



## *A bit of light*

**A few thoughts from Rabbi Avram Rothman to the ATCS Community**

Last week in our introductory article we discussed the difficult situation that society in general and the Jewish community in particular is finding itself in. Antisemitism in particular and hatred in general are on the rise and many of the indicators of history are falling into place giving us reason to believe that it will only get worse.

Financial instability, social fascism, forced conformity, a breakdown within the judicial system and mistrust of authority have all been catalysts in history that set the stage for antisemitic beliefs and violence. All of these are appearing throughout the world and we all need to tread cautiously.

So, like "chicken little", I am yelling at how "the sky is falling", but what do we do about it? What role can we play in changing this situation?

I am not an economist, nor am I a social scientist or a political commentator, but I, as many of you, have a grounding in Jewish tradition and Torah- so I rely on what is the most ancient answer to the problem, which is equally the most up to date response.

The Torah teaches us that we are to be a "light unto nations". The expression "light" is a strange metaphor. For example, when someone turns on a light it causes everyone to look at it. Regardless of how light or dark the environment is, the response of having a light go on is for everyone to stare directly at it.

This is what the Torah is referring to. We do not go out and try to convert the world to Judaism, rather, we live in a Jewish neighbourhood and we care for each other. We watch for the vulnerable, the orphans and widows and we make sure they are safe. We make sure that the elderly are cared for, that their driveways are shovelled, that they have sufficient food, that they are noticed in their absence; in general, we keep an eye out for them.

In doing so, we create a community that safeguards the weakest members of society as the Torah admonishes us repeatedly. We create a nurturing, warm, friendly community that cares for and takes responsibility for each other.

Now, imagine being a non-Jewish person whom lives on the outskirts of this community. They see how caring everyone is and how the actions of community members exhibit responsibility for each other. How the community treats its weakest members equal to the most powerful ones. They can feel the respect shown for every person, regardless of personal practice, lifestyle, of race, gender or wealth.

They are drawn to the community, as a person's eyes are drawn to the light. We are to be that light. We are not missionaries, trying to change others but rather we are a "light" that everyone whom comes into contact with us looks at and is drawn to.

So, what happens when they experience such a community? They want to join, to be a part of it and they begin to emulate what they see in that light. They change and become a part of it. They do not become Jews, they become people who care, people who treat every person, regardless of gender, lifestyle, religion, race or financial means with dignity, respect and care.

It starts small, it draws the attention of others and it grows. As the light spreads by looking at it, the Torah ideals spread by being drawn to it.

We do not attempt to make the world Jewish, we become living examples of the light of Torah and the beauty it teaches all as to the treatment and regard for humankind.

Let's take Saudi blogger Mohammed Saudi as an example. He is well known as pro-Israel and pro-Jewish. How did a observant Moslem living in Saudi Arabia become pro-Jewish?

In his words, he explains that he was raised to believe that Jews were evil. That Jews actively betray Islam. Jews want to destroy Islam.

However, as a student in the US, he reluctantly become a boarder in a Jewish home. Over time he says that he saw their acceptance and support of him, how they treated him and all people with respect. How these Jews were kind, understanding and wanted to be close to him.

Where he was first against living with Jews, he learned that he had been misled. He was treated with respect and dignity. He never heard a bad word about Islam and saw the kind lives these people lived.

They were a light to him. They did not try to convert him, they did not try to insult him, they, like a light, drew him closer to them and made Mohammed want to emulate them- not as a Jew, but as a good, proud Muslim.

This family was a light to Mohammed and his hatred turned to respect, affection and understanding.

Mohammed changed by living with the light and now shares that light with others.

This is an example of how we can also be a light to the world around us. To shine a light at the darkness of antisemitism and hatred.

How do we do it? We live the Torah. We adhere to the belief that every person must be treated with respect. We follow the practice of making sure that the weakest of the community are taken care of. The orphan, the widow, the ill, elderly and stranger- we welcome them and become a warm, bright light for them.

As we practice these beliefs to the world, we equally demand the same. We treat all with respect and expect to be treated with respect. We treat those different from us with love and expect to be equally treated with love. We warmly welcome people who are different and expect to be welcomed warmly.

We not only talk the talk, we walk the walk and demand the world to do the same. They do not need to be us, they need to accept us.

The question is, are we doing it? It is difficult to be a light to others, if we are not a light to our own family, community and people.

We need to set the example. We need to follow the life that the Torah demands of us and become the light that draws the attention of others.

Here lies the problem. While we should be shining the light on Jewish life by living correctly, we too often shine a light that is not as favourable on ourselves.

They are watching, they are looking for the light and it is up to us to make sure that we are watched for the good we do, not the reverse.

How do we do that?

Well, let's keep in touch as we search further within ourselves in the coming weeks and see how we all, as a community and an assembly of individuals can become that light, the light that shines so brightly, burning off hatred and warmed by its flames.

 "A BIT OF LIGHT, DISPELS A WORLD OF DARKNESS" 

# PRACTICAL PARSHA

Join Rabbi Rothman  
in person and on Zoom  
as he explores the  
weekly Torah portion  
and how to apply the  
parsha lessons to our  
lives in 2023

STARTING THURSDAY  
FEBRUARY 2, 2023



THURSDAY MORNINGS  
10:00 AM - 949 CLARK AVE W.  
MEETING ID: 8315 780 2076

All are welcome!