

Tetzaveh and Shabbat Zachor

The Ner Tamid

At the outset of this week's Sedra, Moses is commanded to take pure pressed olive oil with which to light the Eternal lamp on the Menorah in the Tabernacle. One of the Midrashic comments is that G-d does not need the light of the Menorah, so why was the lamp kindled daily in the Temple?

In addition we kindle the *Ner Tamid* in our contemporary Synagogues above the Ark as a remembrance of the original Eternal Lamp. What does this represent?

In this little article I want to discuss the metaphor of light and how it is employed to describe various facets of Judaism.

Light is used as an illustration of how G-d manifests Himself to His creations. In the Priestly blessing we read: (Numbers 6:25) *"May G-d cause his countenance to shine upon you and be gracious unto you"*. In Isaiah (Chapter 60:3): *"And nations shall go by your light, and kings by the brilliance of your shine"*. In Psalm Chapter 27, the Psalm begins: *"G-d is my light and my salvation"*. In numerous places in our prayers, G-d is depicted in terms of light, *"Bless us, all of us father with the light of your countenance"*

We must however add caution when employing physical manifestations or anthropomorphism to describe G-d. Ultimately, G-d is supremely higher than any metaphor can reach. There is no physical way by which we can truly describe G-d. He is infinite and unlimited. It is just that the Torah itself speaks in the language of man, and in order to try to comprehend and grasp how He reveals and manifests Himself to His creations we use physical allegory.

Light is used frequently to depict Torah and Mitzvot: *"For the mitzvah is a candle and the Torah is light"* (Proverbs) On Chanukah we kindle the Menorah to symbolise the miracle of the oil in the Temple, but it also represents the continuity of Jewish life in those days and the victory of light as opposed to the spiritual darkness in that generation.

The Shabbat candles are kindled before the onset of Shabbat to bring simple physical light into the Jewish home, for the sake of honour for Shabbat, but also to bring

peaceful harmony in the home. In addition, we light the candles to usher in the spiritual warmth and glow of the Shabbat, as distinct from the mundane humdrum darkness of the every day.

The final comparison to light is the human soul – *“the candle of G-d is the soul of man”*. (*Proverbs*) Every person possesses in the recesses of His soul a spark of the Divine. The soul- is therefore a spark from above, a microcosmic reflection of G-d Himself.

The *Ner Tamid* is there in our Synagogue, demonstrating the infinite and omnipresent light of G-d. It is above the Holy Ark, representational of His Holy Torah and by which the spark within man, the soul can be truly elevated and reach up towards the Divine.

Have an illuminating Shabbat!!