

Summer 2019 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

Chazak chazak v'Nitchazek. Be strong, be strong, and we will be strengthened. These words form the quintessential Jewish statement of conclusion. It is said in (Ashkenazic) communities around the world every time we come to the end of another book of Torah. This past Shabbat, being that we concluded the yearly reading of Leviticus, we followed custom and recited these very words of strength.

It's an interesting phrase for many reasons, among which is the fact that it is comprised of two identical words in the singular followed by a related word in the plural. And so we ask why? Why say the first word twice? And then why move from singular to plural for the third?

As should be a surprise to no one, these straightforward questions have a plethora of suggested answers, but one of the more generally accepted ones, and certainly the one that resonates most fully with me, is summed up by my teacher, colleague, and friend, [Naamah Kelman](#), Dean of the Jerusalem campus of [Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion](#) (and also, by the way, the first woman ever to be ordained as a rabbi in Israel), who writes the following:

“Whenever we finish a book of the Torah in the synagogue’s cycle of readings, those who are present respond immediately with three words: *Chazak chazak, v'nitchazek!* Be strong, be strong [in the singular] and we will be strong [in the plural].” My late father, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, taught: Why do we say *chazak* twice, when once would be enough? It is to tell us that if you and I each are strong, then together we are even stronger. In other words, this is a true “win/win” situation: I need you to be strong so I can be strong too.”

How simple yet profound! How easy, yet also so challenging! And how perfect, because it is true. My strength depends on yours, your strength depends on mine, and together, we will be even stronger when we work in concert with one another. But there is more, at least for the JCNWJ family, because finishing the Book of Leviticus was only one of the reasons we uttered these Jewish words of conclusion recently. The second, and far more personal reason we said them was that this past Shabbat marked the conclusion of Cantor Lazar’s tenure as our leader in song. Beginning this summer, she will be devoting her professional attention to fulfilling her expanding responsibilities as Director of [Steve & Kate’s Camp](#) on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Over the time that Cantor Lazar has been with us, she has strengthened our worship and our very souls with the sweet and powerful melodies that resonate from her with the voice of an angel. She has strengthened us through her jovial way with our

students and her personable conversations with members of all ages. She has strengthened us with her command of Torah and her deep knowledge of liturgy.

In turn, we, too, have strengthened Cantor Lazar. We have strengthened her with our commitment to maintaining Jewish life in a rather remote setting, with our appreciation of deep prayer and meditation, and perhaps, most of all with our heimishe ways. As a proud New Yorker myself, I have license to say that being able to hold on to a piece of the JCNWJ way of life is valuable beyond description when living day to day in the middle of New York City. My time in Washington is what sustains me in New York, and from having spoken with Cantor Lazar about this, I can say that it is no less the case with her as well.

In the end, we are among the truly blessed because we can say that Cantor Lazar has strengthened us, as is Cantor Lazar, because she can say that we strengthened her. Together we are all blessed because having had the fortune of being together, we have all become even stronger. Best of all, even though Cantor Lazar will no longer be with us in the building, the lessons of love and devotion that we have taught each other will continue to pay dividends for years to come.

We are strong, Cantor Lazar is strong, and together, we have all been strengthened.

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Dubin

Copyright © 2019 Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey