
*The eternal
flame...*

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out. **Vayikra 6:6** Even while the Israelites were journeying through the desert, G-d's honour demanded that precautions be taken that this flame be kept going. **Chizkuni on Vayikra 6:6²** One older person stood up from behind a wall, and said: Rebbe my teacher, The Holy Light, come and light candles, for that is a Mitzva (commandment), on that it is said: An everlasting fire shall be kept burning on the altar, it should not be extinguished. And, on

that it is also said: To light the eternal flame. This is surely the light of the divine, the light that shines within the soul of every person. Come, light it with her.

– **Tikkunei Zohar on Vayikra**

6:6³ A *Ner Tamid* is a symbol that is to be placed over the ark to bring us closer to Torah and what is in it. It points us to the values found in Judaism. It brings many generations towards Torah, their knowledge of Judaism, and the values they use daily. Families have seen the values that the *Ner Tamid* points us towards and have raised their own children in its guiding light. A *Ner Tamid* has stood before so many people, heard so many peoples' prayers, and, as the Torah tells us, draws us with its light towards its' teachings and values, allowing us to structure our lives and families in its glow. – **Rabbi Marnina Yergin** ⁴

The word *tamid* in the Torah can mean "regular" or "uninterruptedly", depending on which scholar you read. (For more on this

and lots of other fascinating ancient Hebrew terms, see the website Balashon). What it does not mean is "miraculously eternally automatically". This leads to a visual of some ancient priest whose regular job is to ensure that this fire, this *ner tamid*, does not EVER go out – wind, rain, even the occasional snow notwithstanding. What was so special about this fire? Only this: its origin was a bolt of fire that came directly from the Eternal (Lev. 9.24.). The fire itself came from G-d; all the priest had to do was to

tend it, not to let it go out. Eternal fire, but only if it is tended.– **Rabbi Ariel Stone**⁵ The *Ner Tamid* acts like a light house for world Jewry, they know that

A perpetual fire shall be kept burning...

אֵשׁ תָּמִיד תִּנָּקֵד
Vayikra 6:6

wherever they are in the stormy seas of the world, they have a guiding light to draw them back in. The *Ner Tamid*, and the synagogue itself offers a sanctuary for all who are seeking. – **Rabbi Alon Meltzer**⁶

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