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## The Chief Rabbi's Rosh Hashanah Message 5778 "FINDING UNITY IN COMMUNITY"

As we conclude a year which seems to have been dominated, in no small part, by disunity across the Jewish world, it is increasingly troubling to see some of the vitriol that is now routinely espoused by Jews against one another.

It takes no time at all to find comments on social media about "Chareidi extremist bullies with no grasp of the realities of the modern world" and "heretical leftists who wilfully dilute and undermine the sanctity of Torah at every opportunity." Is this what it has come to?

ויעשו כלם אגודה אחת לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם. "And may the people form a single united bond – to perform Your will with a full heart".

These words, from our Mussaf prayer on Rosh Hashanah, encapsulate our deep and enduring desire for Jewish unity which stretches back, through the annals of history, to the point at which we left Egypt and became a nation for the first time. But, what is the virtue of unity? Don't we have a responsibility to protect what we believe to be right, even if that means division?

There is no question that we do, but what is also certain is that throughout history, disunity has been nothing short of an existential threat to the Jewish people.

The Talmud describes the tense state of conflict in Jerusalem during the years 67-70 CE, throughout which, the Romans laid siege around the walls of our capital city. In Jerusalem, there were storehouses which had provisions to last for 21 years. Yet tragically, when civil war broke out within the city, the storehouses were burned and destroyed. The Romans, who would otherwise have likely lost patience and moved on to fight more pressing battles, were now able to breach the walls and conquer a weakened people.

Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits pointed out that 'Sim Shalom', our prayer for peace in the Amidah, includes the words 'Bless us our Father, all of us as one, in the light of Your countenance'. Why, in the context of prayers for peace with our enemies, must we aspire to peace amongst ourselves? Lord Jakobovits explained that if we cannot overcome our differences within, we will never prevail over our enemies without.

The first Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, Rabbi Kook, would point out that in an orchestra, there are many different instruments which make their own unique sound. Together, under the baton of the conductor, they create beautiful harmony.

May 5778 herald a year in which each one of us can look to parts of our community within which we might ordinarily find very little common ground; those whose instruments possibly make an entirely different sound to ours, but with whom we can offer beautiful harmony to the world.

Valerie and I extend to you all our very best wishes for a happy, fulfilling and peaceful New Year.

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis** September 2017 • Tishrei 5778

