



## The Universe always leaves a Light On

16 July 2021

It's Friday and this past week has been one of the most horrendous in South Africa for many, many years. Covid is still running rampant knocking people down and out. As a consequence we still have quite a harsh lockdown in place. This week was a very cold week for Gauteng as the winter began to bite. And then, as if that was not enough, the rioting and looting in KZN and Gauteng shook the nation and its people to their core. People I have spoken to this week have used terms such as "stunned", "dazed", "paralysed", "shocked", "devastated", to describe how they are feeling. Even if you decided to avoid being inundated with the news there was no way you could escape what was happening. It dominated our lives 24-7 for the week. It occupied quite a bit of time in the international news. As if Covid had not shaken our nervous systems and left us all feeling a bit overwhelmed because of the impact of the virus, our already frail selves were bombarded with more shocks as we read about and saw images of the rioting and looting.

For some people this experience hit closer to home than for others. Some people were witnesses to news reports and videos. Others were in the middle of it. They were part of the security teams attempting to protect businesses, property, and people. They were right in the thick of things. For others, explosions and gunshots could be heard in the streets outside their homes. Sleep was uneasy, if at all, and being confined to your home took on a whole new meaning. If you were in KZN, travel for many was not possible. You were stuck. You were scared. The violence was horribly close. The near future was totally unknown and unpredictable. Fuel was running low, food shortages were on the horizon, and transport could not move goods and services. That is pretty much how war is. Something tells me that once this is all over, including the horrible Covid pandemic, we could all do with some counselling. We have lived through, and are still living through, unusual and trying times. Day after day, gradually but continuously, the unusualness and difficulty of each day has crept into our psyches and worn us out. Each day we get more and more frazzled, traumatised, and weary.

And then on Wednesday something happened to change things. While paging through Facebook I started seeing messages of help and support. The first one in my feed was a construction company offering to fix damaged premises for free. Wow. A ray of light appearing. Then another cleaning company offered their cleaning services for free to those businesses that had been trashed in the riots and looting. All of a sudden there was a change in the messages being posted. Yes, the looting and rioting continued. However, the

newsfeeds started including a lot of people putting up their hands to fix things. These offers of help and support changed the narrative most people were faced with. Suddenly, amongst the horror, the goodness and kindness of humanity emerged. On the one hand there were people looting and rioting with merry abandon while the security forces got their act together. On the other hand, people gave up their time, their money, and even their lives to help out. Businesses that were not damaged offered services for free. Many, many people provided food and essentials to those without. Numerous citizens, not part of the security forces, offered their time, bodies, and courage to stand guard and protect homes and factories and malls. Even the much maligned taxi industry did their bit guarding premises from looters. I and my fellow citizens watched as in the midst of the horror of looting, property damage on an unprecedented scale, arson, and all manner of criminal acts, there were people who were able to forget about themselves and what they needed and wanted, and thought of their fellow citizens and what they most needed at this time. The recognition that fellow human beings were hurting and suffering and scared prompted a mass outpouring of support, care, and aid. Suddenly I liked being part of the human race again. In the midst of unspeakable violence and damage, I realised angels do exist. We have them amongst us.

I do think we are on the verge of new things. Be it new policies, a new dispensation, and new way of life. I thought this when Covid hit us, and I now think so even more, especially for South Africa. Yes, they must arrest the criminals. For too long people have been allowed to loot the country with no consequences for their actions. But that is not the whole story. There is deep discontent. There are very angry and hurt people. It is simply not possible to have people finish school and have no future ahead of them because youth unemployment is around the 60% mark. For the youth that means no work, no money, and no future. Something has to change, and unfortunately it may have taken such drastic measures to get us to realise this. I hope it has woken up the people in power and the decision makers. Structural change in society is necessary. We simply cannot continue to live as we have been. There are too many people who don't see hope and don't see a future.

But I don't think it is only the rioting and looting that should be the focus of policy makers. What I really hope is that they see how many people are good, how many truly kind, considerate, unselfish people the country has. People see pictures of the looting and violence and are shocked. You must also see the pictures of all the people bravely transporting essential goods to those who need them. You also need to see the pictures of a wheelchair group cleaning up a shopping mall. Understand that what most South Africans love about South Africa is their fellow man. Most South Africans care about one another, care about the country, and have good hearts. We may be a country seen by others as having innumerable problems. Somehow though, despite our history, various criminal elements, and a terrible economy, South Africa has many, many great people who will stand together and do what needs to be done to make the country work. Whenever we have been on the brink of a crisis, somehow, this always comes out.

I personally believe though, that in this world, nothing is ever permanent darkness. Somewhere, someone is ready to shine a light and demonstrate the humanity in the human race. And this can start another light shining as well. No matter what happens, the universe always leaves a light on. It's up to us to be that light, or to find that light, and spread it.