

TETZAVEH (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Heartburn -- Full Time!

2008 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Every synagogue has one.

Look in the front of any shul and you will see it hanging there. The *Ner Tamid* -- *Eternal Flame*. While all the other lights may be extinguished at the end of the day, there is one small light that illuminates the Sanctuary. It is usually a small chandelier-like fixture, suspended from a chain in front of the Holy Ark where the Torahs are kept.

This custom is, I assume, based upon the first verse in this week's Torah Portion:

"You shall command the Children of Israel to take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination to kindle the lamp continually." (Exodus 27:20) (An alternate translation of the end of the verse is "...to kindle the *Eternal Flame*.")

The "Eternal Flame" being discussed was not a chandelier like they have in synagogues. It is a reference to the Golden Menorah:

"In the Tent of Meeting ... Aaron and his sons will arrange it from evening till morning..." (Ibid, verse 21)

Rashi explains that the Menorah did not have to be constantly lit. As long as Aaron or one of his descendants the Priests kindled the lamp every evening and it burned through the night, the Torah considers it to have been lit continually. (Other commentaries maintain that at least one of the lamps of the Menorah remained burning for 24 hours.)

Torah study is a full-time job:

This Book of the Torah is not to leave your mouth. You shall contemplate it day and night, in order to observe, to do, all that is written in it. (Joshua, 1:8)

The Talmud (Menachos 99b) cites various interpretations of this verse.

Rabbi Yishmael's nephew asked him whether someone who knows the entire Torah is permitted to study non-Torah topics. His response: "The verse says '... *You shall contemplate it day and night...*' If you can find a time that is neither day nor night, go ahead!"

Rabbi Yochanan, quoting Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, said that if one recites the *Shema* every morning and every evening, he has fulfilled the requirement of “*This Book of the Torah is not to leave your mouth. You shall contemplate it day and night.*”

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Rothenberg, the first Rebbe of Ger, was bothered by a question. G-d told Joshua that the Torah is NEVER to leave one’s mouth. Our in-depth involvement in Torah is supposed to be “... *day and night.*” How, asks Rabbi Rothenberg, do we define a few moments of prayer in the morning and then again in the evening as a fulfillment of that verse? A quick 2-minute Shema twice a day, spending the rest of the day engaged in trivial pursuits, and we call that “*contemplating it day and night*”? Who are we trying to fool?

The Rebbe says that we can see the answer from the beginning of this week’s Torah Portion.

“... *kindle the lamp continually.... Aaron and his sons will arrange it from evening till morning...*”

This verse presents the same problem. The priest takes a few moments to ignite a wick, and yet the Torah says “... *kindle the lamp continually...*”

“*CONTINUALLY?!!*” You spent a minute lighting candles and then went about your business! How do you call that lighting continually?

Obviously, explains the Gerrer Rebbe, when you put a match to a candle that proceeds to burn all day, it is considered as if you are continuing to perform the Mitzvah of lighting throughout the day. In a similar vein, if a person takes a few moments to engage in genuine inspiration, that too can be considered to be “*contemplating it day and night.*”

The trick is getting the fire to BURN. Anyone can quickly recite a few Hebrew words and write that off as fulfilling the Mitzvah. But if he doesn’t ignite his soul with the fear of heaven, it’s like trying to light a candle in the middle of a hurricane. The match head will flare up, and then quickly fizzle out.

A person is supposed to start off his day with a heartfelt declaration that G-d is our Master, and that we are required to channel all our efforts toward serving Him. We are supposed to accept the Kingdom of Heaven upon ourselves. We fulfill the Mitzvah of loving Him, “...*with all your heart, all your soul, and all your possessions.*” (Deuteronomy, 6:5) We repeat that declaration in the evening.

If we would but take a few moments each day to fully absorb and contemplate the goodness of G-d, His kindness, His generosity, and His sanctity, we would find our hearts burning with a sublime holiness that would warm ourselves and everyone around us all day long.

Have a good, illuminating, and heart-warming Shabbos.

