

PRESSED INTO LIGHT

A Devotional Meditation on Tetzaveh (You Shall Command)

Exodus 27:20-30:10; Ezekiel 43:10-27; Isaiah 6:8-13;
Matthew 5:14-16, 6:22-23, 13:10-17; 2 Timothy 3:1-17; Hebrews 12:25-29

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The world is such a dark place that it takes considerable effort to imagine the coming age when the light of the heavenly realm floods our reality. The first question might be whether we go to that heavenly realm, or heaven comes to earth. Perhaps the answer is both. What's more important, though, is preparing ourselves to be part of that realm of light. And what better way to do that than here in this dark place, where the little light we have can shine all the more brightly?



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Our Creator is the source of all light, of course. That should be easy to grasp – as long as we have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to understand. Those who lack such ability to comprehend God are the people we might call heathen and sinners. They are the blind ones stumbling around in the dark, groping for answers, always learning, but never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth, or so we suppose. But are the heathen really the people God means when he talks of those who can't or won't perceive his light?

This can get uncomfortable very quickly. The truth is, it's God's people who are the blind, deaf, and uncomprehending ones. That's the testimony of Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and Messiah Yeshua about the very ones the Creator called out from the nations to be his light in the world.

Let's take at face value what scripture says about people called out of the world and into covenant with the Creator. They are called Israel, whether they are Jewish or not. The important thing is that these are people who wrestle with God and man and prevail, meaning they succeed in moving out of this world's darkness and into the Creator's light. It's not helpful that both halves of God's Covenant people keep trying to exclude one another from his Covenant, even though the evidence of the light is on and in both. Neither are the source of the light, but the way they conduct their lives indicates that the light of the Creator burns with the fuel they contribute.

That's the pattern Moses described in the instructions for the Tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood. God gave the people of Israel the responsibility to bring pure beaten olive oil for the light. The oil wasn't the light; it was the fuel the priests used in the lamps of the menorah. Yet even that wasn't the light; the menorah was simply the means by which the light was diffused throughout the sanctuary. The light itself was neither liquid like the olive oil, nor solid like the menorah, nor gas like the air filling the holy place. Light, along with heat, is the product of those elements coming together and being consumed in a self-sustaining chemical reaction.

That's the simple explanation of fire. We might be satisfied with that explanation if we were simply material beings, but we're not. Our existence extends beyond this physical

plane, connecting at a profound spiritual level with our Maker. There's a reason scripture describes him as a consuming fire. That makes him perilous and uncontainable, much though we like to think we can put him in a box – or in a house dedicated to his Name. We can't fit him into our human institutions, such as denominations, yeshivas, and governments. We wouldn't even be able to comprehend him if he hadn't revealed himself to us through the ages. Yet he not only reveals himself, but he has also chosen to become one of us so that we humans can be the living expression of the Creator into his creation.

What that means is that we, the images of God, become the light of God through the intimate connection he established. We come closer to understanding that connection as we enter into relationship with our Messiah. After all, he is the one who said we are the light of the world – which means we are that pure olive oil put into the lamps to fuel the illumination of God's creation.

That's nice to think about until we realize that he is the fire that consumes us. It's not just that he consumes all our impurities. That's an essential part of the process. The trials and troubles we face in life are not simply the result of sin. Even if our first ancestors had never rebelled against the Creator, he still would have found a way to mature and purify us to be vessels worthy of his Presence. Our sin and rebellion simply complicate the process. That's because our first inclination is still to preserve ourselves at all costs and cling to sovereignty over our own tiny portion of creation.

This is why our Creator indicts his people for claiming to be enlightened while actually being blind, deaf, and insensitive. That's something our Messiah said: if our eye is bad, then the light we think we have is actually darkness. We're not really illuminating the world with the Creator's light, but with some kind of false light that leads us off his path of true light and life.

As usual with the Creator whose ways and thoughts are so far above our own, this is a paradox. We're supposed to be consumed by his fire, and yet we remain in existence just like the burning bush Moses encountered. We're supposed to be bruised and crushed to produce the pure oil for the Creator's fire, yet that bruising is what makes us capable of replicating his light. We're made in his image and have the freedom to act like little gods, but if we do we miss his light altogether and end up corrupting whatever we touch.

We're always in peril from one side or another – either the consuming fire of our God, or the deceptive consumption of our sin. The remedy is to make him our highest priority. That's why we pray, meditate on his word, and associate with others who love him. We don't know exactly what this will mean in the age to come, but we do know that it pushes back the darkness of our present reality.