

The Twenty-Fourth Annual Passover Gathering: Sunday Morning, April 24, 2005

A Celebration of Freedom from Tyranny



The Twenty-Fourth Annual Passover Gathering will be held on the first day of *Pesah*, Sunday morning, April 24, 2005, with festive holiday services beginning at 9:30 A.M. In his inaugural address in January, President Bush underscored the essential themes of the Passover holiday. He said, "There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force

of human freedom . . . The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world . . . The great objective of ending tyranny is the concentrated work of generations."

It affirms God's role in the liberation of our people from the tyranny of Egypt, and calls us to affirm the constant challenge of each generation to protect human freedom and resist tyranny. In my sermon, I will reflect on the struggle for freedom and the defeat on tyranny, what it meant to us in our history, and what it means to us today as Jews and as Americans.

AJ's "Passover Gathering" began twenty three 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 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 rededicate 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 heartening 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.

In recent years, though still strong, the numbers have slacked off a bit. So this year, I am again asking that we revitalize The Twenty-Fourth Annual Passover Gathering, an AJ original, with renewed numbers that will fill the Sanctuary. This year, the Gathering is on Sunday. There is no need to take a day off from work. Just the effort to get up a little earlier after a night of *seder* to join fellow congregants in worship and thanksgiving for freedom and liberation.

Come to this year's Passover Gathering. It will be a short period of spiritual peace, a time of healing and rejuvenation. A time of joy and spirit. A time to focus our efforts on behalf of freedom from tyranny.

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.

Sunday, April 24, 2005. Put it on your calendar—the Twenty-Fourth Annual Passover Gathering.

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

CONGREGATION
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