



Dear Friends and Partners,

The ongoing COVID-19 epidemic is a tense and challenging period that is coupled with great uncertainty. The ability of all groups in Israeli society to obey the health guidelines, to act together, and to demonstrate solidarity with one another is essential to successfully coping with the epidemic and the acute triple crisis - medical, economic and political – that Israel faces. The current situation also provides us with an opportunity to look at the various groups that make up Israeli society - Jews, Arabs, Haredim, religious, secular, Ethiopian, Soviet, and more - as well as the relationships between them during this challenging time.

We at **aChord: Social Psychology for Social Change** have been working in recent years to develop and apply innovative academic knowledge from social psychology in order to promote equal, tolerant, and respectful relations between the various social and ethnic groups in Israeli society, and between Israeli society and neighboring societies. In this vein, we want to share with you some insights from the scientific perspective of social psychology that are relevant to the challenges we face today. We believe that now is a time that each of us as citizens, and certainly public personas and the media, have a significant role to play and a historic opportunity to promote a more equal, tolerant, and respectful society. Here are some of our suggestions for thought and action:

1 We are all against Corona - In situations of threat and uncertainty, our natural tendency is to stay closer to our own group. Categorical conceptions of "we" versus "they" are heightened such periods, as are the tensions between the groups. This process, although a natural response, is the **opposite** of what it takes to handle and overcome this epidemic. In times of global crisis, there is a mutual dependency between everyone, regardless of their group affiliation. We must emphasize as much as possible what connects us, because we are all fighting Corona together. Shared goals will promote the formation of a shared identity. In scientific terms, this process is called re-categorization - creating a new and broad category that is shared by different groups and is highlighted in the public sphere. This is a significant challenge in Israel, where almost all aspects of life remain segregated. However, it is important to emphasize that there is a common struggle here for all Israelis, and only together will we succeed.

2 Remain aware to inequality - The Corona virus also reveals to us our societal blind spots towards minority groups. For example, it is our duty to make sure that while Arab doctors and nurses work around the clock to save lives, they will have adequate representation across all democratic systems and their children will have *access* to and *equal opportunities* for distance learning. Our opportunity to stay home with our children is also a chance for them to learn not only English and math, but also to create a discourse on values and meaningful issues that will contribute to their development as future citizens who believe in equality and solidarity.



- 3 **Do not succumb to generalizations** - In times of stress and anxiety, failure to follow health guidelines is seen as a violation of a social norm that engenders highly emotional and critical responses. We must encourage and nurture the recognition that there is a stronger tendency than usual to apply negative stereotypes to an entire group when it comes to the "out-group" versus our "in-group." Thus, in Israel these days, discourse in the media and on social networks can become over-generalizing, stereotypical, and sometimes offensive with regards to adherence to social distancing within Haredi society. Despite the importance of enforcing the rules and taking measures against the violators, we must be wary of such discourse toward entire groups. We must encourage more complex, heterogeneous statements, and provide examples that contradict the media narrative that often presents a stereotypical, one-dimensional picture of various groups.
- 4 **Make connections** - One of the most significant psychological needs is the need for *connection, closeness, and social affiliation*. At a time where everyone is shut in their homes and physical encounters are not possible, this need will be felt more and more. The virtual space, which provides an opportunity to meet, get to know, and create a direct connection with people can help fill this need. Social media can foster connection around the common challenges and experiences of life during the COVID-19 crisis with people from other groups, who, in the limits of day-to-day reality and / or geographical distance, we usually would not meet. Look for these opportunities and take advantage of them.
- 5 **Increase hope** - We have chosen to end with a less popular or noticeable emotion in the public sphere, but one that we at aChord are working to increase both generally and in times of emergency: **Hope**. Negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and sometimes anger and frustration can impact us all in both the personal and social contexts. It is not an easy situation. Nonetheless, studies conducted in Israel and around the world show that sending messages about the ability of states and groups to change, restructure, and eventually overcome crises, even if they are difficult and complex, can increase hope and optimism and strengthen public resilience. We believe that the crisis will end. Along with adhering to the health system guidelines, it is critical to send messages that reinforce the belief that all the different groups in Israeli society can come together for a better future for all of us. This is essential both during the current crisis and after it passes.

Wishing you and your loved ones remain healthy & safe,

The aChord Team