

**The Chief Rabbi's Rosh Hashanah Message 5786**

A few months ago, while recording some podcasts in Israel, I interviewed hostage campaigner Dalia Horn. Her family's pain is unimaginable: her brothers-in-law, Yair and Eitan, were both taken hostage by Hamas on October 7th. Yair, who was released after nearly five hundred days of unspeakable torture, shared a story with Dalia which she recalled during our conversation.

At one point during their captivity, the two brothers were forced to run for their lives through a tunnel deep beneath Gaza. Eitan collapsed. Broken and exhausted, he begged his brother to leave him behind. But Yair refused. He bent down and lifted him up, with two Hebrew words: "Achim anachnu" – "We are brothers".

After his release, Yair asked Dalia, "Who will be there to lift Eitan now, when I no longer can?"

Dalia's answer became her mission, and her message to the Jewish world: We are all brothers and sisters. And it is our responsibility to lift one another.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of the Akeidah – the binding of Isaac. In its aftermath, Hashem famously blesses Abraham: "I shall significantly increase the number of your offspring so they will be like the stars in the heavens above and like the sand which is by the seashore."

The Midrash asks: why both stars and sand? Both seem to symbolise incalculability – so what is the difference?

The answer is that stars are high, untouchable and secure. They represent the Jewish people in times of safety and strength. But sand is trampled underfoot. It symbolises us in our moments of danger, pain and vulnerability. And yet, this is part of a blessing. How so?

Because the reference here is not merely to "sand". It is "sand by the seashore". Wet, compact and pressed tightly together by the tide, the individual grains are bound together as one.

This was Hashem's deeper blessing: that even when we are under assault, when we feel trampled or cast aside, we will not scatter. We will draw together. We will hold each other up.

As we mark two years since the atrocities of October 7th – atrocities that have left deep scars across the Jewish world – we can reflect with pride not only on our survival, but on the way that we have stood together. We have felt the loneliness of facing down hatred, and the weight of grief and fear. And yet, like the sand on the shore, we have held firm, bound together by a heritage that is ancient, unshakable and sacred.

Achim anachnu: We are brothers. We are sisters. And we do not let one another fall.

As I write these words, Eitan Horn remains in Gaza. He is one of fifty whose families still await their return. May this Rosh Hashanah bring healing, strength and redemption. For our hostages, for our homeland, for every Jewish soul still waiting to be lifted and for everyone whose lives have been shattered during these exceptionally challenging times.

Shanah Tovah!



**Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis KBE**

