



Congregation Ner Tamid

on the Greenspan Campus for Jewish Life, Learning, and Spiritual Renewal

Pesach in the Time of Corona

As we approach the holiday of Passover so many thoughts come to my mind. Passover has always been my favorite holiday because it is filled with a lot of wonderful memories of family gatherings. The food, the story, the silliness, and even the serious message...all seemed to come together each year.

It has been a while though since I have been able to be at home with my sisters and mom who live in California. Ironic isn't that through "zoom" technology we will be together...albeit with 200 of my "best friends" at Temple!

But that is the point isn't it? We want to be together. And the times that we are in have kept us apart. So we will find incredibly creative ways to be together. By phone. By zoom. By facetime. By Facebook. By looking across the table at your life partner or roommate with whom you are sharing this unusual experience. We are isolated, but we need not be alone. We may be keeping our "social distance"; but in some respects we have never felt closer to each other.

Passover is about both remembrance and making new memories. The symbols of the seder ceremony were meant to remind us that we should never take our lives for granted. For many Americans living today our lives have been full and plentiful. These ancient symbols remind us that life wasn't always this way. We were strangers. We were slaves. Our lives were embittered. We were considered "the other". But still, we had hope.

What memories will we make this year? Memories that will become layered upon years and years of past Passover experiences? I don't know if I will ever view the themes of the Passover story the same way... the slavery of fear.... perhaps today we can relate to a slave's daily experience of facing uncertainty... food shortages and long lines in the grocery store have taught us about scarcity and poverty; and being sheltered at home has made us think twice about homelessness... the ten plagues! Who will ever think of the ten plagues the same way? And the phrase, "Let My People Go!" resonates in a whole new way this year!

These past few weeks many of our freedoms have been diminished. Few of us ever thought we would be going through this type of experience. In so doing, perhaps we are truly adding a layer of Passover memories that will forever etch the lessons of Passover onto our very souls. But let these be lessons and memories that embolden and ennoble us. We were strangers...so let us be kind to each other. We were slaves...let us not take our freedoms for granted. We were delivered with a mighty hand... faith delivers us from despair even today. And "next year in Jerusalem" reminds us that tomorrow brings with it renewed hope.

In this time of uncertainty, may our faith, our family, and our community give us strength. From my home to yours, I wish you a *Zissen Pesach*.

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad