



Agudas Achim Newsletter

January 2022

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

Save the date

January 7, 2022 7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice
7:30 PM Services

January 16, 2022 1:00 PM Annual meeting of Congregation Agudas Achim

RABBI'S MESSAGE

We usually spend the school vacations with our grandchildren whenever we can. This year we planned to have a home stay going into Manhattan each day for Broadway, museums, and sightseeing activities.

The Omicron variant hit, spreading wildly in Manhattan, and so we decided to change plans, and drive to a mountain resort we know in the Laurel Highlands of Southwestern Pennsylvania, where there is an abundance of outdoor activities.

I had forgotten that the resort has a gigantic outdoor display that grows each year. In the starlit darkness that expands before the two hotel buildings, stretching to the size of a football field is a wide array of illuminated colored light lit emblems of the Yuletide season: huge animals, gift boxes, walk-through ornamental bulbs. The limbs of the bare trees are encased with tinier twinkling white lights than I have ever seen gathered in one place. Beams of light dance over the building fronts. Front and center of all of the glowing objects is a mammoth Chanukah Menorah. (ironically in this Christian family owned resort, the Chanukah is the only religious object on display)

My attention was fixed on this massive lighting display. A photographer's light meter needle would dance wildly if exposed to all of this light. Moreover, I saw an abundance of guests break into smiles upon seeing all of this illumination.

We have just passed the darkest day of the year. When primitive people in the Northern Hemisphere saw and felt the light continually diminish, many cultures developed myths that the sun was dying, and that their people were about to dwell in permanent darkness. In the folkways called sympathetic magic, many of these

cultures developed customs of creating magnificent bonfires around the time of the equinox.

In addition, people with seasonal affective disorders respond to full spectrum lighting introduced in a light box, or in the bill of a ball cap, so, it seems that the human condition has always responded to light being introduced in this season when natural light is in such short supply.

In the weekly Torah portion, we just read about the most pervasive darkness that the world ever knew. The text says that just before the last terrible plague in Egypt, there was choshek. A darkness so complete that a finger held up before the eye could not be seen. Black bleak darkness the Israelites light torches and small oil lamps to break the choshek. The light offered hope against despair. Courage against fear. Life against death.

Similarly, the new secular year, as accounted by many cultures offered renewal in the time ahead, as the light begins to gather again. Similarly, people approaching the New Year are making, "new year resolutions." This is really the same possibilities that Judaism offers in our high Holy Days: a chance for renewal. It's the same lesson that the Prophet Isaiah taught when he said of the New Year, "create in you a new heart and a new spirit."

Not everyone is in the darkness of being less than they can be. But all of us as human beings understand the implication of the light fading. We have limited time to be all that we want to become.

As the growing light of a new year reflects the light from the Chanukah flames, or for our Christian friends, the glow of their tree, or for others, the candles of Kwanza or for still others bonfires lit at

this season. Our lives, no matter how wonderful, are unfinished we can move them closer to our own ideal.

We can come out of the darkness's: Covid, uncertainty, anxiety, frustration, unfulfilled aspiration and longing, and begin to move more into the light in the year ahead.

Guests at that resort in the Laurel Highlands who gather for a New Year's Eve celebration will see and feel all of the illumination in front of the hotel.

May their New Year resolutions motivate them to renewal similarly, may our best impulses move us to the light. That light is not in a bulb. That light has already been placed in our heart and spirit by the Source of Light.

May it renew us.

Love
Rabbi Fred Pomerantz

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year! I am quite sure I'm not the only one that is looking forward to welcoming in 2022 and putting 2021 behind us. And, though the pandemic is still wrecking havoc with our lives, we have come so far. At this time last year vaccines were just being rolled out, many of us were still staying in our homes most of the time, separated from family and friends. Families and individuals were celebrating the holidays alone or with small pods. By contrast, as of this writing, 493,000,000 doses of the vaccine have been administered in the United States. Families have been reuniting across the country and even with a new virus surge we have been able to, cautiously, continue with our daily lives. Yes, we are still in the middle of a pandemic but there is definitely progress. Bring on 2022 and let's keep moving forward!

Many things have changed over the last two years. At Agudas Achim through the magic of zoom we have been able to reach new and old friends around the country and to provide services throughout the winter. Weekend

residents have made Livingston Manor their permanent homes and new residents have moved into the region. With that, new families and individuals have joined as members and like each of us; Agudas Achim has grown and changed. Now we'll have to see how we move forward from those changes.

When a core group of (then) young people helped shift Agudas Achim from an Orthodox to a Reform congregation in the mid 80's, part of the commitment was to continue to provide the opportunity for Jewish culture to grow. Certainly religion was at the core of the commitment but maintaining Jewish culture in the community was a driving force. Livingston Manor is the 'last frontier' of Catskill Judaism and at the heart of our mission we strive to provide opportunities for the Jewish community to gather and share experiences. We've done that for more than 30 years but now there are different opportunities to grow and develop; new residents of Sullivan County that we can welcome, residents that have moved away that we can now stay connected with, programs that can be created for each of them as well as for those that have been a part of Agudas Achim for a long time. Regardless of which category you fit into we encourage you to reach out if there is a program or idea you have. This is your congregation-we'd love you to be part of its maintenance and its growth.

My wish for Agudas Achim in 2022 is that new and established members join each other to meet and grow together, laugh together and learn together. I'm looking forward to each of you being a part of or even leading that.

Please get vaccinated, if you are vaccinated, please get your booster, please wear your masks, keep your distance and please stay healthy.

L' Shalom,

Judy Siegel, President
Jsiegel523@gmail.com
845-798-0783

ANNUAL MEETING

All members are invited to attend the annual meeting of Congregation Agudas Achim on the 3rd Sunday of January as required in the by-laws. The meeting will be held at 1:00 pm on January 16th and all members are invited. A zoom link will be sent to all before the meeting with an agenda.

OPTIONAL OPT OUT

Would you prefer to 'opt out' of the hard copy newsletter and just receive an email version?
Email us at virtualshabbat@gmail.com and let us know.

SPRING OPENING

We are moving forward with plans to provide the first live services beginning Friday, April 1, 2022. We will continue to provide services via zoom for those who are out of town and for those that are still more comfortable joining us from the comfort of their homes.

Upcoming Shabbat Services

January 7, 2022	7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice 7:30 PM Services
February 4, 2022	7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice 7:30 PM Services
March 4, 2022	7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice 7:30 PM Services

Want to be involved?

Are you interested in becoming involved in the direction of Agudas Achim? Just let us know! Send me an email or text or write to virtualshabbat@gmail.com

We would love to hear from you.

Giving Tuesday Donations

Hope Blecher
Ron & Susan Elinoff
Alison Gould
Jennifer Grossman
Joshua Pomerantz
Gary & Judy Siegel
Jack Strassman
Robert Vermes & Dr. Joan Hoffenberg

Message from our College Kids

All of our college kids truly enjoyed the Chanukah care packages sent out with love to let them know the congregation is thinking of them. We received several thank you letters as well as words passed along that this wonderful endeavor was a huge hit! Thank you to everyone involved in making this happen. We hope to make this an Agudas Achim tradition in an effort to show our students that no matter where they are, we will always be here for them.

DONATIONS

Our in person contact (and thus our fundraising efforts) are 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:

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

Jewish Education News

Some call *Tu B'Shevat* the Jewish Arbor Day. National Arbor Day is a day of planting trees. It is held on the last Friday in April, but many states observe Arbor Day on different dates according to their best tree-planting time. Here in New York, Arbor Day is celebrated on the actual day itself and our state tree is the Sugar Maple. *Tu B'Shevat* is the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat, which this year corresponds to January 17. Here in the northeast, winter has just begun. Our days are short, and it is cold and snowy in the Catskills. However, in Israel, the weather is starting to warm up, and it is the perfect weather for planting trees. People from all over the country come out to sing, dance and plant trees. *"On the first of Shevat is the new year for trees, according to the view of the School of Shammai, but the School of Hillel say, on the fifteenth thereof," (Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:12-13)*

~In the December bulletin, I spoke about the different views of Shammai and Hillel when it comes to lighting the Chanukah Menorah. And now we again see differences between these schools of thought when it comes to the New Year for Trees.

In the Hebrew school the students will mark this day with *Morah Mindy* by having a special Zoom *Tu B'Shevatseder*. Usually, we know a seder from our celebration of Passover, but seders are not only for Passover. Seder, which means order, explains that we do things in a certain way, a certain order. The order of the Tu B'Shevat Seder, will include drinking white and red grape juice, eating fruit and nuts (items which come from trees), discussing the importance of trees, learning about taking care of the environment, and our role as Jews in taking care of God's world, called *Tikkun Olam*. Doing acts of *Tikkun Olam* is one of our sacred tasks.

One story we read during Tu B'Shevat is the story of Choni the Circle-Maker. Here is a piece of that story; the students will hear the whole story during their Seder.

While the sage Choni was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Choni asked him: "How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?" "Seventy years," replied the man. Choni then asked: "Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?" The man answered: "I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise, I am planting for my children."

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

Happy Anniversary

Carl Tishler & Bonnie L Katz 1/28

Happy Birthday

Steven Fishman 1/5
Sherry Silver 1/6
Alan Blocker 1/7
Dr. Jack Rubenstein 1/15
Marta Pomerantz 1/17
Jerrold Ehrlich 1/21
Mary Jane Schneider 1/22
Alli Hemmer 1/23

Thank you for the donation

Jerry & Monica Frey
Sally Levin

Building fund
Ron & Tedda Lindeman

Cemetery fund
Steven & Diane Fishman