

RABBI'S MESSAGE

What is Eternal?

When I first moved away from my parents' house, it was early December. I asked if I could take with me a Hanukkah menorah from the home. My mother suggested that I buy a new one when I got to my destination. I quipped, "But I only need it for a week!"

The menorah has become one of the most recognizable symbols of Judaism. The candles are short, often lasting less than an hour. The eight nights go by quickly, and we get ready to start the secular New Year. It is the memorable spark that shines in the darkness that makes Hanukkah so dramatic. Hanukkah is one of the few Jewish holidays that does not start during a full moon, but at the end of the lunar month. Hence, Hanukkah is designed to be during the darkest time of the darkest month. When the lights go out, we pray that the glow remains.

As we remember the story, a little oil lasted just long enough. A one-day supply lasted eight days, just enough time to bring in more olives to make oil to keep the lamp burning. What would have happened if the oil ran out? Would Judaism have flickered out with the last of the flame? I don't think so. My guess is that we would have created a different story of survival, one that included an "internal light" that shined as brightly as the "eternal light."

The Eternal Light that stays on above the ark that contains our Torah is called in Hebrew the *Ner Tamid*. It is the perfect name for Temple Beth Torah's annual award that honors a special member. It is a reminder that each individual spark has a way of coming close enough to ignite other flames. Founders and elders of the community inspire new generations to carry the torch into the future.

I love that our *Ner Tamid* celebration is during Hanukkah, and Joni Levy is quite a deserving recipient. She and her husband, Burt (of blessed memory) were among the first sparks that shined the lights of TBT. Our logo is also in the shape of an eternal flame. In 1983, the same year TBT was founded, Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul and Mary), published his famous Hanukkah song, "*Don't Let the Light Go Out.*" As our own lights shine in the darkness of December, we look forward to many years of brightness.

In the classic story of Hanukkah, the valuable resource that provided light was olive oil. No matter how much oil we have, there is always a chance it can run out. Our most valuable resource is the light we have inside our hearts that we can share with others. The light of human kindness can transform any dark time or dark place into a burst of sunshine. And that is a much more precious gift than any presents we can buy. The holiday and the candles only last a week. The sparks we ignite, the spirit we inspire, and the torch of tradition shine on eternally. As one generation inspires the next, we have a warm, bright future to celebrate!

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon