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**Daniel Greenberg CB**

**Script for BBC Thought for the Day**

**27 June 2024**

**Respecting Opponents**

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Good morning.

While the country is preparing for the election, in Parliament my colleagues and I are preparing to induct a large expected group of first-time MPs immediately afterwards.

In my “welcome to Parliament” speech to new Members I am planning to encourage them to take the new Parliament as an opportunity to aim to restore trust and respect between the public and politicians, and to do that by showing that they trust and respect each other. Famously, the government and opposition benches in the House of Commons are separated by lines on the floor which keep them two sword lengths apart: indicating that in Parliament we do not fight – we debate with passion and power, but always with respect for our opponents.

Treating opponents with respect and decency is the essence of humanity, and there is a Jewish teaching that makes the point in a particularly graphic way.

In Leviticus the Bible lists animals that are permitted to be eaten – kosher – and those which are not. As part of their general search for ethical messages in the details of Biblical law, the rabbis discuss the attributes of the different species and, broadly speaking, discern morally meritorious characteristics in the kosher species and morally meretricious characteristics in the non-kosher species.

The Hebrew name of the bird the stork is *chassidah*, from the root *chessed* – kindness – and the Talmud attributes this to the ways in which the male stork shows unusual care and concern for its mate and offspring. Later rabbis ask, in that case, why is the stork not listed among the kosher animals? And they give an inspiring explanation: showing kindness to one’s family is not true kindness, but a form of self-interest. Looking after those who are part of my support network is not showing disinterested concern: my ability to show true compassion is found not in how I behave to those who love and agree with me, but to strangers and opponents.

This is the same as the message of those two lines on the floor of the House of Commons. Anyone can show respect when talking to those who agree with them and support them. The mark of true leadership is to embrace the stranger and the enemy: to treat those who disagree with us and with whom we disagree with a *chessed* – kindness – that reflects the divine image in which we were each created and turns it into a blueprint for life.