



In this week's Parsha we are commanded, three times within six verses, to keep the fires burning on the Altar (Vayikra 6:1-6).

Indeed, three separate fires were kept burning on the Altar constantly. These were

- (1) the large pyre upon which the offerings were burned;
- (2) the second pyre of the incense;
- (3) the pyre for 'the perpetuation of the fire', from which burning wood was added to the large flame whenever necessary

(Rashi on v.5; Yoma 45a).

Ramban points out that the law concerning the permanent fire that "should not be extinguished" included the night-time, meaning that the flame burned continually, day and night. Needless to say that our commentators saw in this positive command a homiletical message to all who wish to serve G-d.

Rav Kook says it most poignantly: "The thirst for godliness that burns in

the heart like a tremendous storm-driven torch can never be extinguished. Indeed, if an individual smothers even one burning coal from a "material" altar, he is guilty of the command, 'Do not extinguish' (Z'vachim 90a). How much more so, then, if a Jew douses a flame from the spiritual altar, the beating heart of the Jew!"

To paraphrase the Rav: One must always add to that flame with intelligence, wisdom and understanding, with the light of Torah and that of the candle, which is the Mitzva, so that the burning fire (in his heart) will continually rise and be uplifted, giving him strength and willpower in every aspect of life from the highest, heavenly sphere to the lowest depths... What a profound message to take us into Shabbat! **MP**