

FOR THE CHARGE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

וְהַחֲנִים לְפָנֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן קִדְמָה
לְפָנֵי אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד מִזְרָחָה
מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו שֹׁמְרֵי מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. . . .

Those who encamped before the Tabernacle to the front,
before the Tent of Meeting to the east,
were Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary,
for the charge of the children of Israel. . . .

Those who encamped before the Tabernacle to the front, before the Tent of Meeting to the east—We are often called to be in places where it seems difficult or impossible to do God’s will; but we make it possible when, each of us individually and all of us together as a community, we choose others who study and practice the lessons of Torah to be our neighbors, our associates, and our teachers. *Were Moses and Aaron and his sons*—Since Moses engaged in the study of Torah, those who were his neighbors “became great in Torah” (Rashi), as it is said, “It is well with the righteous, (and) well with his neighbor”; while many of those encamped near the Kohathites, and the family of Korach, became enmeshed in his rebellion (Rashi 16:1), as it is said: “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor” (Genesis Rabbah 89:7). *Keeping the charge of the sanctuary*—Each of us is given a unique gift to guard the sanctuary, that is, to maintain the holy precincts—all the sacred places and times—that sanctify and uplift the Jewish people to God’s purposes. *For the charge of the children of Israel*—Each of us, and each of our congregations, may choose from moment to moment whether the purpose of our existence is to satisfy our private appetites or, instead, to model for others the upbuilding of Israel as a holy nation, one people that ennobles and realizes all the ends we seek in life.

* Numbers 3:38 (in Bamidbar)