

The Twenty-Second Annual Passover Gathering: A Time for Community



The Twenty-Second Annual Passover Gathering will be held on the first day of *Pesah*, Thursday morning, April 17, 2003, with festive holiday services beginning at 9:30 AM.

What is "The Passover Gathering"? It struck me that many members of the congregation are unfamiliar with this AJ original practice that all began twenty-one years ago. I was discouraged by the poor attendance at services on *Pesah*. While the *seder* is one of the most universally

observed Jewish rites, *Yom Tov* services went begging for worshippers.

And yet, in Biblical times, Passover was the beginning of the year. Passover celebrates our freedom as a people. Indeed, Passover celebrates being a people, a proud people.

So, I mused, would it be too much for us to come together on *Pesah* in a great assembly, just as we do on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*? Semi-annually we would rededicate ourselves to Jewish living and our people.

Now I am a realist too. I was content to challenge the congregation to come in numbers sufficient to fill the Sanctuary on the first day of Passover for what I dubbed "The Passover Gathering." I didn't know if it would work. But I hoped. And with each succeeding year, I saw the numbers grow. A few seats were still empty. But I was heartened to see how so many members made the effort to be in shul on the first day of *Yom Tov*, even when it was normally a weekday.

In recent years, though still strong, the numbers have slacked off a bit. So this year, I am asking that we revitalize The Twenty- Second Annual Passover Gathering, an AJ original, with renewed numbers that will fill the Sanctuary.

And never has it been so important. As I write these words, our nation is on the brink of war with Iraq. Our homeland of Israel continues to quake with violence. World instability is real, and our anxiety is palpable.

In this environment, we need the spiritual balm of the synagogue more than ever. By coming together, we bring comfort and strength to each other. We embrace one another with friendship and love, and together it is easier to bear our shared burden. As Jews celebrating an ancient liberation, we draw confidence for the future, knowing that God is the ultimate Liberator, and that his presence is everywhere, at all times.

So come to this year's Passover Gathering. Take the day off from work. If you think you cannot take the whole day off, take the morning off and come to *shul*. It will be a short period of spiritual peace, a time of healing and rejuvenation. A time of joy and spirit.

The *Talmud* says "When a large crowd of Jews comes together, God is glorified." Let us come together for God's glory, for our own spiritual well-being, for our nation and our people.

Cindy and I, our children, and all the members of the synagogue professional staff join in extending to you our heartfelt best wishes that this festival season will be filled with joy and peace. May it be a time for expressing love to those who are dearest, and achieving reconciliation among those who have been estranged. During this season, when we remember our exodus from Egypt, the most formative event in the history of our people, may we rededicate ourselves to living full, intense, and productive lives as Jews and as human beings.

May God bring peace to our hearts and homes, to our nation, our homeland of Israel, and the whole world.

April 17. Put it on your calendar—the Twenty-Second Annual Passover Gathering.

Hag Kasher V'Sameach! A kosher and happy *Pesah* to one and all.

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