

While the bimah is primarily used for krias hatorah, some congregations use it as the amud (the cantor's prayer site) and for the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashona. In this manner the congregation is able to hear the cantor and the shofar clearly. Most congregations have a special amud up front for the cantor. Because the psalmist says "from the depths I call you O L-rd," it was customary in Talmudic times to have one step leading down to the amud so that the outer physical depth awakened an inner spiritual one. Today the area near the amud is at floor level, but our thoughts are awakened by a decorative ledger placed by the amud which reads "know before whom you are standing." Ashkinazim use the bimah for prayer on Friday night while those praying Nusach Sfarid use it only on the High Holidays.

(d) The Menorah and Ner Tomid

In the Beis Hamikdash there was a menorah (candleabrum) of seven lights six of which burned from the evening till the morning, the seventh (the center one) burned for twenty four hours as a sign that the spirit of the Shechinah dwelt in Israel. So, too, the synagogue which is a miniature sanctuary has a menorah and ner tomid. The menorah has only six lights and is lit only during prayer, while the ner tomid, symbolic of the seventh light is above the aron hakodesh and burns continuously. The verse "Ner Hashem nishmas odom — the light of Hashem, the soul of man" is generally written on the glass of the ner tomid. Although in the mikdash all seven lights were together, in the synagogue we separate the seventh so as to distinguish between the synagogue and the Beis Hamikdash.



MINHA: Israeli law states that a synagogue must be built in every Army camp. Here a Nahal (Pioneering Fighting Youth) trainee leads afternoon services.