



Agudas Achim Newsletter

March 2023

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

Save the date

Friday, March 3rd 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

Purim, Who Knew?

We have it all wrong. In order to understand the creation and meaning of The Book of Esther and Purim, think of the Movie, "Animal House."

For the leading characters, think of Esther as Marilyn Monroe, or Madonna, or Lady Gaga. Mordecai is Paul Newman, as a senior citizen. Haman as John Belushi (Bluto in Animal House), and the Sons of Haman as the Keystone Cops! If Mel Brooks had been given a Jewish education, and knew the true meaning of the holiday, he surely would have made a film, "Purim, the Movie." As surely the Marx brothers might have done in their time, calling their opus, simply, "Hamantaschen."

The original Book of Esther, one of the five scrolls (Megillot) in the Bible was originally written as a ribald comedy around 2-250 BCE, not a history book written around the year, 1,000 BCE in Persia, where the story is set. I know that it is shocking for some to discover that there was no historic Haman, nor Achashverosh (in Persia where meticulous records were kept early on.) Sorry, there was Mordecai, and the name "Esther," is a word play on the fertility goddess, Astarte, (same root word in Hebrew as Esther) small statuettes of whom were kept in households throughout the ancient near east. In the time that the story was written and reproduced by scribes on scrolls, everyone got the joke. It's as if Marylyn Monroe was the heroine who saved the Jewish people from extinction. (Think of the way

Hitler is portrayed in the "Producers".) That's what the author of the "Book of Esther," was trying to do with Haman, because in the year 250 BCE, there had been many, and would be many who tried to annihilate the Israelite. The writer was mocking them, and the readers of, and the listeners too, understood this and laughed. (The earliest scrolls containing the story were carbon dated to this period, as was the philology of the Hebrew words and grammar therein).

Purim occurs at a time of the year, late January to February, when many ancient cultures observed a bacchanalia festival against the darkness and bleakness of the winter. Each lead in measured time to a Spring festival, as in Purim to Passover, or later, Mardi Gras to Easter. They were based on earlier pagan observances that were ultimately given religious grounding.

So, in earlier times, Purim was an observance that said, for one day, "don't sweat it." Don't take the world seriously. Later Purim was a time to see the world upside down. Medieval Purim Schpiels portrayed the Rabbi as jester, and the jester as rabbi. Everything was mocked. The King was a fool and a drunk, the tyrant overthrown. the sex goddess saves the people, the Jew saves the life of the King. And let's tell the story in noise, song, drunkenness, and joy.

Around the first century CE, long after the time of the Greek (Hellenistic) influence on Judaism, where such ribald tales were just entertainment, at a time when heroes were needed to combat (physically and emotionally) the Roman oppressors, the early rabbis

began to see the opportunity to teach about Jewish heroism in The Book of Esther. Purim, as we know it, had not yet evolved, but the scholars who met at the town of Yavneh, to decide what books would be included or excluded in Tanach, the Jewish Bible, decided to include the story of Esther, which was then being read with "new eyes." It was a perfect secret code to foster revolution against Rome.

The Purim festival grew over the next centuries influenced in part by celebrations in other cultures, predominately, Mardi Gras. The jester and joking and myrrh continued to play a larger part, as did Mordecai and Esther as Hero and savior. Even in this outrageous story, even in inebriation, even in ribald rivalry, the story gave hope, especially to children.

Like much in Judaism, Purim can be understood in many levels. Children in religious school are encouraged to be like Mordecai and Esther. The sex trade way in which the Queen was chosen is ignored by everyone by an unspoken code. It provides a day of fun and release, and implicitly says, God doesn't want you to sweat it, or take yourself so seriously today.

II. On Friday March 3, join us for a shortened Shabbat Service and the Purim Schpiel, the historic telling of the story in outrage and song.

A tradition has evolved to drink "until you can't distinguish between Mordecai and Haman." We're not sticklers in this point, but if you drink, have a sip or schnapps with us. On zoom that means BYO bring your own). While everyone is invited to wear a costume on Purim (not necessarily a Biblical figure) in our congregation, we've developed a custom of wearing hats. Team hats, crazy hats, proper hats or fedoras, as we hear the Purim Schpiel.

Let's drink for Purim. (Or not)
Just show up. We'll be glad to see you on Zoom.

Love,

Rabbi Fred Pomerantz

PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

Dear Friends of Agudas Achim,

You should have received the request for dues in your email box recently. There are some things to note about that:

♥ We're honored and proud that you are part of our congregation. If you have already sent in your membership dues, thank you.

♡ Your membership and/or your donations sustain us...without them we cannot survive.

♥ The leadership of C.A.A. is committed to maintaining an open-door policy welcoming those from a diverse spectrum of life and religions. Supporting the congregation through membership is your choice not a requirement for participation. That said, maintaining a congregation, even a small part time congregation, costs money. Heat, electric, Clergy...it is surprisingly expensive. Your membership and/or donations will allow us to continue.

♥ The continued growth of this congregation is both remarkable and necessary. Whether or not you are religious, whether or not you attend, whether or not you can imagine that you will one day need the support of an organized Jewish community, I can assure you that you know someone who will. That is why we need to be here. **For today and for tomorrow because once we are gone it will be hard to find the way back.**

The cost of a household membership at Agudas Achim is \$1.37 a day. The cost for an individual is \$.96 a day and if you are not able to attend in person, remote membership is just \$.68 a day. The value is priceless. Please visit congregationagudasachim.org/membership to join.

Thank you for reading this and thank you for your support.

L'Shalom

Judy Siegel, President
845-798-0783

Jewish Education News

As winter begins to fade into a memory, we seem to be ready to break out of our winter cocoons. But it is not quite spring, especially in our area, the ground is still too cold to plant, and the cold winds are still blowing. But in March, there is a hint of the coming of Spring in the air. We are ready to let loose of the pent-up energy we are feeling. And just at this time, when we need it most, when the winter seems to drag, this is the time that we celebrate the holiday of Purim. And what a celebration it is! The pagans of ancient Persia, used to celebrate the ending of winter of the 14th of the last month of the year, with exchanging of gifts and much gaiety. Purim falls on the 14th of Adar, the last month in the Hebrew calendar.

Purim is unlike most of our holiday observances. The majority of our holiday observances are mentioned in the Torah, with the exception of modern observances that are related to Holocaust and Israel. Purim tells the story that we read in the Book of Esther. And the earliest observance of Purim is mentioned in the 2nd Book of the Maccabees about the late 2nd Century BCE. Yes, Maccabees, those heroes of Hanukkah. There we are told of "Mordecai Day". This reference wouldn't be written there if it was not already being celebrated by people. Purim was known at the time of the Maccabees, although it was not an official holiday yet. The festival of Purim became more and more important with the passing of time.

Look at the message that was shared between the stories of Purim and the Maccabees, and is still valid today. We can stand up and need to stand up to those who would oppress us. Through our actions we have the power to change the Jewish world. The Purim story tells us that Queen Esther went to King Achashverosh and let him know that Haman wanted to kill the Jewish people. Her bravery, and her willingness to stand up to Haman saved the Jewish of the Persian empire. And so today we observe Purim with music, fun, and celebration!

The students in the Hebrew School are learning about the story of Purim and its traditions; reading the Megillah (the scroll containing the Book of Esther), groggers to drown out Haman's name, masks and costumes because Esther's identity was hidden, songs that we sing, and hamantaschen that we eat. Here is a link to a number of hamantaschen recipes. <https://jamiegeller.com/holidays/20-unique-hamantaschen-recipes/>

Chag Purim Sameach!

Shalom u'Verachah ~ Peace and Blessings

Tobi Innerfield, Director of Education



Happy Birthday

Andrew Weiner 3/5
Jessica Ellen Schwalb 3/10
Brad Hemmer 3/19
Lynne Freedman 3/21
Jerry Burd 3/24
Ethel Hirshon 3/31

Message from the Levins

Shakespeare's reminder that, "All the world's a stage and we are all merely players," is echoed in the suggestion given on Purim to "drink until you cannot tell the difference between the hero and the villain."

This mandate, meant for adults, is restricted to this holiday. It is not encouraging cantankerous behavior, but asks the participants to push their boundaries *communally*. The drinking can be literal or figurative but we honor our Purim intention by going beyond the labels of the mind and frolic in a state of being where we are all one.

Every month of Adar, we tell the story of standing up for our beliefs in the face of oppression. It demonstrates the courage to overcome our inclinations to seek personal power at the expense of our humanity. It is also a victorious celebration of our diversity, which manages to thrive, despite any demagogue's attempts to destroy those that are different.

As this timeless story unfolds in celebration again this year, we are taking note how, unfortunately, our own nation is mirroring characters with strong attempts at oppressing our nation's diversity, as well as the overall well-being of humanity. This Purim, we will enjoy ourselves and become one with community. We will dance and march while we share this story with our young ones, so it can carry on as a reminder. But also, may this Purim celebration truly inspire us to find the spirited and righteous fire of Esther in our souls and voices. They are needed. Let Esther and Mordecai both inspire and remind us all, how important it is to find ways to speak up, speak out and stand up for one another.

We are looking forward to celebrating together and inspiring each other in service online on March 3rd!

Happy Purim!

Julia and Ira / The Levin

HELP NEEDED ... FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME!

The wonders of zoom have allowed us to reach friends and family all across the world and have allowed organizations like Agudas Achim to provide services throughout the year. Every month a volunteer provides the screen sharing for the entire congregation so that we can read through the services and the song sheets. In order to keep providing that service we need at least one more person to help. Someone with a computer and a basic knowledge of zoom that will commit to just a couple of hours a month is needed. We really need you-please reach out if you would be willing to help round out the team. Call Judy at 845-798-0783 if you would like to be a screen sharer.

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, March 3rd

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, 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*

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 US PRESERVE 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, Mar.18 @ 7 pm

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!

LEADERSHIP BOARD

Judy Siegel, President	siegel523@gmail.com
Michele Hemmer, Vice President	hemmerMD@yahoo.com
Bob Freedman, Immediate Past President	mrfreed@aol.com
Gary Siegel, Treasurer	cdtripsllc@gmail.com
Lynn Skolnick, Secretary	lynnskolnick@gmail.com
Don Simkin, Member at Large	dsimkin@hvc.rr.com
Alan Blocker	msnaab@aol.com
Karen Blocker	msnaab@aol.com
Warren Blumenthal	warren@catskillsales.com
Mike Uretsky	muretsky@stern.nyu.edu
Sarah Weber	swkloria@gmail.com
Lynne Freedman	mrfreed@aol.com
Hope Blecher	hopedoc1@gmail.com
Tobi Innerfield (director of education)	tinnerfield@gmail.com

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