



A Message from Rabbi Debra Dressler

Over recent weeks, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities have all been targeted with violence, vandalism, hate speech, and other forms of bigotry. Even the bomb scares at numerous JCCs that are revealed to be hoaxes create stress, cost resources, and violate the sense of security we strive to provide our families despite the hard realities in the world around us. In London, we have not been immune. Two bomb hoaxes at our JCC, and vandalism at the Chaldean church, have brought the disturbing headlines to our own community.

Despite the sometimes overwhelming external circumstances, not every headline has been a tragedy. Jewish communities have protected Muslim prayer services; Muslims have raised money to repair vandalized cemeteries. Countless words of support have been tweeted, posted, re-tweeted, e-mailed and otherwise shared in every medium imaginable. When faced with the greatest bigotry in generations, more and more of our people have pushed past the years of mistrust, antagonism, and disagreement to extend a hand of support across the divide that only months before seemed an impossible dream.

What does it mean for Jews, Muslims, and Christians to take this giant leap of faith? Can common cause outweigh the intractable challenges that have kept us at arm's length for so long? I have no easy answers. I couldn't have imagined the kind of support we have witnessed as our communities have been targeted. But neither do I imagine that the issues that have divided us will simply evaporate. God willing, the external threats will subside. It is a far greater challenge to build bridges between communities when we are not united in fighting a common enemy.

Christians hid Jewish children from Nazi extermination during World War II. Jews marched with Dr. King in Washington, and even died in the American civil rights movement. Algerian Muslims risked their lives to protect the Jews during the Vichy period, even though they themselves were denied French citizenship by the very government that had bestowed it on the Jewish community. These sacrifices were not made because we all agreed, or because we all suffered or prospered equally in these societies. There are real, tangible differences that will continue to require our attention and even disagreement. But disagreement on some issues can never stand in the way of our essential humanity.

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Our enemies will only win if they succeed in isolating us. If we allow bigotry and attacks to splinter us within our communities or between our faith groups, they will have succeeded. The courage to reach across differences to provide mutual support in the face of violence directed at us all simply because of our faith and our identity--this courage is what has always allowed for our survival.

In his speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Elie Wiesel captured the very essence of the task before us:

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion, or political views, that place must – at that moment – become the center of the universe.

May we continue to stand up against hatred of any kind, against any group, in any place, at any time. Humanity is the only response to hatred. Our own history as a Jewish people has taught us the necessity of this imperative.