

Unless we communicate clearly, the tower will come crumbling down

I am not certain what to make of the famous story which appears towards the beginning of the book of Genesis. It tells of the people who got together to build a tower that could ultimately reach God. Whether it was to challenge or to honour, is unclear. Whether it was literal or a fable, is equally opaque and equally unimportant for the lesson that it might foretell: a lesson that is well worth contemplating in a 2020 Covid world.

 By [Howard Feldman](#) 22 Jul 2020



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In case you weren't paying attention to that school lesson, the tale is a rather simple one. The people got together to build this tower that would reach the heavens. They were doing absolutely splendidly until, for some reason or another, they started to speak different languages. At that point, their failure to communicate had a major impact, resulting in the whole thing pretty much falling apart. If one lacks the imagination, I guess a reference to the Madupi Power Station could assist: that is if one ignores the corruption element that is unique to the South African story.



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It doesn't take a biblical or literary scholar to make the connection to the link between clear communication and success. When people speak so that others can understand, we are able to reach "amazing heights". Without it, we will destroy what we have tried to build and render all our efforts useless.

Covid-19 requires us to communicate clearly. Governments need to have a unified message with little ambiguity, the media fraternity have the responsibility to impart accurate and reliable information and citizens need to make sure that they do their bit not to promulgate fake news just because they have a device that allows them to.

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We started so well in South Africa. The transparent, straight-talking messages from President Ramaphosa saw support where it is unlike the ANC had seen in years. Opposition parties stood behind him and contributed positively to the dialogue as much as they were able to. But then, much like in the tale of Babel, language became confusion, intention and agendas were hidden and the tower of trust began to crumble. Maybe it was the smoking ban. Maybe it was the funding. But either way, the more they spoke, the less we understood.

The responsibility is on us

The responsibility doesn't lie just with them. It sits with us as well. The passing on of dubious information, the repeating of stories that even our late grandmothers would recognise as being rubbish, the suggestion of improbable cures and prophylaxis all add to the noise. It creates chaos and confusion around the essential communication and in doing so, dilutes the message and the information that we need. And whilst the pandemic peaks in South Africa, this is something that we cannot afford.

Some view the Babel story as being one of responsibility and of arrogance: as a battle against the acceptance that there is something larger than us at play. This is striking in its relevance to the Covid pandemic. It's greater than the individual. It's bigger than anything that most of us have seen in our lifetime and likely greater than we ever will. What it means, is that there is a responsibility on us all to communicate clearly and to hold those who don't, to account. Lest it all come crumbling down.

ABOUT HOWARD FELDMAN

Howard Feldman is one of SA's leading entrepreneurs and Head of Marketing & People at Synthesis. His experience is global and extensive, spanning more than 20 years of working as a businessman, philanthropist and social commentator. Feldman was the chairperson of the Board of the South African Jewish Report, the only weekly Jewish newspaper in Africa, and is a global keynote speaker, business strategist, author and morning drive show host.
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