

## Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins Parashat Tetzaveh

### **Keeping The Light Shining Against The Onslaught of Anti-Semitism**

This week's Torah portion, *Tetzaveh*, includes the instruction for maintaining the *Ner Tamid*, the menorah that would shine a continuous light to brighten the inner sanctum of the tabernacle. We were commanded to kindle the lights every single day and that this *mitzvah* was an eternal obligation for every generation. To this day, every synagogue has a *Ner Tamid* that glows above the *Araon Kodesh*, the Ark that contains the Torah scrolls. The reasons for this light are both practical and symbolic. Yes, there is a logical function to having a light that illumines our sanctuaries. And it is also true that the *Ner Tamid* represents the inextinguishable spirit of the Jewish people: our commitment to be a light unto the nations and to resist those who are bent on evil.

In an ancient *midrash*, Rabbi Berechiah taught that though the *Ner Tamid* is a commandment from God, the light is for our benefit alone: “*And the earth was chaos and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep*’ (Genesis 1:2). What follows? ‘*And God said, let there be light!*’ The Holy One said, ‘I have even created light in the midst of darkness. Do I need your light?’” (Vayikra Rabba 31.7)

We need the light. And we need to keep kindling the light because in every generation there are those who are determined to sow chaos.

This past Sunday, Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) tweeted vicious comments against Jews. Fortunately, there were immediate rebukes from leaders across the political spectrum. Her limp apology that followed convinced no one. She has been on record as a supporter of BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) against Israel, which is an overt attempt to destroy Israel. Both Representative Ilhan Omar and Representative Rashida Tlaib seek the destruction of the Jewish nation of Israel. They are a part of an unusual club of extremist politicians, intellectually and ideologically twisted professors and students, conspiracy cranks, anarchists, neo-Nazis, Islamic radicals, far-right, far-left, and those who are not really sure why, but they just hate Jews, Judaism and Israel. Strange bedfellows indeed! Put in a room together, this group would find very little common ground, with one exception: they are all on the same team seeking to wipe out Israel and the Jewish people.

Now, Israel, like every nation, is fair game when it comes to criticism. Nations and political leaders should be taken to task when they adopt policies that are poorly thought

out or wrong-headed. Israel, as a democracy, has a vibrant, free and often fiercely critical press. Israel's opposition political parties are quick to strongly disagree with the majority coalition, currently headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But there is a world of difference between criticism and calls for a nation's destruction.

When called out on their anti-Semitism, those who call for Israel's destruction try to weasel wiggle out by claiming that they don't hate Jews, they just hate Israel. Gee, what a subtle difference. They don't hate Jews, they just want to destroy the only Jewish nation. They don't hate Jews but they want to put the 7-million Jews who live in Israel at the mercy of the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Iranians and their terrorist friends who have all sworn vows to destroy Israel and kill Jews. "Ah-ha," they retort, "there are even some Jewish groups that are anti-Israel." Yes, that's true. They are small and pitiful, but what can we do? Every family has some crazy cousins. "Ah-ha," they snort, "the polls show that a growing number of young Jews are less sympathetic towards Israel than the older generations." Well, some polls do show that some segments of young Jews are less enthusiastic towards Israel. But those polls certainly don't reflect the feelings of the vast majority of young Jews who are actually engaged in Jewish life and have visited Israel.

This Friday night, at Temple Sinai's *Erev Shabbat* service (6pm), we'll have the opportunity to hear from a young Jewish leader. Jacob Meitus grew up at Temple Sinai (he's the son of Doug and Marty). Jacob made *aliyah*, served in the IDF, and has now returned to the United States as a pro-Israel advocate for AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee). You should know that there will be some 5,000 pro-Israel students in Washington at the coming AIPAC Policy Conference. I suppose that not many of them were asked their opinion by the pollsters!

As we continue to shine the light of hope and justice for people of every faith, race and nation, let us not forget to take care of our own Jewish family. Yes, we may get tired having to keep kindling that light every single day. And we may grow weary of defending ourselves against those bent on spreading anti-Semitic hatred. But these sacred tasks are vital for the well-being of our world. Let us stand strong, stand proud, and hold our lights up high!

***Shabbat Shalom!***

*Rick*

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