

Tetzave-Ner Tamid **by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

In Shemos 27:20 we find the expression *ner tamid*, constant light being used for the first time. The original context of the expression is in regard to the menorah that was to be lit every evening without interruption. Since the Menorah there was symbolic of the spiritual light of the Torah contained in the aron just behind the curtain, the term *ner tamid* was adapted for light we place before the aron kodesh in our schules.

The Kli Yakar comments on the words, ‘Bnai Yisroel shall take take for you oil’. Hashem said this to Moshe Rabbeinu. He states that the purpose of the oil was for Moshe Rabbeinu’s *hod*, splendor to be given over to the rest of Am Yisroel. This Ner Tamid also referred to the westernmost light that miraculously always stayed lit during the time of Shimon Hatzaddik in the days of the second Bais Hamikdash. Why was there a need for such a miracle? Because the other side of the curtain was the *kodesh kodashim*, holy of holies which was the holiest place on earth and in the first Bais Hamikdash actually housed the aron with the original tablets Moshe brought down to us at Har Sinai. There was a need for such a testimony to Am Yisroel and this need was filled by the Kohanim witnessing the testimony on a daily basis as they did the rituals there. Any testimony from the *kodesh kodashim* would be once a year and not daily as only the Kohen Gadol went there on Yom Kippur only. This westernmost light was the light closest to the aron and served as a second testimony that the Shechinah, divine presence was with Am Yisroel. The first testimony was the aron and the tablets themselves as the Torah states in Shemos 25:16, the *eidus*, testimony was placed in the aron.

We find the connection between light and Torah in a number of places in Tanach. One place is Tehillim 119:105, ‘Your word, [Torah] is a light unto my feet a light unto my path.’ Another well-known verse is Mishlei 6:23 which states that mitzvos are a candle and the Torah light. The Kol Bo, a late Rishon, stated that one should light a candle in shule as one enters there to daven. Sefer Minhagi Yeshurun records the idea of lighting the ner tamid before every morning and evening service. Today, it is universally customary to have a ner tamid burn continually whether or not there is a service taking place. Fascinatingly, this concept and practice is followed by the Reform and Conservative houses of worship as well. The symbolism of light and dedication to the Torah seems quite well-bred into our spiritual consciousness. Some schules have two nerot tamidim. One is to commemorate the menorah and the other to commemorate the ketores, incense which was burned every morning and evening but on a continual daily basis. Tamid in this context means always being done at a specific time such as every morning and evening, the Shabbos offering and the placing of the *lechem hapanim*, the showbreads. The Torah uses the expression tamid for all of these mitzvos

Our schules and batai Midrashim are referred to as *mikdash me-at*, microcosms of the Bais Hamikdash. Therefore, we place continually burning light in front of our aron kodesh contain the sifrei Torah. In merit of our honoring the Torah properly, may we merit to see the original aron restored to its proper place in the *kodesh kodashim* in our rebuilt Bais Hamikdash speedily in our days. Amen.