When Visibility Becomes Risk:
What an Ancient Story Teaches Us About Jewish Life in Canada Today
By Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
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The attack on the Jewish community in Sydney on the eve of Hanukkah horrified Jewish communities around the world. It was devastating, frightening, and painfully familiar. Sadly, such acts are part of a troubling global pattern that forces Jewish communities everywhere to ask difficult questions about safety, visibility, and resilience.

Those questions are not abstract, the security guards outside our synagogues and community centres are not for show, there is a real danger for Jews in Canada and around the world, and we cannot accept that as the price of being Jewish in Canada today.

An ancient story offers a lens through which to understand them. In the book of Genesis, a father gives his teenage son a beautiful, distinctive garment. Joseph's coat of many colors is not just a gift. It is a declaration. It marks him as visible, different, and full of promise.

Jewish tradition understands that coat as far more than a symbol of favoritism. It announces identity in a world that does not yet know how to respond to difference with generosity.

The coat quickly becomes three things at once. A source of pride. A trigger for resentment. And eventually something Joseph must learn to shed in order to survive.

That ancient tension felt strikingly contemporary well before the Sydney attack, now it is soul crushing. And yet my faith in humanity and the goodness of the majority of Canadians is not diminished.

For many Jews in Canada today, just one percent of the population of this country, visibility has become complicated. Jewish friends and neighbours who once moved through public life with ease now pause. Some think twice before wearing a Star of David. Others hesitate before placing a mezuzah on their home. And now I fear many will think twice about attending public menorah lighting ceremonies. Imagine if you felt it unsafe to go to a Christmas fair or cultural festival.

These questions are not expressions of shame or distance from Judaism. They are expressions of uncertainty about how that identity will be received.

The biblical story does not fault Joseph for loving his coat. Why would it? It reflects creativity, hope, and possibility. What the story does show is the cost of carrying a public identity in a society that reacts unpredictably to difference.

Joseph's brothers respond by stripping him of the coat and throwing him into a pit, then sitting down to eat as though nothing has happened. It is a jarring detail that captures how quickly empathy can disappear and how abruptly safety can vanish, even among those once closest to you.

Many Jewish Canadians recognize that feeling today. Classrooms, streets, and workplaces have become spaces where Jewish identity can invite hostility. What once felt stable now feels conditional.

This tension becomes especially visible during Hanukkah. The menorah, a nine branched candelabrum lit in Jewish homes each winter, is traditionally placed where it can be seen from the street. Visibility is not decorative. It is part of the practice itself. Light, in Jewish thought, is meant to spread outward, like good deeds.

What the events in Sydney make painfully clear is that Jewish communities are targeted not for how visible they are, but for being Jewish at all. Our institutions, synagogues, and community centres are already known and established. Retreating into invisibility does not eliminate risk, it only makes Jewish life smaller. Security must be balanced with vitality, because a community that disappears from public life has already absorbed the damage such hatred intends.

That balance raises a question many Jewish Canadian families quietly ask this week as Hanukkah begins. Should the menorah go in the window? Is it safe? Is it wise?

When a minority community begins to pull its symbols inward, it signals more than private fear. It says something about the health of the wider society. Jewish communities around the world watch one another closely. What happens in Sydney reverberates in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Safety anywhere affects confidence everywhere.

Canada prides itself on visible diversity. Christmas lights spill from balconies and front yards without hesitation. Lunar New Year lanterns brighten windows and streets. During Ramadan, glowing *fanous* lanterns appear in homes, symbols of welcome and holiness. These displays are received as natural expressions of belonging.

A menorah should feel no different.

The aspiration is straightforward. A nation where a Jewish home can place a menorah in the window with the same sense of safety and ease as any other seasonal symbol. This is not about special treatment. It is about equal confidence. It is about a civic culture where difference is protected rather than tested.

Such a society does not emerge by accident. It requires leadership willing to take the vulnerability of minority communities seriously before crisis arrives. It requires clear policy, consistent enforcement, and moral clarity that does not wait for violence to escalate.

Hanukkah teaches that light spreads through partnership. One flame kindles another. When public institutions create conditions of safety and trust, individuals are free to place their light in the window (or in the public square) as an expression of belonging rather than defiance.

Joseph eventually learns that identity endures even when the coat is gone. But a healthy society does not ask people to shed what makes them visible in order to feel safe. It creates the conditions in which every community can shine openly, wear its coat of many colours proudly.

That should not require a miracle. Safety is not miraculous. It is the product of a society that values light over darkness, presence over fear, and responsibility over indifference. That is the enduring lesson of Hanukkah.

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