Starting with the Fast of Tammuz, we begin a period in the Jewish calendar known as The Three Weeks, culminating in the 9th of Av. During this period, we recall the tragedies throughout history that have befallen the Jewish people, many of which, according to the Sages, were brought about as a result of sinat chinam, baseless hatred and discord between individual Jews and within the Jewish people.

Jews are an argumentative people. We say “The L-rd is my shepherd” but no Jew was ever a sheep. I remember once having a dialogue with the late and great Israeli novelist Amos Oz who began by saying, “I’m not sure I’m going to agree with Rabbi Sacks on everything, but then, on most things, I don’t agree with myself.”

Ours is the only civilization I know whose canonical texts are anthologies of arguments. The prophets argued with G-d; the rabbis argued with one another. We are a people with strong views — it is part of who we are. Our ability to argue, our sheer diversity, culturally, religiously and in every other way, is not a weakness but a strength. However when it causes us to split apart, it becomes terribly dangerous because whilst no empire on earth has ever been able to defeat us, we have, on occasions, been able to defeat ourselves.

It happened three times. The first was in the days of Yosef and his brothers when the Torah says, “They could no longer speak peaceably together.” The brothers sold Yosef as a slave and yet eventually they all, as well as their grandchildren, ended up in slavery. The second followed the completion of the First Temple. Shlomo died, his son took over, the kingdom split in two. That was the beginning of the end of both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. The third was during the Roman siege of Jerusalem, when the Jewish men and women besieged inside were more focused on fighting one another than the enemy outside. Those three splits within the Jewish people caused the three great exiles of the Jewish people.
How then do we contain that diversity within a single people, bound together in fate and in destiny? I think there are seven principles.

**Principle 1**
**Keep talking**

Remember what the Torah says about Yosef and his brothers: לֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם — “They couldn’t speak to him in peace.” In other words, Rabbi Yonason Eybeschutz says, had they kept speaking, eventually, they would have made peace. So keep talking to one another.

**Principle 2**
**Listen to one another**

There is good news about the Jewish people and bad news. The good news is we are amongst the greatest speakers in the world. The bad news is we are among the world’s worst listeners. שְּמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל calls on us to listen to one another in a way that we can actually hear what our opponent is saying. If we do this, we discover it is not just a powerful way to avoid conflict, but profoundly therapeutic as well.

**Principle 3**
**Work to understand those with whom you disagree**

Remember why the law follows Hillel rather than Shammai. According to the Talmud, Hillel was humble and modest; he taught the views of his opponents even before his own. He labored to understand the point of view with which he disagreed.

**Principle 4**
**Never seek victory**

Never ever seek to inflict defeat on your opponents. If you seek to inflict defeat on your opponent, they must, by human psychology, seek to retaliate and inflict defeat on you. The end result is though you win today, you lose tomorrow and everyone loses in the end. Do not think in terms of victory or defeat. Think in terms of the good of the Jewish people.

**Principle 5**
**If you seek respect, give respect**

Remember the principle of the Book of Proverbs: "As water reflects face to face, so does the heart of person to person." As you behave to others, they will behave to you. If you show contempt for other Jews, they will show contempt to you. If you respect other Jews, they will show respect to you.

**Principle 6**
**You can disagree, but still care**

Jews will never agree on everything, but we remain one extended family. If you disagree with a friend, tomorrow they may no longer be your friend. But if you disagree with your family, tomorrow they are still your family. In the end, family is what keeps us together, and that is expressed best in the principle כל ישראל עבדים אותו בעב - All Jews are responsible for one another. Ultimately, I do not need you to agree with me, I just need you to care about me.

**Principle 7**
**Remember that G-d chose us as a people**

G-d did not choose only the righteous, He chose all of us. We stand before G-d as a people, and it is as a people that we stand before the world. The world does not make distinctions. Antisemites do not make distinctions. We are still united by a covenant of shared memory, shared identity and shared fate, even if we do not share the exact same faith.

The Sages said a very striking thing. They said, “Great is peace because even if Israel is worshipping idols and there is peace among them, G-d will never allow harm to happen to them.” That is a powerful idea to reflect upon.

So the next time you are tempted to criticize another Jew or walk away from a group of Jews you think have offended you, make that extra effort to stay together, to forgive, to listen, to try and unite, because if G-d loves each of us, can we justify failing to strive to do this too?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth