

# The eternal flame...

Tzav 5782/2022

The Torah tells us that the fire on the outer altar needs to be kept alight perpetually. It is to be an eternal flame<sup>1</sup>. The Chizkuni notes that this command was one that needed to be kept even as the Jews were wandering through the desert. Great care needs to be taken to ensure the flame stays alight.

As part of my time in Scouting, in order to qualify for a certain badge, we had to maintain a fire for 24 hours – it required constant vigilance. Fire left unattended can do two things – consume everything or die out. To maintain a fire, one must tend it, care for it, and feed it.

Why was it so important for this fire to be maintained?

The Tikkunei Zohar establishes that the fire on the altar was sparked by God himself- it was a gift to the Jewish people, similar to the gift of fire that was created on the evening after Shabbat, which is now represented by the ritual of Havdallah<sup>3</sup>. With such a gift, the Jewish people have a responsibility to be a partner in maintaining the gift, ensuring that it doesn't go out.

While the Temple is no longer standing, the gift itself has been transferred. We establish in the synagogue a ner tamid, an eternal flame that rests above the ark. The ner tamid draws people in – it is a symbol that points, as Rabbi Marnina Yergin notes, to the values found within Judaism<sup>4</sup>.

The essence of the eternal nature is that we must work for it – we cannot be idle<sup>5</sup>. The flame may be eternal in nature, but to keep it going, means that we must constantly thinking about it, tending it, and developing it. I have always thought of the ner tamid as a lighthouse, and have written about it in that way, but now I realise that it is much more than just the physical structure, the ner tamid must also contain within it the person who will look after the light house, making sure that the flame never goes out.

That could be a Rabbi, or a mentor, or a friend, or just a simple yid who has a burning passion. In fact, each of us should be thinking about how to maintain the ner tamid. We should be fighting at the chance to become the lighthouse keeper, ensuring that our own, and other's, flames never get to that dying moment.

All citations can be found in **A New Page of Talmud**