

# Serving the Community

But what of the priests? Apart from the symbolism of calling up a Cohen and a Levi first whenever we read the Torah and the custom of redeeming first born boys from the priesthood, the whole paraphernalia of the priesthood has not been part of Judaism for two thousand years. Rabbis are not priests. Ironically the idea of priests has survived in Christianity.

In its original form the priests had a much greater role than just the ceremonial tabernacle service. They were supposed to be a class of people who were dedicated to the community full time through education, pastoral support and leadership. They were both civil and religious administrators and community servants.

Throughout the first thousand years of Jewish history they failed more often than they succeeded and fell prey to the usual vices of materialism, selfishness and power. Perhaps that is why we have managed so well without them.

But as with the eternal light, there is an important message. A community survives and thrives only when there enough people care and work for its spiritual and emotional needs as much as the physical. Originally this duty devolved on the First Born, then it switched to the Priesthood and now it falls on those who choose, voluntarily to commit themselves to serving the community. They are the ones that in all the different ways they choose to do it, keep the flame alight.