



Jewish Community Center of Paramus

Congregation Beth Tikvah

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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, February 26, 2021 ~ Torah Portion: Tetzaveh

Dear JCCP/CBT Family,

Years ago, I taught the congregation the rabbinical ruling that one is to start thinking about the laws of Passover 30 days before Passover actually begins. Even as we are concluding our observance of Purim, our attention begins to shift to what is arguably the most important and most fundamental of Jewish holidays. The extra preparation time is a testament to the importance of this holiday.

Once upon a time, 30 days was enough. But I happened to be at a local supermarket this week and already they are clearing shelf space for Passover supplies. The amount of Passover products is growing, the pre-Passover season has become longer than in the past, and there are more opportunities than ever to learn about Passover. The challenge for our time is not how difficult it is to make Passover, but whether Passover can remain as compelling an experience in our generation as it has been, historically speaking, in our past.

We know that in many ways, Passover may be the best-observed Jewish holiday. Let me rephrase: The Passover Seder may be the most-observed Jewish ritual. While many Jews fast on Yom Kippur and even more light the Chanukah menorah, almost everyone will be at some type of a Seder on Passover, even during the pandemic. There will be differences among the Seders, and you and I and your neighbor might differ as to what constitutes a proper Jewish Seder. But what we know from a study of the many different Haggadot used on Passover is that all of them share one common idea: to tell the story of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt, and to help us reflect on what the experience of freedom means and the responsibilities it imposes on us. All Seders will use the core Passover principle of questions and answers, and telling our unique story, so we might be moved by the experience.

We have a collective responsibility to make sure that everyone at our Seders has the opportunity to come away with something of value as a result of the experience of sharing Passover together. All of us must serve as educators to those around our tables who may not have the same sense of responsibility for the Jewish faith as we have. As our Jewish educators often tell us, we must find “teachable moments” and then make the most of the opportunities that those moments present. We must share our devotion, love and commitment to our Judaism, and (and this is difficult, I know) exactly how and why we feel these feelings

As difficult as it may seem, and as daunting a responsibility as it might appear to be, the truth is that the Passover actually lends itself to this challenge. You don't need to be a professional Jewish educator to help someone find their place, to ask questions or to inspire others. What we do need is an awareness that as perhaps no other time in recent Jewish history, we have so many Jews who are waiting to be inspired, to feel something, so we must make the most of our opportunities to help them find their place in the tradition. That we care is great. That we may be in a position to help others find their way to a better appreciation of their Judaism is even greater.

Many are familiar with the questions at the beginning of the Passover Seder that represent four types of children -- the wise, the simple, the wicked and the one who is unable to even ask a question. The last one refers not just to the young, but to those among us who don't even know where to begin to gain the understanding and an appreciation of the Seder at which they sit. Yet they are there, and we must make the most of those moments.

The Haggadah teaches us that for such people, those who simply don't know how to ask, At P'tach Lo that we must begin the explanation and conversation for them. We can't wait. We must seize the initiative to teach, share and welcome others to the heritage that means so much. It must begin with us. And Passover just may be the best time to start. You have 30 days. Get ready!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner