

# כל בית ישראל

שבת קודש פרשת ויקהל פקודי החדש תשי"ף

Jewish Center of Teaneck

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## The Entire House of Israel

VaYakhel Pekudei HaChodesh

25 Adar 5780

### I.

The story of Sefer Shemot is about the transformation of the Jewish people from a family of seventy into a nation of millions.

The Sefer begins with the words, את יעקב איש וביתו באו. They each came down, the House of Yaakov. It was an intimate family.

Of course, by the end of the Sefer which we will conclude tomorrow, the Jewish people have grown to a nation of millions.

It is completely typical, as groups expand, for the level of connection, those precious familial bonds, to loosen, and eventually, to evaporate. It's just very difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the intensive connections which define a family to persist as the sheer number of people expands to the point where people simply do not know each other.

If this is the typical pattern of group expansions, the conclusion of Sefer Shemot tells us a completely different story. The last words of the Sefer, which take us back to those very opening words, introduce a new concept: כל בית ישראל בכל מסעיהם, 'the cloud of Hashem was on the Mishkan by day, and in a fire by night, before the eyes of the entire House of Israel, in all of their travels.'

The Torah is teaching us something simply astonishing. We succeeded in going from seventy to millions, from a family to a nation, without sacrificing our sense of belonging to the same house. את יעקב איש וביתו באו is transformed into כל בית ישראל.

We are not a nation as other nations may be. We are a nation that belongs to the same house, כל בית ישראל. We care for each other as members of the same family would.

## II.

We are presently engaged in a moment of great trial testing the proposition that we can act, across communities and continents, as one single household, כל בית ישראל. The results have been absolutely unequivocal. Our community kaddish moved from our beloved shul to Florida, to the United Kingdom, and when the National Health Service in Britain closed the minyan, to a government sanctioned minyan. כל בית ישראל!

For those in our immediate community for whom leaving home to go shopping involves a serious health risk at present, so many deliveries and shopping trips were arranged and organized. Pesach food was arranged for all those who need it delivered. In one of the key scenes in all of Sefer Shemot, Pharaoh says to Moshe, מי ומי ההולכים, who do you plan on bringing to your religious festival. Moshe's answer is crystal clear: בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך. We go together, old and young. Our community lived up to that mandate this week, as I know we will in the weeks ahead. כל בית ישראל!

Our Youth leaders posted bedtime stories and activities from right here in Teaneck, and our Shluchei Beit HaKnesset did so from Israel. I received messages from so many in our community who made aliyah over the last year, supporting us and sending us love. כל בית ישראל!

Dr. Stephanie Haimowitz, my cousin and daughter of our members Dr. Azriel and Joyce Haimowitz, penned a letter from the very front lines of treating COVID-19 in an Emergency Room in New York with very specific guidelines for Pesach observance (ones which have already been adopted by the RCBC), which, with permission, have been distributed to thousands of Rabbis in North America and Israel about what it means to act responsibly this Yom Tov reason. This is what it means to take responsibility for each other. כל בית ישראל!

## III.

Tomorrow morning, for the first time since 1740, the Mikveh Israel shul in Philadelphia will not be open for davening on Shabbat morning.

So many in our community are being severely impacted by the spread of COVID-19, and we must brace ourselves for the very challenging weeks which lay ahead. There is much about which we might feel depressed. There is much about which we might cry.

And yet, as we all recite Birkat HaChodesh tomorrow, for the first time in our lives, perhaps, without a minyan, and a Sefer Torah, and daven for health, **הימים של חילוי עצמות**, let us remember the timeless words of our Sages: “Israel is compared to a moon, which waxes and wanes.”

Indeed, we are **נמשלה ללבנה**, there are times of great darkness, but then, like the moon, the light returns.

Let us be strong right now, to ride out the storm in accordance with the vigilant guidelines we have observed to date, for our own safety, for that of our community, and for all those impacted by this virus.

Chazak Chazak V’Nitchazek.