Fireworks in Babel

Thought for the Day
Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)
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I suppose there's something metaphorically apt about the new Speaker of the House of Commons taking office on fireworks day! It's not for nothing that Sir Lindsay Hoyle has pledged to address the sometimes venomous tone of debate in the House, and expressed his fears for the safety of MPs and candidates now that the starting pistol for the general election has been officially fired.

It's a sobering reminder of what political debate has come to, even in these supposedly civilised times. And the news that the UK's official terrorism threat level has been lowered – still rather unsettlingly to merely "substantial" – also makes me wonder how much the world has really matured since the explosive days of Guy Fawkes.

The portion of the Torah that was read in synagogues throughout the world this past weekend tells one of the best known stories in the Bible – Noah's flood – which is often cited as teaching two important and universal lessons: first, that since all of humanity has common ancestry, no race or ethnicity is superior to any other; and second, that we have an obligation to care for and protect the environment, since all creation is literally in the same boat.

We also read another famous story – the Tower of Babel – when humanity comes together to build a monument to their own self-importance, and are frustrated by the babel of their own voices. The main moral, as the Bible puts it elsewhere, is that to claim that "I achieved all my success on my own" is pure vanity and conceit, "mere chasing the wind".

There's another moral too: having a common purpose is not enough to ensure success; shouting at one another, name-calling and abuse, is a pretty sure way to frustrate that purpose. So let's resolve to conduct our debates with courtesy and respect, to recognise that our opponents are not our enemies, and to turn this election season into a season of good will to all!

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