

## Calling Out in the Dark

### Rabbi Sally Finestone

One of my earliest childhood memories is about my grandfather (may his memory be a blessing) yelling down a dark hallway. Each year, we would travel from Virginia to Brooklyn, NY to enjoy Passover with my grandparents. And each year, when we got to the part of the Seder where we proclaim "whoever is hungry, come and eat," my grandfather would go to the apartment door and open it wide. Then, with the light from our warm feast spilling out into the dark hallway, my grandfather would call out and say: "Anyone there? Anyone need a place for Seder? Anyone hear our call?" We would sit and wait, wide-eyed and curious, holding our breath to see if some stranger would suddenly appear from the darkness and answer my grandfather's request. And each year, after no reply, my grandfather would close the door with a sigh, and return to our Seder.

Yet one year, while looking down the dark hallway and waiting for a reply, my grandfather noticed one of his neighbors coming up the stairs. He recognized the man as someone who had recently lost his wife, and whose children lived far away. My grandfather quickly ran to him, and insisted that he join our Seder. I soon found myself helping my grandmother set another place at the table, urging my brother to scoot over and make room, all the while staring wide-eyed at this stranger who had emerged from the dark. I have long forgotten the neighbor's name - but I will never forget my grandfather's joy at having found someone at last to share our Seder table.

I have often wanted to repeat my grandfather's custom. I have visualized myself flinging open the door to my house, glancing down the darkness of my street, and calling out for whoever is hungry to come into my home. But what would I do if someone responded? Would I welcome a complete stranger into my home? The current times makes this a little more difficult than in the days of my childhood Seders in Brooklyn.

Yet welcoming someone to our Seder table has long been a part of the traditions of Passover. Unlike all other Jewish holidays, where the community gathers together at the synagogue, Passover is the one holiday that should be celebrated in the home; it is the one holiday where we create our own, smaller and more intimate community in order to celebrate our freedom. And it has long been the custom for each family to include a few guests at the Seder table, guests from all stages of life: college students far from home, young singles, old singles, newlyweds, divorced or widowed friends - in other words, to include anyone who cannot be with their extended family. No Jew should be alone on Seder night; no Jew should be without a family.

As members of the Jewish community, we often think of ourselves as one large family. And as a family, we must make sure that no member of our community is alone on Seder night; we must ensure that everyone in our community receives a "call in the dark" to come join a Seder. In this spirit, I offer the following request.

If you have room at your Seder table for one or two or three, let someone know. If you find yourself far from family and friends, and are facing spending Seder alone, let someone know. If you are a small family and would like to join with another, let someone know. By setting an

additional place, by scooting over to make room for more, so many of us can welcome another - and so many of us can enjoy the holiday surrounded by conversation and the laughter of others.

I may still yet call down the dark streets of my neighborhood, listening for a response, as my beloved grandfather did so many years ago. But just in case no one answers, I'll be sure to invite someone to our Seder. May we all open our doors, and welcome in someone from the dark.

*Rabbi Finestone is the Rabbi of Congregation Or Atid in Wayland. She wrote this article for Passover 2002.*