

Dear Chavraya,

Think of that moment when lighting the Chanukkah candles, the moment when you hold the Shammash to the wick of another candle, expectantly awaiting the rising of light. Think perhaps especially of the first night, one lone candle in solitary witness waiting to be enkindled. It takes courage to give light, wondering of the power and possibility of one small flame in the great darkness all around. And it takes courage to receive light, knowing then that one is duty bound to pass it on, to give of one's received light to another, to take one's place in the great dance of giver and receiver in the circle of light.

Think of that moment when in holding the flame of the Shammash to a new wick there is that sudden rush, a swoosh as the new flame takes and two flames rise as one, rising higher and brighter than either flame alone could soar. Then, in taking away the Shammash each flame returns to its place in the Menorah of life, each giving of its light, giver and receiver indistinguishable. It is the way of teaching in all the ways that each of us shares of what we know with another and so receive. In giving of one's own light, whether of knowledge or of inspiration, each light shines brighter for having been touched by the light of another. In teaching we learn and in learning we teach. It is the way of our praying each morning before the Sh'ma, *Ahava Rabbah ahavtanu/with great love have you love us, God..., have compassion upon us and give to our hearts to understand and to discern, to hear, to learn and to teach/lilmod u'l'lamed....* In the same moment, in the same breath, as of flame to wick, we pray to learn and then to pass on what we have learned, praying for the courage to raise up light and dispel the darkness.

It is the teaching of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat T'tzaveh* (Ex. 27:20-30:10). Instructed last week to build the desert sanctuary, of all that is to go into the sanctuary to help fulfill its purpose the list continues to unfold. We are told at the outset of the *parsha*, *va'yikchu elecha shemen zayit zach/and they shall take to you pure olive oil, pressed for lighting, to cause light to go up always/l'ha'a lot ner tamid*. It is not the usual word for lighting, *l'hadlik*, to kindle, as to strike a match and light. *L'ha'alot* is in causative form, *you shall cause light to go up*. As from a pre-existing flame, as from a Shammash held to a Chanukkah candle, lighting in this way requires engagement, presence, a sharing and transferring of one's own light.

The light that is to be raised as *Parashat T'tzaveh* begins is the light in the desert sanctuary and later of the great menorah in the Temples in Jerusalem, the seven-branched menorah that was the *ner tamid/eternal light*. The *ner tamid* in the ancient sanctuary burned only from dusk to dawn, giving of its light through the night. In the wording that tells of how to light is the teaching that we are to be givers of light. In the phrase *l'ha'alot ner tamid/to cause light to go up always*, the first two words are joined, *to cause light to go up, always*. It is therefore not a reference to the *ner tamid*, not a limited reference to the kindling of one light. Rather, we are told to raise up light, each of us, always. We are to be the light, God's candle in the world, as from Proverbs (20:27), *ner ha'shem nishmat adam/God's candle is the human soul*.

In the midst of so much darkness, of so much that would extinguish the light, it takes especial courage to raise up light continually in all that we do, to be God's

candle in the world. In the glow of Shabbos candles, may hope be illumined within ourselves, its light raised up to shine in the world as one small candle in the night.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor