

The Thirtieth Annual Passover Gathering, April 19: Lana and Bernie Dishler to Speak on a New Exodus Community



This year is a milestone. Our **Thirtieth Annual Passover Gathering** will be held on the first day of *Pesah*, **Tuesday morning, April 19**, with festive holiday services beginning at 9:30 AM. Our devoted members, Bernie and Lana Dishler will be speaking to the congregation on their recent trip to the Jews of Ethiopia, and the continuing efforts to bring them home to Israel.

I cannot believe that this is the thirtieth "Gathering" we will be having. I remember when we initiated the "Passover Gathering." 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 worshipers.

And yet, in Biblical times, Passover was the beginning of the new 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 re-dedicate ourselves to Jewish living and our people.

Now I am a realist too. And I was content to challenge the congregation to come in numbers sufficient to fill the Sanctuary on the first day of Passover. With each succeeding year, I saw the numbers grow. It was thrilling to see how many members made the effort to be in *shul* on the first day of *Yom Tov*, even when it was normally a weekday. Colleagues from all over the country asked me about this great congregational success. It was a source of great pride to me and to the congregation.

And I am looking forward to greeting you this year.

Passover celebrates the exodus of our people from Egyptian slavery. In our lifetime we have seen embattled Jewish communities winning their freedom and finding rebirth in Israel.

Lana and Bernie have been in the forefront of this fight for freedom for our people. They were leaders in the movement to free Soviet Jews. Their trailblazing work inspired many who became involved, and the freedom that Soviet Jews enjoy was achieved, in part, through the work of support and encouragement that people like Lana and Bernie gave them.

The rescue of the Jews of Ethiopia began in 1984, with Operation Moses. Eight thousand were rescued and brought to Israel. In 1991, in a span of 36 hours, another 14,000 were brought to Israel.

Today, there are approximately 2,000 of the Beta Yisrael, as the Ethiopian Jewish community is known, remaining in the northern Ethiopian province of Gondar. Lana and Bernie were the only Philadelphians on a mission of 60 North American leaders sponsored by the Jewish Federations of North America that took place at the end of March. Their visit took them to Gondar, where the Beta Yisrael live, and Addis Ababa where they are prepared for their journey home.

As part of the mission, Lana and Bernie accompanied a group on their Exodus from Ethiopia to Israel.

I hope you will come to mark the Thirtieth Annual Passover Gathering, and to hear Bernie and Lana speak about this remarkable continuing modern exodus of the Jews of Ethiopia.

I know it may not be easy to take off from work. For others of us, we will be exhausted from the *seder* which can go on late into the night. But this morning is special, and it will be meaningful to join others in the AJ community to mark the *Pesah* holiday. Take the few hours, and help make the holiday even greater for yourself and your community.

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 people and for our synagogue. After all, community is what this holiday is all about.

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.

Tuesday, April 19. Put it on your calendar. The Thirtieth Annual Passover Gathering.

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



Lana and Dr. Bernie Dishler

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