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Striving for unity among the Jewish people is a practical undertaking

“Pursuing peace” means practically doing something about it. We pursue peace by reaching out to each other.

By WARREN GOLDSTEIN MAY 31, 2020 03:25



Israeli communities make signs with slogans of unity amid coronavirus lockdown
(photo credit: OHR TORAH STONE)





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Last week I received a call from Russian Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar suggesting that we issue a joint letter from chief rabbis around the world calling for Jewish unity. I was really drawn to this idea and thought it a timely one given the connection with the festival of Shavuot.

Shavuot, of course, celebrates the Divine revelation at Mount Sinai. "Like one person with one heart" is how our sages describe the sublime moment of Jewish unity as the Jewish people stood at the foot of the mountain ready to receive the Torah. We see that unity was a key element to Shavuot and the giving of the Torah. The question is, why?

The Maharal of Prague, the great 16th century [Torah](#) sage, has an explanation. He cites the famous statement from the Zohar: "The people of Israel, the Torah and God are one."

The deep connection between these three entities has profound implications. The Maharal explains that if the Jewish people are fragmented, this results in the Torah itself being fragmented. If we are divided, it compromises the integrity of the Torah itself. In other words, unity is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. The Jewish people had to be united so that the Torah could come into the world whole.

That unity is only achieved if we make space for each other. This means transcending our ego, rising above ourselves, and developing the capacity to show understanding, forgiveness and compassion to those around us. This





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self-transcendence imbues us with holiness and greatness; it makes us Godly and brings us together and unified as one, as a united people ready to receive the Divine gift of the Torah.

These are very lofty ideas. Crucially, though, Jewish unity isn't an abstract idea. It needs to be put into action. As Pirkei Avot teaches: "Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace."

Rabbeinu Yona explains that "loving peace" means subscribing to the concept of [peace](#), aspiring to it as an ideal. "Pursuing peace," on the other hand, means practically doing something about it.

We pursue peace - we actively create the conditions for Jewish unity - by reaching out to each other, dealing sensitively and kindly with one another, building bridges, healing rifts, and settling our differences through concerted action.

This idea that unity is a verb rather than a noun - that it's something we do rather than simply pay lip service to - is the basis of our call to action. In our joint letter as chief rabbis around the world, we are encouraging Jews everywhere to take practical steps to pursue peace and create unity.

Our letter states: "If you are in a situation of conflict or tension or resentment or anger with another, use these days to reach out to that person and peacefully resolve the matter. If you know of people in similar strife, encourage them to do the same."





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By doing so, we can enter Shavuot and receive the Torah once more "as one people with one heart."

In the merit of our peace-making efforts, may God bless all of us, and the entire world, with health and healing.

The signatories to the letter are: Chief Rabbi of Israel David Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel Yitzhak Yosef, Chief Rabbi of France Haïm Korsia, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar, Chief Rabbi of South Africa Dr. Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of Moscow and President of the Conference of European Rabbis Pinchas Goldschmidt, and Chief Rabbi of Argentina Gabriel Davidovich.

The write is the Chief Rabbi of South Africa.

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