi Levy’s answer attaches the word “*olam*” (the last word of the previous verse) to our first word “*vayeitzei*.” Interestingly, the word “*olam*” in the previous verse is part of the expression “*chok olam* (eternal decree),” and does not translate as “world” in this context. Instead of a noun, “*olam*” is used as an adjective meaning “eternal.” Our Sages explain the concept of “leaving his world” homiletically; cursing Hashem was a sin through which this man lost his future in *Olam Haba* – the eternal world.³¹⁵ Cursing Hashem is compared to idolatry, because it denies the very foundation of *emunas Hashem*. The severe punishment for both offenses is *kareis* (spiritual excision) – his soul is “cut off from among his people.”³¹⁶ The blasphemer forfeits his

315 *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:3.

316 *Bamidbar* 15:30.

share in *Olam Haba*.

The word *olam* shares the same letters has *elem* (hidden). Rabbi Munk elaborates³¹⁷ how each person is an *olam katan* (small world). A G-dly soul is hidden within the microcosm of the human being. The Radal explains³¹⁸ that the blasphemer exited the world of his soul, thereby separating from the aspect of Hashem that is hidden within him. *Sefer HaChinuch* states³¹⁹ that cursing Hashem is equivalent to effacing the *tzelem Elokim* (image of G-d) in a person.

The reality of *Olam Hazeib* is the danger of becoming a stranger to yourself and being disconnected from your inner essence.³²⁰ “Exiting your world” means distancing yourself from your inner holiness. According to Rav Shlomo Wolbe,³²¹ this is the message of *Tishab B’Av*, when we read *Megillas Eichab*. The opening word, “*Eichab*,” has the same letters as “*Ayeka?* Where are you?” *Eichab* alludes to Hashem asking *Adam HaRishon*, “Where are you?”³²² This question is addressed to a person who is lost because he has left his spiritual place.

Our Sages attribute negative connotations to many of the *pesukim* in which the concept of “*yetzi’ab*” appears.³²³ In addition to the blasphemer, the Torah cites the famous cases of “*yetzi’ab*” with Leah³²⁴ and Dina,³²⁵ in which the act of departure was the

³¹⁷ Rabbi Elie Munk, *Call of the Torah*, p. 291.

³¹⁸ *ibid*.

³¹⁹ *Sefer HaChinuch, Mishpatim, mitzvah 70*.

³²⁰ Rav Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, p. 234.

³²¹ *Alei Shur*, p. 411.

³²² *Sanhedrin* 38b.

³²³ Of notable exception is the case of Yaakov *Avinu* in *parashas Vayeitze*. Rashi interprets the emphasis on Yaakov’s departure as highlighting the impact of a *tzaddik* on his place of residence. The word “*vayeitze*” here indicates the effect Yaakov’s exit had on Be’er Sheva, and does not make a negative statement about Yaakov’s actions *per se*.

³²⁴ *Bereishis* 30:16.

catalyst for subsequent calamity. The *Midrash* criticizes Leah, labeling her “*yatzani*” (one who frequently goes out).³²⁶ Dina is also viewed unfavorably for inheriting this immodest quality from her mother. Similarly, in our case, the cause of the blasphemer incident was “*vayeitzei ben ishab Yisraelis* (and the son of an Israelite woman went out).”³²⁷

How is “*vayeitzei*” an indicator of immodesty in the case of a male antagonist? Men generally have a more public role in society; “going out” is more befitting a man than a woman. What other negative connotations are implied by “*vayeitzei ben ishab Yisraelis* (and the son of an Israelite woman went out)?”³²⁸ Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, quoting Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, brings³²⁹ the case of *yetzit’ab* by men from *parashas Ki Seitze*: “*Ki seitzei lamilchamah al oivecha* (when you go out to war against your enemy).”³³⁰ This verse speaks about a voluntary war. Our Sages teach that the participants of this kind of battle were on a very high spiritual level, possessing intense *yiras Shamayim*.³³¹

So what was wrong with their “going out” if they were so fearful of sin, and clearly not acting immodestly? States Rabbi Yechezkel, that when a person leaves his place, he is no longer sure of himself. *Yetzit’ab* means leaving the security of “your place” or “your comfort zone”; it is a precarious situation in which even righteous people become vulnerable and more susceptible to sin.

Leaving one’s place is always fraught with challenges. One’s reality is intertwined with one’s environment. Leaving that familiar environment necessitates making an adjustment to new surroundings. A person’s focus shifts from his internal spiritual reality to his external physical reality. Consider what happens when summer arrives and people go on vacation. Do we keep the

325 *Bereishis* 34:1.

326 *Bereishis Rabbah* 80:1.

327 *Vayikra* 24:10.

328 *ibid.*

329 Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Shi’urei Chumash*, p. 234.

330 *Devarim* 21:10.

331 *Sotah* 44b.

same standards of *kasbrus* and *tzni'us* when we go on vacation? When the physical environment is different, human tendency is to abandon established routine as well. Do we keep the same Torah learning schedule when we are not in our community?

Our Sages emphasize the importance of knowing our place in this world.³³² The spiritual quality of our present environment ultimately affects our place in the Eternal World. The community in which we place ourselves needs to be conducive for striving in *avodas Hashem* to the best of our personal ability. Our world – our physical surroundings – helps us determine our place, namely, our unique mission in this world.

The *Mishnah* states,³³³ “There is no thing without its place.” Rabbi Twerski points³³⁴ out that many people have low self-esteem, and as a result are discontented with their place. They are jealous of someone else’s life circumstances, thinking, *I wish I was in his/her place*. These individuals push themselves where they do not belong, simply because they do not know their place.

To discover our unique mission in the world, we need to know ourselves. Rabbi Akiva Tatz suggests³³⁵ the following exercise as an aid in defining one’s life work. Draw a circle; inside that circle, list all of your natural abilities and strengths, no matter how small. Outside the circle, write all of your weaknesses. Detail every quality or talent you wish you had. Study the contents inside the circle; now use those tools to the best of your ability, because they will help you define your life’s work. Do not spend energy on anything outside the circle; these items are just fantasy. Anything needed for your role, Hashem has given you. Focusing on what you are not is a futile endeavor, because you are simply longing to have someone else’s role.

332 Rabbi Abraham Twerski, *Visions of the Fathers*, p. 372.

333 *Pirkei Avos* 4:3.

334 *Visions of the Fathers*, p. 372.

335 Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *The Jewish Teenager’s Guide to Life*, pp. 80-81.

The most necessary and difficult part of this exercise is to stay within the circle and not look outside of it constantly.³³⁶ It is difficult to achieve anything if one is unclear about where to invest one's energy. The challenge lies in our reluctance to admit that our possibilities are finite. A childhood mentality wants to leave all opportunities open. A child holding an ice cream cone in each hand will be tormented when offered a third one. He is not satisfied with the abundance he has, because he is saddened by his limitation of having only two hands! A critical part of knowing our place is knowing who we are to begin with so that we can grow into who we are meant to become.

Who Am I?

The above discussion enables us to clarify the psychological subtext of the blasphemer in our story. *Vayeitzei ben isbah Yisraelis* (and the son of an Israelite woman went out), *vehu ben ish Mitzri* (he was the son of an Egyptian man), *besoch Bnei Yisrael* (among the children of Israel).³³⁷ This man went out from his place and did not know where he belonged. This was an unsettled person, unclear about his circle, his mission.

The verses illustrate his identity crisis. He is called both the “son of an Israelite woman” and “son of an Egyptian man.” Was he Jewish or Egyptian? Rashi explains³³⁸ that the inclusion of the phrase *besoch Bnei Yisrael* indicates that he converted. Prior to *kabbalas haTorah*, Jewish identity was determined by the paternal line. According to the Ramban, this son of an Egyptian father participated in the mass national conversion prior to the Sinai

³³⁶ *ibid.*

³³⁷ *Vayikra* 24:10.

³³⁸ Rashi's Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:10.

experience. After *Matan Torah*, however, the ruling changed and a person's religious status was now inherited from the mother's lineage.

The personal crisis became manifest in the argument that ensued. Where should he put his tent? When this man became a Jew through conversion, he did not attempt to encamp with the tribe of Dan. Only after *Matan Torah* was Jewishness inherited from the mother. This individual now wanted his Jewish status to be connected to his mother's side, giving him rightful claim to a place in the tribe of Dan.

Clearly this is not a superficial discussion about where to put a tent, but a deeper question of "*Where is my place?*" His questioning is manifest in challenging the practice of *Lechem HaPanim*. From a different angle than the one brought above, it's almost as if he sees his identity in the same imagery. *Look at this old bread that seems so new! Why did I have to convert and become completely new? My Jewish mother is from the tribe of Dan. Old bread can be new bread!*

If this individual was experiencing an emotional crisis, why did not *shevet Dan* accept him with open arms? The *Ne'os Desheb* asks,³³⁹ "Where was the *bachnasas orchim* (hospitality) of *Klal Yisrael*?" Does not the Torah obligate us to uplift others spiritually?

As its name indicates, the tribe of Dan embodies the *middah* of *din* – strict justice. Its essence prevents them from operating *lifnim mishuras hadin* (above the strict letter of the law).³⁴⁰ Furthermore, the members of the tribe of Dan understood that this individual's identity struggle was not sparked by altruistic motives. He was not expressing a sincere desire to serve Hashem, but rather abandoning his place – namely, abandoning his perspective of *emunah*. From this viewpoint, he mocked the *Lechem HaPanim*. The tribe of Dan did not want this heretic to have a

339 Rabbi Dovid Shneur, *Ne'os Desheb*, p. 125.

340 Rabbi Moshe Reiss, *Mesillos BeTanach*, p.199.

negative influence on their children; they observed the instruction to distance oneself from a *shachen ra* (bad neighbor).³⁴¹

Our verse can now be interpreted as follows: *Vayeitzei* – He went out of his place. *Ben ishab Yisraelis vehu ben ish Mitzri* – He confused his Jewish and Egyptian identity – *besoch Bnei Yisrael* – and abandoned his Jewish conversion. This man began to attach to the traits of his Egyptian father, the *ish Mitzri* who was a Jew-hater.³⁴²

Upon closer analysis, we discover an even deeper connection between the *ish Mitzri* and the blasphemer – between father and son. When Moshe saw the *ish Mitzri*, the merciless Egyptian taskmaster striking a Jewish slave, the verse states “*vayar ki ein ish* (and he saw that there was no man).” Rashi deduces³⁴³ that Moshe foresaw with Divine prophecy that no offspring from this Egyptian would ever convert. Does Rashi later contradict his own words by stating that this Egyptian’s son converted? ³⁴⁴ In truth, no offspring of that *ish Mitzri* ever had an enduring, genuine conversion. Moshe’s prophecy saw to the ultimate end, when the blasphemer would abandon his conversion. Furthermore, the *ish Mitzri* died instantly when Moshe pronounced Hashem’s secret name. His son, too, suffered a similar fate when he blasphemed Hashem’s Holy Name.

What prompted this man to abandon his Jewish identity and revert to his Egyptian roots? Why was he so unsettled? What motivates a person to lose his place in the world? The antagonist of our story was somehow not in touch with his spark of G-dliness attained through conversion. Low self-esteem is often a result of not being aware of one’s spiritual potential and the greatness of

341 *ibid.*

342 *Shemos* 2:11.

343 Rashi’s Commentary on *Shemos* 2:12.

344 Rashi’s Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:10.

one's soul. He was dissatisfied with his place as a convert. A person gets lost by losing touch with his inner self.

Sarcasm's Sword

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz asks³⁴⁵ how a Jew could fall so low. An identity crisis is only the first level; cursing Hashem is hitting rock-bottom, because it denies the foundations of faith. Rabbi Shmulevitz explains that there are two ways to falter in *avodas Hashem*. When a person is in a secure Torah environment, the *yetzer hara* cannot cause a person to sin suddenly. Instead, the *yetzer hara* has to convince a person to take small steps, allowing for occasional slight leniencies that gradually cause a person to transgress more seriously. We might call this the “slippery slope” effect. One does not even realize one is sliding until one is almost at the bottom.

A second method of the *yetzer hara* is to create a very small opening in a specific area that is almost impossible to control. According to Rabbi Shmulevitz, that area is called “*leitzanus*” (mockery). The downfall of the blasphemer began with his scoffing at the *Lechem HaPanim*. The danger of *leitzanus* is that it unlocks all the gates, all the natural control mechanisms of a person's will.³⁴⁶ Once a person starts mocking, almost nothing will be able to save him.

The destructive nature of *leitzanus* can be likened to torn cloth. A tiny hole in a cloth that is left unattended will expand uncontrollably into a gaping hole, until the cloth is ripped apart completely. One of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe's students once complimented him on a powerful talk, stating that no one could

³⁴⁵ As quoted by Rabbi Moshe Price, *Mizakeinim Esbonan*, p. 103.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

possibly refute it. Rabbi Wolbe answered as follows: “Do you really think no one can refute it? I can refute it. And it will not take much, either. Listen: ha, ha, ha. One word of mockery can counteract one hundred rebukes.”³⁴⁷

How can an individual refute something that is an objective truth? If the *Lechem HaPanim* was hot and steaming before the blasphemer’s eyes, how could he mock it? Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz explains³⁴⁸ that another danger of *leitʿanus* is how it causes a person to lose their *da’as* (sense of logic). The world was created for people to use their minds.

Vayeitzei – “He went out of his world.”³⁴⁹ This expression can mean that he lost his balanced thinking through mockery. *Mesillas Yesharim* compares³⁵⁰ the power of *leitʿanus* to oil on a shield. Just as arrows slide off an oiled shield, the obvious truth slides off of a scoffer. *Leitʿanus* makes a person deaf to logical reasoning, and also influences others to follow suit. As mentioned above, just one word of mockery can deflate the effectiveness of a rebuke.

Once a person has lost his *da’as*, he can convince himself of anything. Rabbi Avraham Schorr cites³⁵¹ the *Imrei Emes*, arguing that the blasphemer’s flaw was in his outlook. He did not observe the miracle of the *Lechem HaPanim* objectively, but rather perceived it from a mocking perspective. His observations were tainted by his disbelieving attitude. When a person looks at everything with *kerirus* (coldness), he can perceive day as night and vice versa. Since heresy stems from an emotional problem, it is by definition illogical.³⁵² One can see fresh, hot bread, and still argue that it’s stale and cold.

347 Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon, *With Hearts Full of Faith*, p. 155.

348 Rabbi Chaim Leib HaLevi Shmuelevitz, *Sichos Mussar*, p. 338.

349 Rashi’s Commentary on *Vayikra* 24:10.

350 As quoted in *Sichos Mussar*, p. 338.

351 Rabbi Avraham Schorr, *HaLekach VeHalibuv*, p. 119.

352 See chapter on *Behar*.

Breadwinner

An important detail remains unaddressed. Why was the *Lechem HaPanim* the specific target of his mockery? Examining the symbolism of the *Lechem HaPanim* will offer a window into the psyche of the blasphemer. Rabbi Uziel Milevsky elaborates³⁵³ on how the act of cursing is associated with coldness and distance. Blessing, by contrast, is associated with warmth and closeness. The literal translation of *Lechem HaPanim* is “face-bread,” because the sides of the loaves bent up to face each other.

The word *panim* is related to the word *penim* (inside). A person’s face reveals what he feels inside. The *Lechem HaPanim* had the power to reveal the spiritual level of the *cobanim*. If the bread tasted fresh, it meant that his soul was in “spiritual alignment” so to speak. The blasphemer ridiculed this spiritual aspect of *Lechem HaPanim*. He denied the ability of a person to feel such a warm closeness with Hashem, or, homiletically speaking, that nine-day-old bread could taste warm and fresh.

The ultimate question remains: Why? What was the root cause of his *leitẓanus*? Why did he mock this ability to achieve closeness with Hashem? Unfortunately, he ridiculed it because he did not have it. His conversion was not complete; in that he did not establish a relationship with his Creator. Without this connection to Hashem, he felt cold and distant. The *Lechem HaPanim* represented that which he lacked.

Rabbi Schorr points out³⁵⁴ the reason that those who came on *aliyah laregel* (pilgrimage to Jerusalem) on the festivals would be shown the *Lechem HaPanim*. The Gemara states that the *cobanim* would raise the *Shulchan* full of *Lechem HaPanim* and say, “Behold and see your love before G-d.”³⁵⁵ Why specifically the *Lechem HaPanim*? The *Pri Tzaddik* explains³⁵⁶ that the miracle that took place with the *Lechem HaPanim*, as compared to any other miracle of the *Beis HaMikdash*, represented Hashem’s great love for *Bnei*

³⁵³ Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, *Ner Uziel*, p. 106.

³⁵⁴ *HaLekach VeHaLibuv*, p. 119.

³⁵⁵ *Chagigah* 26b.

³⁵⁶ *HaLekach VeHaLibuv*, p. 119.

Yisrael. The main purpose of *aliyah laregel* was for a Jew to strengthen his connection to Hashem; seeing the *Lechem HaPanim* would remind him in a tangible way of Hashem's love for the Jewish People.

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson underscores the message of *Lechem HaPanim*.³⁵⁷ Old bread can be fresh. Hashem loves us and we are special. Divine love is supreme, because it is not dependent on the spiritual state of the Jewish people. Incredibly, the argument of the blasphemer is similar to that of the *Purim* story's antagonist – Haman. The *Gemara* interprets³⁵⁸ the names of Achashveirosh's ministers, each hinting at different aspects of the Temple service. Haman's alternate name, Memuchan, is interpreted as follows: “*Kelum beichinu lefanecha Lechem HaPanim?* (Did the non-Jews bring you showbread? – a question asked by the Heavenly angels.)”

Haman's criticism of Klal Yisrael was, “*Yeshno am echad* (there is a certain people).”³⁵⁹ As mentioned in the chapter on *parashas Tzav*, our Sages note³⁶⁰ that the letters of “*yeshno*” (there is) are the same letters as “*yashnu*” (they slept). Haman recognized that the Jewish nation was spiritually sleeping. Just as the blasphemer denied the inherent *kedushah* of the tribes of Israel, so did Haman refute the unique, loving relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*, as represented by the *Lechem HaPanim*.³⁶¹

This concept of the Hashem's unconditional love for us is the message of *Purim*, when Hashem saved us despite our spiritual weakness. It is not by accident that *Purim* and *Lag Ba'Omer* fall on the same day of week.³⁶² *Lag Ba'Omer* marks the passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, who taught us that every Jew is special. Every Jew should know this wondrous secret, that G-d loves every individual Jew. *Purim* and *Lag Ba'Omer* share the same lesson

357 Rabbi Moshe Wolfson, *Emunas Ittecha* on *Lag Ba'Omer*, p. 50.

358 *Megillah* 12b.

359 *Esther* 3:8.

360 *Megillah* 136a.

361 *Emunas Ittecha* on *Lag Ba'Omer*, p. 50.

362 *ibid*.

that Haman and the blasphemer tried to rebuff. The message is that of the showbread: we might think we are old and stale, but in Hashem's eyes we are always fresh and new.

Lessons for Us

What relevance does the blasphemer story have to our lives? What can we learn from the details of the incident? How can we avoid the same tragedy?

First, we must know our place. It is critical that we use our talents to the best of our ability to fulfill our unique mission in the world. We should not waste energy envying the role that others have in this world. Second, we need to be aware of the dangers of *leitzanus* and avoid this pitfall. Mockery is an area that is so difficult to control, and it should be avoided at all costs. Third, we need to recognize the source of *leitzanus* as a feeling of distance from Hashem. Let us always remember Hashem's love for us, as represented by the miracle of the *Lechem HaPanim*.

May we strengthen our relationship with Hashem, until the Day of Redemption, when Hashem will bless us with His ultimate closeness.