

The Twenty-Third Annual Passover Gathering: "I Am Jewish"



The Twenty-Third Annual Passover Gathering will be held on the first day of *Pesah*, Tuesday morning, April 6, 2004, with festive holiday services beginning at 9:30 AM.

When Daniel Pearl was murdered brutally by enemies of America and Israel, his last words, spoken freely, not knowing his death was imminent, were, "My father is Jewish, my mother is Jewish, I am Jewish."

In response to the pride of his affirmation, even in the grip of a twice mortal enemy, as an American and as a Jew, a new volume has been published entitled *I Am Jewish*, edited by Daniel's parents, Judea and Ruth Pearl. It is a collection of scores of personal statements about what it means to be Jewish from the famous, and the unknown. It is a moving testament to Daniel's last words, and to being Jewish.

Pesah is truly the holiday of Jewish identity. Our ancestors were rescued from enslavement, torture and death. It is the single most important event in history that establishes the peoplehood of the Jewish people, and the covenant with God. So on this first day of *Pesah*, when we gather together as a great congregation, I will devote the sermon to reflections on the responses published in *I Am Jewish*. As we reflect on what it means, and has meant, to others, perhaps it will challenge us to articulate what being Jewish means to us as individuals.

AJ's "Passover Gathering" began twenty-two 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 worshippers. 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-Third Annual Passover Gathering, an AJ original, with renewed numbers that will fill the sanctuary.

Come to this year's Passover Gathering. Take the day off from work. If you think you cannot take the whole day off, take the morning off and come to *shul*. It will be a short period of spiritual peace, a time of healing and rejuvenation. A time of joy and spirit. A time to affirm "I am Jewish" and reflect on what it means to us.

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.

April 6. Put it on your calendar. The Twenty-Third Annual Passover Gathering.

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

CONGREGATION
ADATH JESHURUN



7763 Old York Road
Elkins Park, PA 19027
215.635.6611
www.adathjeshurun.info