Our shared roots should help us find the path to peace

COLUMN

View from a rabbi



Rabbi David Hulbert

My poor father arrived in England from Germany in September 1939, two days before war was declared.

As a Jew, he knew, pretty much for all of his life, what racism really was.

His school, university, and his German neighbours had legitimised prejudice and discrimination against him, based on his Jewish identity and antecedents.

He and his family were looked down upon as an inferior race, so he was forced to flee.

As we now know, had he not reached safety in England, he would have been murdered and I wouldn't be here.

His mother and two sisters made a different decision.

They fled to Palestine earlier, in the 1930s.

Ninety years later, they have countless descendants, my relatives, who live throughout the modern State of Israel.

If you visit my little synagogue in Woodford, you'll meet plenty of English Jews.

Most of them, like me, are descendants of immigrants from Russia and Ukraine, Poland and Germany, who arrived here before the First World War.

But a minority have black or brown skins, the latter having descended from Jews who left India shortly after partition and independence.

Are these religious Jews, who regularly come into synagogue to hear the Bible and pray to God, all racists?

I doubt it very much.

The Bible certainly distinguishes between Israelites and Gentiles (non-Jews), but it's completely uninterested in people's ethnic origins or the colour of their skins.

Our prophets condemned equally both Israelites and Gentiles for their moral behaviour, when they had strayed from the right path and had committed idolatry.

Our greatest prophet, Moses, married an Ethiopian woman.

A later prophet, Amos, asked: "Are you not just like the Ethiopians, O people of Israel?"

So it's not surprising that in the latter 20th century, Jews were at the forefront of the American Civil Rights movement, fighting racial discrimination against black Americans.

Those who have suffered from racism themselves will naturally empathise with others whose lives have been blighted by racial hatred.

The Torah declares: "When non-Jewish strangers settle beside you in your land, you must not oppress them. You must treat them equally as your own citizens – you shall love the stranger as yourself." (Leviticus 19).

So what of the modern State of Israel, a melting pot of the descendants of immigrants over the past 150 years?

Of the six million Jewish population, half are the descendants of people like my aunts, who escaped the countries of Northern Europe.

The other half are descended from the 700,000 Jews who left or were expelled from all the Arab countries, Persia and India, in the 1950s.

There are also many black Ethiopian Jews, and around two million Arabic-speaking Muslim citizens.

All are Israelis now. A truly lively multicultural and multiracial society.

And as for the Palestinian Arabs?

The breath-taking irony is that ethnically, they are indistinguishable from the overall Jewish population.

Palestinian Jew or Palestinian Arab – all look exactly the same.

You can't tell who's a Jew or an Arab, until they open their mouth and speak in Hebrew, Arabic or accented English.



Jewish refugees from Aden pictured at a temporary shelter in Mansell Street, Aldgate, in 1967 Image: PA

This is objectively confirmed by plenty of genetic research into peoples' origin and ancestry.

In the end, they are all of the same ancient Semitic stock.

Of course, there are probably a minority of racists in modern Israel, just as there are here in Britain.

In both countries there's far too much hate.

But the assertion that an entire people, or religion, is intrinsically racist, is manifestly absurd, as well as being deeply offensive to me personally and to my congregation.

These two Semitic peoples are so similar, brothers and sisters, descended from a common stock, our ancestor Abraham, and they must ultimately learn to live together in peace.

■ **Rabbi David Hulbert is from East London & Essex Liberal Synagogue.**

Curtain rises on a bright new act for much-loved theatre

COLUMN

View from a theatre



Emily Isaac

You may have seen the exciting announcement that the Kenneth More Theatre will reopen this December, following the successful completion of major building works and refurbishment.

The theatre closed in 2024 after reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (Raac) was identified in the roof during a routine structural assessment.

In order to keep the public safe, the council took the decision to close the auditorium while essential works were carried out.

The council has invested more than £1 million to remove the Raac and refurbish the building, including new seating, redecoration, carpets and a new ticket booking system.

It feels particularly special that we will be celebrating the reopening on December 31, 2026, as it originally opened on New Year's Eve in 1974 with a preview of *The Beggar's Opera*.

From school performances and community productions to professional shows and much-loved pantomimes, generations of local residents have made memories here over the last 50 years.

To mark this exciting moment, we are bringing together the people who have been part of the Kenneth More Theatre over the years for a very special family celebration show – *Curtain Up! Celebrate Act Two*.

More than just a reopening, this is a chance for the community to come together and reflect on the Kenneth More Theatre's proud history while looking ahead to an exciting new chapter.

We have invited local companies and groups connected to Kenneth More Theatre to be part of the celebration and to bring a performance that represents them.

It could be something they have performed there in the past, something from a current production, or perhaps something they are hoping to bring to the theatre in the future.

The line-up will include performances from local amateur dramatics companies, dance schools, plus our in-house theatre company – Redbridge Creates Theatre Company – and many more yet to be confirmed.

There will be music, musical theatre, drama, dance, comedy and plenty of surprises, as well as some special group numbers bringing everyone together.

The show will be led creatively by Gemma Eves and Fraser Stainton, with Artie Reed as musical director.

Whether you are a regular theatre-goer, a former performer, or visiting for the very first time, this unique performance will offer a memorable opportunity to experience the magic of live performance as the curtain rises once again on our much-loved venue.

Our reopening show will be followed by an exciting programme in 2027 of comedy, music, family shows and of course, our much-loved pantomime.

Tickets for *Curtain Up! Celebrate Act Two* can be purchased at: *vrlc.uk/book-a-show*



Kenneth More Theatre is celebrating its reopening with a special gala on New Year's Eve Image: Vision RCL

■ **Emily Isaac is from Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure (Vision RCL).**