

Light Insight

The Eternal Flame

“Command the Children of Israel ... to kindle a continual lamp.” (Leviticus 24:2)

Go into any Synagogue when it’s dark and you will see a small lamp shining above the Holy Ark. It’s called the *ner tamid* — the eternal flame.

That lamp is a memorial of the *ner ma’aravi* (western lamp) of the menorah which the priests lit in the Holy Temple. The western lamp burned miraculously. It never went out. Every evening, when the priest came to kindle the flames he would find the western lamp still alight from the previous evening. He would remove the still-burning wick and oil, clean out its receptacle and then put back the burning wick and the oil. Then he would kindle all the other lamps with the western lamp.

However, when the Romans destroyed the Temple it seemed that the little solitary flame had been put out forever.

In Rome, there stands a triumphal arch built by the Emperor Titus. One

of its bas-reliefs depicts the menorah being carried through the streets of Rome as part of the booty pillaged from the Temple. All its lamps are dark. It looks like some expensive antique, soon to languish under the dust of ages in some Vatican vault.

But did Titus really extinguish that eternal flame?

The Holy Temple is a macrocosm of the human body. If you look at a plan of the sanctuary in the Temple, you will notice that the placement of the various vessels — the altar, the table, the menorah — corresponds to the location of the vital organs in the human body. Each of the Temple’s vessels represents a human organ.

The menorah is the vessel that corresponds to the heart.

Why is it that so many young people today are choosing to return to the beliefs and practices that their parents had forgotten, and their grandparents despaired of seeing continued? It is as though some mystical force is transmitted in the spiritual genes of every Jew. A light burning on the menorah of the Jewish heart across the millen-

nia. A light which can never be extinguished, which burns miraculously, even without replenishment of the oil or wicks of mitzvah observance.

So, in a mystical sense, the light Titus tried to put out continues to burn in the menorah of the Jewish heart. But there’s more.

It would come as a great disappointment to Titus, but the menorah that is collecting dust in the Vatican is not the original Menorah. It is a copy. The original menorah was hidden away (together with the other vessels) in the caves and tunnels under the Temple Mount.

If while the Temple was standing the western lamp of the menorah burned miraculously without human assistance, so why shouldn’t it go on burning even after it was buried?

That western lamp continues to “burn” under the Temple Mount throughout the long dark night of exile. It continues to “burn” to this day. And it will continue to “burn” until the Messiah comes. Then, the light of the menorah of the Jewish heart will be revealed as identical to the light of the menorah in the Holy Temple.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The Merit System

Why will G-d surely not abandon His people Israel? “For

great Name.”

Another passage in Psalms declares, “G-d will not abandon His people nor forsake His heritage.”

G-d will not abandon His people,” states one passage in Samuel, “because of His

When Jews in the Land of Israel are in trouble, G-d promises not to abandon them because of their merits and the merit of their land which is called G-d’s heritage. But when Jews are outside of the Land of Israel G-d has mercy on them so that His great Name, which is identified with them, will not be desecrated.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

Even when we judge them favorably, kids always seem to find their way into...

A Lot of Hot Water

It was Friday afternoon and the water was hot. It was Sarah's turn for the shower. "Sarah," said my wife to our nine year-old daughter, "please go easy on the hot water. Your father and I still both need to take showers before Shabbos dinner."

The warning was in vain. Lukewarm describes my shower only charitably; my wife's shower, if the second law of thermodynamics be true, was worse.

From the lips outward, my wife and I tried to actualize the great principle of "judging favorably" that we've gleaned from Ohr Somayach's column "The

Other Side of the Story." "Maybe I used too much water for the dishes," said my wife. "Or maybe there's some other explanation," I said.

In our hearts, however, we agreed to one thing: Our budding adolescent was guilty of yet another act of gross self-centeredness.

That night the real culprit revealed himself, as a trickle of water appeared from the crack in the wall where the bathtub meets the tiles. (Aha! So that's why that mysterious crack had been developing for the last couple of months!) In the morning, that trickle became a whoosh of spurting water.

After Shabbos, the plumber replaced the rusty pipe which had been rotting away in our wall for who knows how long, and which was to blame for who knows how many instances of "inconsiderate behavior." Too bad it's not that easy to replace our rusty "heart pipes" so that we can learn to judge others — yes, even our children — favorably.

Response Line

Thou Shalt Love

Faron Lebson wrote:

In the Torah, why does G-d command us to love Him? I thought that love was a natural response that could not be demanded of someone?

Dear Faron,

When we speak of loving G-d, we are not referring to "falling in love" with G-d, as though love, like a pit, were something that you "fall into." Genuine, lasting love comes from respect and appreciation.

That is why, on the whole, we understand this commandment to mean that we should act as though we love G-d. We should keep the commandments faithfully, and make personal sacrifices for G-d just

as we would towards a child, spouse or parent whom we love.

On a deeper level, though, the Torah is revealing a secret here: Planted within each person is a hidden capacity to truly love G-d. Acting with love towards G-d cultivates this dormant emotion until it grows and shines forth.

The study of the Torah, with its breathtaking depth and beauty, is a prime way to cultivate this love.

Another way to awaken our love for G-d is to study science and nature. Consider, for example, the fact that your stomach is full of acids that are strong enough to dissolve ox leather, yet these very same acids don't melt through the soft flesh of your stomach! This is because the Creator provided you with a specially formulated mucous lining to protect against this. Becoming aware of countless such kindnesses will certainly nurture our innate feelings of thankfulness and love towards G-d.