

What is a *Ner Tamid*?

*And you will command the Israelites to bring pure oil of beaten olives
for lighting the lamps continuously. (Exodus 27:20)*

The Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light, is a significant symbol both in Torah and in modern synagogues. Of course, in ancient times, it was necessary to create oil directly from olives, and everyone remembers the popular story from Hanukkah, in which a small amount lasted for eight days. The issue was not just about the light remaining lit. There was an active role; someone had to take responsibility for making sure the light stayed lit.

Today, in every synagogue, a light remains lit over the holy ark where the Torah is kept. In most places, it is a low-wattage bulb in a decorative frame, and we count on electricity to make certain it stays on. When we walk into our sanctuary at Temple Beth Torah, the light is always on. It does not take much energy, physical or electrical.

It is just as important that we keep our spiritual flames burning. This involves more than replacing a bulb or flipping a switch. It requires being actively engaged in being Jewish. There are infinite ways to be active in Jewish life. Worshipping at religious services is just one way. Volunteering to teach in our religious school or serving on committees are other possibilities. Some congregants volunteer with Meals on Wheels or help at other institutions that need help. Others engage in private study or take advantage of the temple and other community learning opportunities. Still others focus on philanthropy. Any way you participate, whether as an individual, with your own family or in the context of a community, you are helping fan the flames that keep our Jewish world bright.

This was the reasoning when Temple Beth Torah chose to name an annual celebration the Ner Tamid Award. The award honors accomplishments of the past, but just as importantly, recognizes how continuous dedication helps ignite and inspire others. A single flame can be extinguished quickly; but when it spreads its light to another, the influence stays bright. And that is also why Hy Penn is a perfect recipient of this first TBT honor. For the past 35 years, Hy has been helping make sure our Jewish community is a bright spot. He sets an example with his presence and his efforts and inspires others to take this light into the future.

In 1982, Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul and Mary) wrote a song, *Don't Let the Light Go Out* to commemorate Hanukkah and offer strength to an Israeli nation torn over the war with Lebanon. The song suggests that even one candle can bring strength and unity while shining beautifully. Thanks to members like Hy, TBT's light is sure to remain strong. We look forward to honoring many other members who also continue to make beautiful contributions for our community.

L'shalom

Rabbi Dan Gordon