

# HOW WE ARE REALLY DOING

by Rabbi Label Lam

*"Speak to the whole of the congregation of Israel saying: On the 10th of this month, they should take to them, every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor who is near unto his house take one according to the counting of the souls, accounting to every person' seating capacity shall you account for the lamb." (Shemos 12:3-4)*

We find here a dramatic shift of focus. In the midst of the great showdown between Moses and Pharaoh, right before the 10th plague, the Jewish Nation is told to mobilize. What is their configuration to be? How are they to be gathered on the night before Israel steps out onto the grand stage of history? Were they to congregate in Cairo Stadium and be held sway by some rhapsodic rhetoric from either Moses or Aaron? No! What are the focal point, the building block, and the survival unit of the Jewish People? The family and the local community!

More than 150 years ago, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote the following in his introduction to the Haggadah: Judaism depends on every Jew. To be a Jew means to be born and bred to this particular vocation. Can our Divinely revealed legacy be transferred from one generation to the next - can Judaism be realized - if the child has no parent, if he has no home in which his spiritual heritage is transmitted to him and where he can thrive in a morally pure and formative atmosphere?

To inherit a home and to build a home - this encompasses a Jew's ethical vocation on earth. Is it not the sine qua non for the hopes and perfection of all nations? If only this great Magna Carta were consulted wherever education and culture, peace and salvation of men and mankind are discussed.

For the fate of men, their success or failure, is decided neither in the chambers of rulers nor on the battlefield. It is not decided in business concerns, in colleges and institutions of arts and sciences or in houses of worship. It is sealed only in one place, in the parental home... There exists no substitute for the home, and if one is looking elsewhere for the source of peace and prosperity, he is searching in vain. All of a nation's politics and diplomacy, its theories of national economy and institutions for mass education, its trade and industry, its schools and community centers - none of these will save the people from extinction if they let the parental home become a parody.

Are children born for the sake of the state's false concern instead of the warm love of parents? Does the census show ever-growing numbers of children without parents and parents without children? Does the nation's high society make a mockery of morality and modesty? If so, then all the palaces it

is building are founded on quicksand."

Last year, at a weekend seminar, a woman approached the table in the dining room where my wife and I were seated with rest of the family. She was excited to see us but we did not recognize her. She told my wife that she had spoken to her briefly five years earlier at another seminar. She recalled that at that time she had decided that she would never get married and have children.

In the midst of their conversation one of our then-newly-born twin girls stretched out her hand to the woman. She told my wife that she put her finger out and the child grasped her finger, as children do. From that brief contact, her heart melted. She went back to her room and cried. "I changed my mind!" she said, and pointing to a spot a few tables away she said, "There's my husband and our two children! Thank you!"

I would like to have believed that one of my lectures could have made the difference, but the feel of a little child or the warm glow of a loving mother means much more than words are capable of conveying.

Just as when the Jewish Nation came down to Egypt it was "each man and his household" so to in the end the Jewish family remains the survival unit and building block of the nation. It is the breeding ground of our future and center of our best hopes and dreams. Its vital signs are the clearest indicators of how we are really doing!

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