

Jewish unity during times of crisis



by Matthew M. Hausman

“Who is a Jew?” may be considered a politically charged question, but it actually has an easy answer. Simply stated, a Jew is defined by *Halakha* (Jewish law) as one born of a Jewish mother or who joins the Jewish people in accordance with Jewish law. That is the baseline accepted by everyone – it is neither vague nor ambiguous and is a question to be determined by the Jewish people themselves.

However, the question “what do Jews do?” is more controversial because it often implicates perceptions and stereotypes instead of substance and presumes unflattering definitions foisted upon us from the outside. Moreover, it is often employed by antisemites to disparage Jewish integrity, provoke

discord, and shatter Jewish unity.

Even without the pressures of antisemitism, divisions within Jewish society can seem insurmountable to the point of dysfunction.

Since October 7th, however, the Jewish world has come together in a spirit of "*achdut*" (oneness) not seen in a long time, and it seems to have restored the Torah imperative to seek commonality rather than dissimilitude. As stated in the Gemara (*Shevuot*, 39a), "*kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*," or "all Jews are responsible for one another." Forgetting this principle in the past has led to senseless hatred among Jews, which according to the Sages was the reason for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Whereas deviations from core *halakhic* doctrines and principles may well be irreconcilable, other differences are often illusory or based on acquired local custom. Many Jews have experienced the discomfort of non-substantive parochialism..

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