



## Home

[home](#) : [news & features](#) : [local news](#)

Saturday, September 09, 2006

## News & Features

Local News

National

Mideast

International

Obits

## Arts

Beltway

Mideast

Report

Jewish World

Opinion

## Celebrations

Sports

## Synagogues and Chavurot

## Advertising

Info

Submissions

## Search

Feedback

Subscription

## 11th Street

Fitness

Company -

Membership

Contest

6/1/2006 7:50:00 AM

[Email this article](#) • [Print this article](#)

## Soul mates

*D.C. chavurot find love, 'marriage'*

by Paula Amann

News Editor

The chuppah was held high, the vows spoken, the glass crushed underfoot last week as two became one.

Well, not exactly. But, with a tad less ceremony, two District lay-led Jewish congregations "wed" at their first joint service the Friday before last.

And in a novel twist, the chavurot are inviting area Jews to help them celebrate their union through an online registry that will enable the new group to purchase a set of 60 prayer books.

The pair, Tikkun Leil Shabbat and the DC Reform Chavurah, will hold combined kabbalat Shabbat services every three weeks through the summer at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in the Dupont Circle neighborhood. After the High Holidays, organizers say they will reassess the calendar of services, which so far draw mostly people in their 20s.

The new congregation, which keeps the name of Tikkun Leil Shabbat, will hold a full Friday evening service with a d'var Torah that touches both on the parsha, or biblical portion of the week, and social justice causes.

Joelle Novey, 27, a District member of the old Tikkun Leil Shabbat and among those involved in the merger, explained the thinking behind it.

"There's a real interest in combining lived Jewish life with meaningful action for a better world," said Novey, a staffer at Co-op America, a District-based network of green businesses. "We're coming together to pray together, to eat together and sing together, and we're also taking a moment to learn about issues in our own city and how to address them."

DC Reform Chavurah member Rob Levy popped the question of marriage at a joint meeting of the two congregations in April, Novey said.

Calling the congregational couple "ready for commitment," Levy, 26, gave a similar reason for the move: "Our primary reason for being is to have really good davening that's filled with ruach < good ruach," or spirit, and social justice.

The Reform group has met for some 2 1/2 years; Tikkun Leil Shabbat was launched last summer by members of the local group Jews United for Justice.

The combined group settled on Siddur Haverim Kol Yisrael: In The Fellowship of All Israel, a siddur, or prayer book, designed by a Boston chavurah that, organizers said, has the advantage of presenting Hebrew, transliteration, English and commentary side by side.

"It means Hebrew and non-Hebrew readers can all be looking at the same page," Novey said.

At press time, the online "marriage" registry had generated 24 purchases of the purple siddur for the new congregation.

Talk to those active in the two former chavurot, each of which drew 30 or more to their services before merging, and you hear the word "pluralism" a lot.

"Pluralism often falls prey to the frummost common denominator ... or you're trying to meet everyone's desires and no one gets what they want," said Eli Staub, 24, of the District, who pointed to "community baselines" worked out for the merger.

These include two distinct service formats: facing east, without musical instruments and circle-style seating, with use of instruments.

Even refreshments include a taste of pluralism. The new chavurah follows the old Tikkun Leil Shabbat's tradition of two vegetarian food tables for the post-service oneg Shabbat - one with foods bearing the kosher hechsher mark and the others simply nonmeat items.

"Especially for young people, there's more and more appeal now to have these nondenominational Jewish communities," noted Novey.

Asked why the chavurot participants chose to form their own congregation instead of joining existing ones nearby, Staub, who hosted the first gathering of the old Tikkun Leil Shabbat at his former home in Dupont Circle, said that "getting to do it yourself is very empowering."

Plus, he said that those involved in forming the original group and its new incarnation had a clear idea of the kind of community they hope to build: "very soulful, politically progressive, traditionally committed and fiercely egalitarian."

Staub, a research analyst with the Service Employees International Union and an affordable housing activist with JUFJ, touts the religious pluses of uniting the two chavurot.

"We're living in a time of frenetic Jewish innovation, especially in the Reform movement," Staub said. "This merger, this marriage, allows us to bring the best of all these experiments together."

Michelle Brownstein, 24, a District trade association professional active in both groups prior to their wedding, predicted a "very happy union" and "no prenups whatever" as the pair pool both material resources and ruach, or as she dubs it, "spiritual activism."

## Article Comment Submission Form

---

Please feel free to comment on this article.

Reader comments are not posted immediately to the Web site. Each submission must be approved by the Web site editor, who may edit content for appropriateness. There may be a delay of 24-48 hours for any submission while the web site editor reviews and approves it.

**Note:** All information on this form is required. Your telephone number is for our use only, and will not be attached to your comment.

**Name:**

**Telephone:**

**E-mail:**

**Passcode:** This form will not send your comment unless you copy exactly the passcode seen below into the text field. This is an anti-spam device to help reduce the automated email spam coming through this form.