



# We are Women's League

Engaging Enriching and Empowering Jewish Women  
Women's League for Conservative Judaism

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D'var Torah – Generic  
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During this year of 5781, Women's League for Conservative Judaism has selected as its theme the idea of B'Yachad or "all of us together". Ironically, this theme was chosen long before we knew about the world-wide Pandemic, where for our protection, we have had to do anything but be together. So many of the epidemiologists today have urged us to "socially distance" ourselves from others around us and to wear masks that so often prevent us from seeing each other's faces as a way of keeping us and those around us healthy.

Thus, the question arises as to how can we live up to the implications of such a theme if we are anything but together.

One story that comes to mind as we contemplate this inability to function in a totally together-like way is that of a man on a boat who began to bore a hole under his own seat. His fellow passengers, who were shocked and frightened, cried, "Stop!. When the water enters through the hole under your seat, the whole boat will sink!" This parable was recounted by Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai, a second century sage in ancient Judea who was active after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. He was one of the most eminent disciples of Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef who was a leading contributor to the Mishnah and to Midrash halakha and like Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai was very aware of the power of our being responsible for one another. This story certainly makes us pause and forces us to think about how many of our actions or even lack of actions affect others around us in both positive and negative ways.

This question and its answer seem truly profound for us in today's world as we grapple with the Pandemic and its repercussions. And it forces us to continue to ask, "How can I get the positive effects of being in a group or in a b'yachad situation when I need to socially distance myself from those around me? How can I feel less isolated when I am alone? How can I help someone else who is also feeling isolated? Furthermore, even though we might be apart from family and community members, how can we still interact with them? And finally, how can we be B'Yachad-together-- under such duress? "It is these questions that have expanded the implications of a theme which should be simple in intent, yet is anything but.

As it is with the boat, so it is that we recognize that being part of something implies that there must be other partners, and partnership implies a condition of cooperation. And when we have the cooperation that exists between one Jew and other Jews, then it is as if we have the strength of all Jewry. With all of this in mind, we have to ask how is it that Women's League for Conservative Judaism, an organization, that includes over 40,000 women from affiliated Conservative synagogues has been able to promote and develop this theme of B'Yachad and its implied values so completely even during the most separating and isolating times that many of us have ever experienced.

Certainly, we are blessed to have strong leaders, our own versions of Miriam, Deborah, and Esther, who continually develop programs, virtual and otherwise that put this theme into existence. Before they even knew about Covid-19, Sisterhoods and Regions developed engaging programs and later shared and adapted their ideas when the Pandemic came, and everything had to be virtual. Ironically, because everything is virtual, we are all now able to attend each other's programs which pre-Covid we might not have been able to do.

These leaders have also been aware that the swift rise of fear and anxiety among their sisterhood sisters due to the uncertainty of Covid-19 is coupled with essential yet socially disruptive measures like lockdowns and quarantines. These can lead to significant psychological disturbances such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, panic disorders, behavioral disorders and loneliness. But we in Women's League are making inroads in combating these fears by providing programming during which we can talk to each other and share these issues together on our screens while we are still able to see each other's whole faces.

One of our most notable programs that clearly highlights the b'yachad theme in a potentially isolating world is the virtual Zoom program of Daily Psalms study, one that also includes the chanting of the Mourner's Kaddish and the Misheberach. Through this program, we, as a group, honor those who are ill and pray for their speedy recovery, provide a daily minyan for those who are remembering a loved one who has died, and check in on the daily endeavors of our sisterhood sisters who are experiencing the difficulty of Covid times with us. Because we have been together all these months and there is such a level of trust amongst all of us, some of us have actually taught a psalm for the first time and also written our own psalms. We finished our study of 150 Psalms with a wonderful celebration- a Siyyum- where we marked this momentous occasion. We even cheered on some of our Women's League women who recited their own psalms. Now that we are studying Pirkei Avot we are continuing on this journey of being b'yachad.

As our International Women's League President Debbi Kaner Goldich has said numerous times during her tenure as president, "We in WLCJ are a holy community, a kehillah kedosha. It is a holy community because it came together in the name of prayer. We were searching for a place to relieve our pain from the Pandemic through sharing our love and friendship for each other. Our community is respectful of each other and accepting of all." Her words are powerful because we know that despite the masks and other kinds of separation, our lives are complex, and we definitely need each other. With our technology and our many educational and programming activities, we are a constant team of partners in everything we do.

There have been so many occasions in which to participate with our Women's League Sisters and it has only made us closer to each other as so many of us look forward to seeing one another and catching up on life cycle events. Some women structure their day around the programs that WLCJ offers. What an amazing opportunity-even a silver lining-during this pandemic to see our Women's League friends from all over North America and Israel every day, ones that we may only see at Sisterhood or Region events or at Convention. For as long as this pandemic exists, we can take comfort in the fact that we have this incredible organization of Women's League for Conservative Judaism that allows us to be together-B'Yachad-in so many ways that impact our lives and help us to navigate this extraordinary time. We may still be wondering how we have changed during this pandemic-in our dealings with our families, our friends and our communities-but right now we are here for one another, b'yachad and because of that we are strong. Shabbat Shalom!