



Agudas Achim Newsletter

April 2023

E-mail: agudasachim@hvc.rr.com or Telephone (845) 439-3600

Save the date!

Friday, April 7th 7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice
7:30 PM Services via zoom*
Post services zoom gathering with Levins and congregants attending

Rabbi's Message

WHERE WILL YOU BE FOR PESACH (PASSOVER?)

Jackie Mason, comedian and rabbi, used to joke that at this time of year Jews don't greet each other in the normal manner. He reported that Jews don't say, how are you, or how is your family, or how's business, or do you think it will snow? "Every Jew," he would exaggerate, "Says one thing." Namely, "Where will you be for Pesach?" Not are you having a seder, going to a seder, are you skipping this year, are you going on vacation? "Nu, where will you be for Pesach?"

Most recently, the latest Pugh study confirmed again that Passover is the most celebrated Jewish Holiday. More so than even, Yom Kippur. The dining room table or the kitchen table, or the dorm room desk, or a table in the military mess hall, become transformed into a holy place, by the prayers and rituals shared there, according to Jewish Teaching. The seder, through the Haggadah, the telling book celebrates historic redemption and deliverance, but its main lesson over two thousand years, is to teach empathy. You were strangers, you were slaves in the land of Egypt (and in so many places since) therefore uplift the stranger and the downtrodden among you. "For you know the heart of the stranger."

Some use lavishly fabricated silver ritual objects saved all year, and only used at Pesach. Some of these have been lovingly passed down, over the years, through generations. But even if someone uses plastic or paper cups or dishes, these too are transformed into holy

objects as they are used to remember. To remember and to allow empathy to swell within us. To lift up "the stranger," because that is what Jews are commanded to do, with full ritual, or with a few words, each seder is a thanksgiving and a call to do God's work in the world, in whatever fashion we can do it.

Yet these are only words, and they don't explain how the teaching is done. To discover this other dimension, we begin by thinking back to the seders we experienced when we were very young. Yes, I know that many were seated at a children's table, (if we were fortunate) a cousins table, often set in a connecting room.

Nevertheless, we can, if we allow ourselves to drift back, remember the feeling of the gathering of family and friends. Even before we understood what was happening, we could feel that this was more special than a Shabbos dinner, or a family reunion, or even someone's birthday.

To feel the power and the lesson let yourself see the faces of those who gathered around the seder table. Memory is serious business. It is as holy as the candlesticks or the seder plate, or the special tsimus. As we remember the adults and other kids, whether the seder was at a Borsht Belt hotel, or in a small dining room, we preserve their memory, and feel the love and connections and power, of those Pesach gatherings. Jewish teaching happens when Jews gather to preserve the continuity of our people by doing "Jewish things," together. At Pesach we did and do "Jewish" by the simple act of "up." So, try to remember the face of the person who was in charge of the seder. Who was in charge of the kitchen? Could you tell?

Even if we felt “antsy” as kids, I get that you can still feel the power of the gathered family. You see, I’ve long held that Passover is about Jewish Survival. Generation by generation we teach the lesson. Simply by sitting at the table, we are silently saying, “count me in.” So, give yourself the gift of remembering the faces of those whom you shared s’darim over the years. They were your teachers, and long ago, they passed the mantel of affirmation to you. Your grandfather and grandmother are more important than Moses and Miriam, in that affirmation. Your uncles and aunts transferred Jewish Identity to you.

Your parents are more important than your Rabbi. Now, in our time it is up to you to pass on the charge to children and grandchildren. For our college kids and others who might be alone for Pesach, zoom into a seder, or even part of one. Isn’t the Haggadah part of the passing of the lesson? Of course, it is. I came into the prayer book committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis just as the Haggadah was in its final compilation. We worked hard to create a colorful, creative, Passover experience where one could have a longer or shorter seder, with explanation, alternate readings, and traditional and modern music with notes, so that one might use instruments if appropriate. But I know that memory trumps the word.

Good recipes passed through the generations reinforces the memories and the lessons. With words or innuendo, the readings and your family is saying to each other.

Be decent.

Be kind

You were lowly and were redeemed, so redeem others.

Love each other, your family and beyond.

Live with hope.

Be Jewish.

Make sure Judaism survives in your time.

Nu, where will you be for Pesach?

The answer is not geographic.

It’s a question for your soul.

A Joyous Pesach

Love

Rabbi Fred Pomerantz

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Now that we have reached the three-year mark from the start of the pandemic and we can start to have a decent perspective to look back from we can start wading our way through the traumas, the losses and the sacrifices. Personally, I love to explore the growth and strength that develop when faced with challenges. But sometimes there is important value in just taking stock of some of the events that have happened and some of the people that we have lost.

I was one of the first to contract covid in Sullivan County. Our daughter Georgia was living in Manhattan and before we knew I was ill we convinced her to come home. The city was an alarming place in those first weeks, and we didn’t want her stuck there with no assurances that she would be able to leave or get help if she got sick. Our son stayed quarantined in New Paltz because he had lost his spleen in a car accident a few years earlier and no one knew how the virus would affect someone without a spleen. Fortunately, neither Georgia nor my husband Gary contracted the virus from me. But as I began to recover my mom got sick and we couldn’t get her the help she needed. Tests were limited and results were slow, so they quarantined her alone in a hospital room to be sure she didn’t have the virus. The negative test results came at the last minute and the hospital called us to say they would move her off the covid floor so we could see her, but we didn’t have much time. We feel that we were among the lucky ones because we were able to reach her and be by her side when she passed, even if it was only the last 5 minutes of her life.

As spring approaches and life moves on, maybe you want to take some time to breath in the enormity of the historic moment we just experienced. Appreciate how we’ve changed, what we have lost and how we have all grown. Take it all in.

To my mom-Evelyn Wittenberg Haas, we continue to think of you, miss you and thank you for being such a powerful and giving presence in the lives of so many. It would be an honor to her if upon reading this you mention her name and perhaps the names of others you have lost and do something kind for someone today. She would be so touched.

L’Shalom

Judy Siegel, President

845-798-0783

Jewish Education News

Some people love it and others, not so much. However, whichever corner you're in, Matzah is one of the, if not THE key symbol of Passover. We retell the story of Passover at our seders. There we share, that God gave instructions to Moses and Aaron about what they should do to prepare to leave Egypt, and the instructions to relay to the Israelites. God tells us that we are going to "Observe a [Festival of] Matzot" – Unleavened Bread, and that for "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread."

So, when it was time for our people to leave Egypt, they took their dough before it was leavened in bowls and put it upon their shoulders for the sun to bake. That dough the Israelites took out of Egypt were matzot [unleavened] cakes, because "they could not delay", and take the time to bake their cakes in the usual way. This is the common understanding; that we were in a hurry to leave Egypt and did not have time for the bread to rise.

What do you think? Was this the Israelites first experience with Matzah? There is Archaeological data, that suggests perhaps it was not. Dating as far back as approx. 1950 BCE, (that's almost 4000 years ago), which was well before our Exodus from Egypt, the data shows that the Egyptians made flatbreads, not the loafs of bread we are used to now. Perhaps the flatbread of the Egyptians was what we ate while enslaved, after all, living in Egypt for 400 years, it would be logical to think that we picked up some of the ways of the Egyptians. The Sephardic Passover blog, Too Good To Passover, writes "In Ethiopia, matzah is made just like it had been done for the first Passover when the Jews were fleeing Egypt through the desert: By hand. And FAST." The result is a flatbread that's about the size of a pita, soft and not crackerlike. It is suggested that this style of baking matzah is often referred to as "authentic," resembling the way that matzah was made thousands of years ago. The website, MyJewishLearning.com explains, "By the 18th century, there was a greater demand for more shelf-stable matzah that wouldn't start to mold. By adding less water to the mixture and by kneading longer and with more effort, matzah bakers were able to achieve extremely thin, crunchy matzah that took days or even weeks to spoil. By the end of the 18th century, hard matzah was the new norm." There are still Sephardic Jewish families who make soft matzah by hand. Here in our region, it won't be easy to find soft matzah to purchase. Search Google to find a recipe, there are several online, and try to bake some soft matzah on your own. Will it be strange not to eat matzah that crunches and makes crumbs all over the place? I think so, but I'm going to try it too. This will be my first experience with soft Kosher for Passover matzah. Let me know how yours came out and send me a picture!

Students in the Hebrew School are learning all about Passover, and reading segments from the Haggadah, and singing Passover songs.

Wishing you a Happy Passover! Chag Pesach Sameach!

Shalom u'Verachah ~ Peace and Blessings
Tobi Innerfield, Director of Education

Happy Anniversary

Joe & Heidi Leunisen-Rivera 4/16
Joseph & Dimona Galli 4/30

Happy Birthday

Jack Rajlevsky 4/7
Ray Croney 4/10
Wendy Schwalb 4/20
Jerry Frey 4/22
Diane Leunisen 4/22
Ariana Burd 4/24
Jenna Blank 4/30

Message from the Levins

As we begin our Passover preparations, we start to look forward to our rituals or become inspired to establish new ones as we remove bread from our shopping lists. We recognize that we are called to play many roles, to be both a student and an educator, both a participant and a leader to those who gather with us.

Passover is a wonderful festival that allows us to renew our connections with not only our collective story but to engage with one another and the narrative we have forged together. They say there is even a "cosmic opening" during this time that allows us to improve all aspects of our lives, giving us the opportunity to free ourselves from whatever is personally enslaving us.

As mayhem and divide seem to escalate in the world, we are getting a chance to wander out together, into the desert of the unknown, with the miracles we have been shown in our individual and congregational lives. This celebration bolsters the hope for our continued strength and freedom. We want to thank you all for continuing to make room for us at the table!

Love and Shalom,

Ira and Julia / The Levins

Congregation News

We send condolences to the family of Chip & Michele Hemmer on the passing of Chip's dad, Richard Hemmer.

HOPE ful information

Thanks to Hope Blecher for sharing your writings with us. Please visit her site at:

<https://medium.com/@hopedoc1/here-i-stand-6c16437dc647>

UPCOMING SERVICES

*Services continue to be virtual throughout the year. Email virtualshabbat@gmail.com for the link. Doors will open in May of 2023 for those who are able to attend in person.

Friday, April 7th 7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice
7:30 PM Services via zoom*
Post services zoom gathering with Levins and congregants attending

Friday, May 5th 7:00 PM Gather In person at Agudas Achim or on zoom
7:30 PM Levins begin welcoming the Sabbath* live and via zoom*

Friday, June 2nd 7:00 PM Gather In person at Agudas Achim or on zoom
7:30 PM Levins begin welcoming the Sabbath* live and via zoom*

A zoom link will be provided for anyone that prefers not to attend in person. HINT: it is the same every month

DAFFODIL GARDEN DEDICATION

We will be dedicating the Agudas Achim Daffodil Garden on Tuesday, May 9 at 9:00 AM.

In the fall we planted 250 daffodil bulbs as part of the daffodil project (daffodilproject.net) which is supporting daffodil gardens around the world honoring the 1.5 million children lost to the Holocaust.

The ceremony will include a presentation by two members of our community that are children of the Holocaust and will be attended by the LMCS 8th grade class and their teacher, Julie Buck. All members of the community are invited and welcome to attend.

DONATIONS....please consider.

Our in-person contact (and thus our fundraising efforts) is limited. Our philosophy has always been to maintain low dues and keep an open-door policy so that anyone can join us in person when available or now virtually. But that philosophy depends on generous donations from people like you. Please consider donating to Congregation Agudas Achim ... no amount is too large or too small! You can donate and designate it to one of the following:

Security
Building fund
Cemetery fund
Endowment fund
Mailing costs
Mitzvah fund
Tzedakah fund

or consider making a donation in honor or memory of a friend, a loved one or someone you care about with a lasting memorial donation by purchasing an honorary:

Chair \$36
Rosh Hashanah Prayer Book \$36
Yom Kippur Prayer Book \$36

BEST WAY TO DONATE:

By Check: mail to PO Box 714, Livingston Manor, NY 12758

By Credit Card website (congregationagudasachim.org) and click donate now

JOIN US IN ISRAEL!

CD Trips, LLC (Owned and operated by Gary and Judy Siegel) is running a trip to Israel in December 5-14, 2023. They will donate a portion of each ticket booked by anyone that mentions Agudas Achim to them at the time of booking. Check out the trip at cdtrips.com and click Iconic Israel.

HELP PRESERVE YOUR STORY AS PART OF OUR HISTORY!!!!

Do you have a story to share now? Some photos of the synagogue or people that attended Agudas Achim? Some knowledge or memories of these and other Livingston Manor families? Please send me an email and share your piece(s) of history. Send the request on to family and friends. Be a part of preserving our history for the future.

WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

Are you interested in becoming involved in the direction of Agudas Achim? We really don't ask too much of your time but anything you want to give will be appreciated. Just let us know! Send me an email or text or write to virtualshabbat@gmail.com We would love to hear from you.

Havdalah Service

What is Havdalah?

Havdalah is the Jewish religious ceremony that marks the symbolic end of Shabbat and ushers in the new week. This beautiful, brief ritual (Less than ½ hour) involves lighting a special Havdalah candle with several wicks, blessing a cup of wine and smelling sweet spices.

Havdalah takes place after the sun is set on Saturday evening.

Although Havdalah is weekly, Tobi Innerfield will be sharing, via Zoom, a Havdalah service once a month.

Winter/Spring Schedule Save the dates!

Saturday, Apr.22 @ 8 pm

Saturday, May 20 @ 8:30 pm

Use this Zoom Link to come into the Havdalah.

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/71950737639?pwd=yDFMo4a1KYbcnHNgZSr1BUQRmrU621.1>

(Note: This is a unique Zoom link,
and is NOT the link that we use for Shabbat services.)

Meeting ID: 719 5073 7639

Passcode: OveXyi

To heighten your personal Havdalah experience, it is suggested that you have some sweet-smelling spices with you...cinnamon, cloves or allspice. Some people will take an orange and stick whole cloves into it.

We look forward to your joining us on Zoom!

RSVP not required!

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If you are interested in becoming a part of the leadership board to help in the decision-making process, please reach out to us at virtualshabbat@gmail.com