



## A Modern Orthodox Congregation

### **Vacation time**

I'm on my way to visit my grandchildren in Israel and wish everyone an enjoyable and pleasant vacation. While I'm away from Delray Beach I am free from the burdens of daily life and find that writing actually relaxes me and helps in de-stressing. Out of cell phone range and no WiFi signal, my mind is at rest able to contemplate issues that are mundane to some but very important to others.

Let me begin by stating that certain issues are beyond my level of competence. I can't solve the immigration issue and have little knowledge on the economic benefits of tariffs and NAFTA. I also don't have a read of Kim Jong Un and whether he is willing to genuinely have North Korea give up its nuclear program. I also don't have a solution to curtail the incendiary kites wreaking havoc on Israel's southern border. My personal desire withstanding, international politics sometimes gets in the way of the seemingly easiest and justifiable solutions.

Often, I feel like I'm at a dinner party and the hosts are excited about the diversity of the invited guests. However due to that diversity they request that all guests refrain from discussing subjects that may create discord around the table. The table setting is magnificent, the food is served beautifully but the room is hauntingly silent. Everyone is on their best behavior but afraid to utter a word; concerned that something they say may be discomforting to someone.

A few weeks ago the south Palm Beach Jewish Federation had a Unity Day celebration. The day commemorates the three boys that were kidnapped in Israel a few years ago and who were eventually found murdered. However, an amazing thing happened during the eighteen days of searching for the boys. Israel became unified. For eighteen days there was no right wing versus left wing, no religious versus secular; there were only Jews hoping to be able to find the boys alive. For almost three weeks all matters that had always kept us

apart ceased to be important. Life revolved around finding the boys and bringing them home. Sadly, it wasn't to be. Thousands that came out to help returned to the daily grind of living in a fractured society. However, the parents of the three boys promoted a novel idea. They asked that to keep the memory of their children alive, perhaps that symbol of unity can be a global communal objective.

Obviously, talking about unity is far easier than actually creating unity. We can't expect a society to go through life silently out of fear they may share an opinion or bring up an issue that some may find upsetting or sensitive. Furthermore, my entire life I was told to have a strong conviction and do what I believe to be correct, regardless if others disagree. Does this new found unity challenge the validity of my upbringing?

Thus, perhaps we ought to define what exactly is the unity we desire and what are areas where disagreeing is both positive and moral.

1. We should all realize that we are one Jewish community and must look out for the overall benefits of our Jewish community. I meet with rabbis whose political leanings and religious values are vastly different than mine, but we work in conjunction on areas that are mutually beneficial to the Jewish community.
2. We should understand that how someone else observes their Judaism is irrelevant; allowing everyone the right to observe in the manner they choose is unity.
3. We should be cognizant that on issues such as abortion, gun control, DACA, the undocumented alien, school vouchers, and a host of other social issues, unity must allow for the ability of everyone to follow their own guiding principles. Often these issues are simultaneously correct and incorrect and each side has a viewpoint that can be valid.
4. Unity must allow that I, as a Torah observant Jew, can believe in the moral integrity of its law, yet not demand that all people of my faith follow my understanding of what is God's understanding. Even in the narrowness of Orthodox Judaism my opinion is often diametrically opposed by other Orthodox rabbis.
5. Being a Torah observant Jew, I must believe in my heart that only my religion and practice is correct. However, your faith should be more between man and God than between man and man. Of course if someone asks, then it behooves you to share what you believe is the privilege of being an observant Jew. However, unity demands that we tread very softly on the toes of others.
6. Unity predicates itself on a realization that all men are created equal, albeit fully cognizant that all men are not equal in almost every facet of life. (Parallel this thought with the biblical version of Moses. "And he Moshe was the most humble of men". Now the fact that Moshe was also the greatest of men is not contradictory. He knew what his God given talents were but he didn't think he was better than anyone else.)
7. Unity means that I can and should be passionate about any issue I desire, yet also be equally accepting of the passion of those who vehemently disagree with you.

8. Unity doesn't mean that I will always feel good about my acceptance of others, but where is it written that feeling good is a valid or logical reason against acting properly.
9. But perhaps the easiest way of achieving harmony and unity is the realization that most divisive issues aren't really issues at all. Whether we like vanilla or chocolate, Yankees or Red Sox, Delray or Boca (ok that is not even a contest) are lacking substance and make zero difference in the overall scheme of life. If we just dismiss all those things that are irrelevant, unity is so much easier to accomplish.
10. And even on those issues that are fundamental to our core beliefs and we can find no middle ground, all is still not lost. By limiting our divisiveness only to issues where our opinion might count, we will realize that most of us are not that important and rarely if ever will our personal opinion matter. Thus, we will find that on the overwhelming majority of issues we will agree or at least not disagree.

Perhaps the pursuit of total unity is unachievable. However, if our objective is to reduce discord and create a more harmonious Jewish community then any reduction of disunity is a step in the right direction. No, I haven't solved the many crisis permeating our globe nor have I acted rabbinic by vehemently chastising those who disagree with me. Yet, at a bare minimum I can still pray that those who currently see the world from a different perspective begin to also see that my perspective has merit. And who knows, they may even end up agreeing with me. Obviously, that would prove to be the optimum sign of unity.

Can you tell, I am on vacation and totally relaxed? Well, it's Friday afternoon and Shabbat is soon to descend upon the hills of Jerusalem and I am luxuriating at our hotels rooftop pool overlooking the old city. No sermon to contemplate or food to prepare I'm able to fully enjoy the tranquility of the moment. This may truly be what Hashem has in mind when he gave us the mitzvah of Shabbat. He gave us time to release our mind from turmoil and concern; a time to look at our holy people and see only the beauty.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Jack Engel