

CONNECTIONS

March 20, 2020 | 24 Adar, 5780

Friends,

We're pleased to share with you the first of what will be a weekly email containing valuable content and resources from across the Conservative Movement. We're calling it "Connections" -- a tool for maintaining togetherness, even when we must be far apart.

In this issue, we've included a note from Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, as well as links to additional resources and content. In forthcoming emails, we will cover additional topics, including ways to address Passover.

To offer additional resources or to share comments, please email me at jlivingston@uscj.org.

Shabbat Shalom,

Julie Livingston
Director of Marketing & Communications, USCJ



TURNING “SOCIAL DISTANCING” INTO “SPIRITUAL SOLIDARITY”

By Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal
Chief Executive, The Rabbinical Assembly

Vayakhel-Pekudei 5780/2020

One of my favorite moments in the morning service is when I gather the tzitzit -- the fringes on each of the four corners of my tallit (prayer shawl) -- bringing them together to prepare to recite the Shema. As I bring together these four separate strands I recite the words of the siddur (prayer book) “Vehavi’enu mei’arba kanfot ha’aretz -- may God bring us together from the four corners of the world.” Indeed, the Jewish people are spread all around the world -- from Buenos Aires to Mbale (in Uganda), from Toronto to Jerusalem.

With each morning’s recitation of the Shema, when we speak of God’s Oneness, we also think about what it means to bring people together, beyond those who are in physical proximity.

It turns out that we Jews, through the concept of global peoplehood, are experts at virtual communities.

This week, our Torah portions (there are two combined) begin with the word “Vayakhel,” in which Moses gathers the people as a community. The

Torah implies that to build the mishkan, a home for God's presence, we must build kehillah -- community -- first.

In this new environment, the need for "social distancing" is particularly painful to us as a Jewish people. We are so used to coming together as a kehillah to learn, pray, sing, and celebrate. As we heed the call for "social distancing" to save lives, let's follow the spirit of gathering tzitzit and parashat Vayakhel and ensure that this does not also become "spiritual distancing." Some of the resources in this email can help, including virtual prayer experiences, classes, and webinars. And of course, we can keep one another in our thoughts. But also, through the gift of technology, we can stay in touch with another. We can reach out to loved ones, check in on those at risk of illness or loneliness, deliver kind words. We must gather people together and form *kehillah* -- community and connection -- in every way possible.

Even in these challenging times, through prayer, ritual, and action, we can build a *miskhan*, a dwelling place for God, moving from "social distancing" to "spiritual solidarity."

Shabbat Shalom.

Resources From Our Partners

- **A Letter to the Community**
 - By Chancellor Arnie Eisen, Jewish Theological Seminary
- **L'Chaim: Jewish Wisdom for a Time of Pandemic**
 - By Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
- **CJLS Guidance for Remote Minyanim in a time of COVID-19**
 - By Rabbi Elliot Dorff and Rabbi Pamela Barmash, The Rabbinical Assembly
- **Shabbat in the Time of Coronavirus: Finding Peace and Joy When You Need it Most**
 - By Rabbi Cara Weinstein Rosenthal, USCJ and Rabbi Ashira Konigsburg, The Rabbinical Assembly
- **Calendar of Movement Partner Events**

Additional Resources Available

- [USCJ's Full Coronavirus Resource Page](#)
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