

TORAH STUDY T'TZAVEH

D'Var Torah By: Rabbi Ana Bonnheim

... "It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time, throughout the ages" (Exodus 27:20-21).

In this statement, the Torah suggests that the *ner tamid* should not be considered a light for practical use but rather something that represents devotion to God. This is not the only place that Jewish tradition draws a distinction between lights kindled for sacramental purposes and regular lights used, say, to illuminate a room.

Generations of Jewish commentators have understood these verses about the creation of and care for the *ner tamid* as more than just another set of details about Tabernacle architecture. Instead, they view the *ner tamid* metaphorically, as an eternal light of connection to God and to Judaism's primary tenets.

The Rabbis used the concept of the *ner tamid* to symbolize the limitlessness and constancy of light, and suggest that the *ner tamid* is a metaphor for the light within us all — not just the light of godliness, so often referenced in Jewish tradition, but also light that is infinite, shareable, and the source of goodness, for us to bring forth into the world.

Oil, Wick, Vessel, Flame

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

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Few sights are as warming to the soul as the sight of a burning flame. Though a physical phenomenon, the flame — luminous, pure, ethereal — is everything the physical is not; hence its appeal to man, a spiritual being ensnared in a material world.

But the flame is more than a symbol of spirituality. The flame is our own mirror, in which are reflected the strivings of our deepest self. In the words of the author of Proverbs, "The soul of man is a lamp of G-d."

To realize its role as a "lamp of G-d," a human life must be a lamp that combines a physical existence (the "wick") with the divine ideas and deeds of Torah (the "oil"). When the wick is saturated with oil and feeds its spiritual yearnings with a steady supply of the same, the resultant flame is both luminous and sustainable, preserving the existence and productivity of the wick and illuminating the corner of the world in which has been placed.

D'Var Torah By: Beth Kalisch

In our contemporary synagogues, the *ner tamid* is most often seen as symbolizing God's Presence in the sanctuary.

But it's not clear that the *ner tamid* of our Torah portion serves the same purpose. While the entire Tabernacle is a dwelling place for God, the first verse of *T'tzaveh* describes the *ner tamid* not as an answer that God gives us, but rather, as something we give to God, "a due from the Israelites for all time." The light is less a symbol for God's Presence than a requisite for that Presence.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught that Judaism is based most deeply not in our human question — "God, are you there?" — but rather in God's question, first posed to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and to all of us since: "Where are you?"

"This is the mysterious paradox of Biblical faith," Rabbi Heschel wrote. ". . . the Bible speaks not only of man's search for God but also of *God's search for man*. . . . It is as if God were unwilling to be alone, and He had chosen man to serve Him."²

We are asked, every day, to find the faith to answer God's eternal question. We are asked, every day, to build a world fit for God to dwell in. We are asked to light the *ner tamid*, to kindle it eternally.