



# Agudas Achim Newsletter

## December 2021

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

### Save the date

**Friday, December 3, 2021**

**7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice**

**7:30 PM Services**

**Be prepared to light a Chanukah menorah**

### RABBI'S MESSAGE

Years ago, on Chanukah, we used to drive our children a few miles to the nearby borough of Bergenfield, another name from the pre-Revolutionary War Dutch settlement in this part of Northern New Jersey. While Bergenfield was known for an abundance of homes with holiday exhibits, decor, and brilliant lighting display, as often happens, there was one street in town where the residents took special pride in enhancing their reputation for spectacular house and lawn presentation.

The street was small, yet when one turned on to it, there was such brightness that visitors joked that it could be seen by passengers in airliners descending on to the flight path for Newark airport. One Jewish family lives on the street, and their Chanukah decoration was larger and grander than any that I've seen outside of Israel.

An article in The Jewish Standard one year explained that the display was the year-long hobby of the father of the family, though he was at times by his children, and members of the local synagogue, where he was active. Why did it require so many people? Each year, they erected a giant wooden illuminated chanukiah-again, the largest I had seen up to that point in time, outside of Israel.

But larger, and more substantial, were the huge wood and plywood painted figures of Maccabees bathed in floodlight gathered in the front yard. Judah was higher than the house. Mattathias, and some of his sons approached the roofline. Each of the historic figures were depicted with sword and in battle dress of the time, metal helmet, and metal body armor. (Another time we can consider how the Maccabees, with no manufacturing facilities or armorers in the country could have acquired such equipment, which they did have for their elite troops. Others wore hand fashioned leather armor and

headpieces.)

They displayed "some" of the sons, as each year the father's project was to build, assemble another of the five Maccabee brothers. (The sections were erected on the front lawn with the help of synagogue members.) The faces were painted with smiles on their faces, reflecting, I suppose, the holiday mood.

It would have more historic, and informative, if they had been portrayed as resolute freedom fighters. They fought to practice and preserve their ancient faith. They fought, these citizen soldiers, against the largest, best equipped, best trained, army in that part of the world-some would say, in the entire world, at that time. Think of it, Antiochus kept a basic war force of 32,000 full time warriors. To this force, mercenaries and conscripts were added as needed.

They would attack in a phalanx of 20,000 men in a space as wide as the length of a football field and 30 feet deep. In addition, were 200 cavalries on each side to protect each flank. Judah led a gorilla band into the hills after his father slew the Greek-Syrian official, refusing to sacrifice a pig, and bow down to an idol. The entire group numbered 200 souls-including women and children.

Judah should occupy a place as renowned military strategist for the way he outmaneuvered the Seleucid force scoring victories for six years. His brothers continued the war for another seven years, finally defeating the Tyrant's son and establishing the first Jewish "commonwealth" for almost a thousand years. Further, they made it safe, again, to practice our ancient faith. There was a time in our people's history, when Chanukah was observed in the spirit of a Memorial Day or Veteran's Day, remembering the sacrifice, and example of self-determination, shown

by Judah, and his brothers.

So, the tall, looming, lit, two dimensional Maccabees, and the outsized menorah with dancing candles stood fast on that street of Seasonal display.

And, the focus for Chanukah in our time is on the story of the oil lasting eight days which first appears in the Talmud 300 years after the Maccabees.

But all of this is good. As are the latkes and jelly donuts, and gelt and dreidels and decoration, and of course, the menorahs, and more in our time. It is fun to sing, with our children, the spirited folk songs of Chanukah in our time. (Some of which mention brave Judah, and his father, and brothers.)

Yet if one has an opportunity to hear Handel's Oratorio, Judas Maccabaeus, in pageantry, and splendor, and stirring music, is the full story of Chanukah, told.

Join us on this Shabbat as we continue the story.

Love  
Rabbi Fred Pomerantz



Rabbi Pomerantz is requesting

If you can:

Please be prepared to light a Chanukah menorah (candelabra) in your zoom window at services on Friday Night.

We'll all say the prayers together.

You may want to enjoy latkes or jelly filled doughnuts

During the wonderful Oneg concert by the wonderful THE LEVINS, after services.

#### 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](mailto:virtualshabbat@gmail.com) and let us know.

#### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Last month I wrote about how thankful I am for so many things in life. Now, as we approach the holiday season my thoughts have centered on how very fortunate we are to live when and where we live. I have read a number of books lately that are set in pre and early war-torn Europe that tell the stories of non-Jewish families and their experiences during the war era. The stories have given me a better understanding of the traumas that families lived through in occupied countries; the loss and fear when farms and homes were confiscated, the lack of food, the betrayal and the fear that all people lived with every day. How did they turn a blind eye to the growing hate that they witnessed? Why didn't anyone stop it before it was too late? Why didn't they do more?

I also recently had an opportunity to read through hundreds of letters that were written to my mother from soldiers and friends during the war. She was at college and, even though there was a war and there were rations, there were also parties and dances and shows and plans for the future. The stories are from the same era with entirely different perspectives. Looking in the rear-view mirror I am able to see how blessed she was (and we are) to be the ones living here in the relative safety of the United States.

Fast forward to life in 2021. Like many, I am concerned about our future. People threaten election workers, school board members, judges and political representatives. There are politicians that are choosing not to run again because they are concerned for their own safety and the safety of their families. Threats are made and the threatened are mocked. I see this and I wonder; one day will people read about this era and ask 'if they saw what was happening, why didn't they do more?' 'Why didn't anyone stop it before it was too late?'

I believe that the goodness that is at our core will push through but it will need help and its incumbent on all of us to figure out a way to provide that help.

As we light the candles of the Menorah and celebrate the Miracle of Lights, I wish that 2022 brings great joy, good health, prosperity and, hopefully, peace to everyone.

L' Shalom

Judy Siegel, President  
845-798-0783

### Message from the Levins

"As the weather shifts and leaves fall to make way for the new cycle, we are reminded to give thanks for this wonderful temple family. The gatherings, support and sense of community is rich with sweetness and sincerity. We recognize how fortunate we are to not only stay in touch, but to continue to connect monthly in sacred joy with Rabbi Fred Pomerantz and the Agudas Achim community. It's an understatement to say that we are very much looking forward to celebrating Chanukah with everyone in December. We'll be lighting the candles in chorus, singing our holiday favorites and rejoicing in the strength we gain from banding together to dispel the darkness during our festival of lights! We send our love and best to you to welcome in this festive season."

-The Levins

Happy Thanksgiving! Love and shalom, Ira and Julia

### **EXCITING DEVELOPMENTS**

Recently we have accepted membership applications from a number of new families that have moved into the area. Times are funny ... we are growing but we are not yet holding services live! The Leadership Board is planning to meet in December and we will discuss, among other things, plans to re-open and plans to welcome new members in person this spring. Stay tuned! It will be nice to see old friends, welcome new friends and imagine what the future will be for Agudas Achim. If you there is something you would like Agudas Achim to provide, drop me a line.

### **Upcoming Shabbat Services**

December 3, 2021	7:00 PM Social Time with your beverage of choice 7:30 PM 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

Email ([virtualshabbat@gmail.com](mailto:virtualshabbat@gmail.com)) or call 845-798-0783 for zoom link

### **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](mailto:virtualshabbat@gmail.com)

We would love to hear from you.

## SUGGEST A BOOK

Do you have books that you have read that you would like to suggest to others? We're starting an Agudas Achim Book List. Please include the name of the book, the author, 1-5 star review and send your suggestions to [virtualshabbat@gmail.com](mailto:virtualshabbat@gmail.com)

Here's a start:

### The Things We Cannot Say by Kelly Rimmer \*\*\*\*\*

Slipping between Nazi-occupied Poland and the frenetic pace of modern life, Kelly Rimmer creates an emotional and finely wrought narrative. *The Things We Cannot Say* is an unshakable reminder of the devastation when truth is silenced...and how it can take a lifetime to find our voice before we learn to trust it.

### Holy Envy by Barbara Brown Taylor \* \* \* \*

A teacher of religious studies in rural Georgia shares her moving discoveries of finding the sacred in unexpected places while teaching the world's religions to undergraduates in rural Georgia.

### The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah \* \* \* \* \*

The story of two sisters caught up in occupied France during the second world war. Both have remarkable stories to tell.

### Miss Grahams Cold War Cookbook by Celia Rees \* \* \* \*

Set in post war Germany this is a beautifully crafted and gripping novel about daring, betrayal, and female friendship.

### Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times \* \* \* \* \*

Rabbi Sachs chronicles the breakdown of **morality**, which is based on the common good into an individualistic code in which everyone looks out for his own benefit.

## 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](http://congregationagudasachim.org)) and click donate now

## Jewish Education News

On the 25th of Kislev began the eight-day celebration of Chanukah. We lit the first candle on the Hanukkiyah, the nine-branched Chanukah menorah, after sunset on November 28th. Though considered a minor Jewish festival, it has become a more significant celebration in many Jewish American families. During the eight days of Chanukah, it is not uncommon to see families playing dreidel, eating chocolate gelt or potato latkes and sufganiyot (jelly donuts fried in oil), giving tzedakah, singing songs about dreidels and Judah Maccabee, and of course, lighting candles. In America, exchanging gifts on Chanukah is a result of Chanukah being in such close proximity to Christmas. However, in Israel, gifts are not exchanged on Chanukah; rather, gifts of food, mishloach manot, are given on Purim.

The Book of Maccabees, the story that we tell and retell during Chanukah is not part of the Jewish sacred texts. The First Book of Maccabees and The Second Book of Maccabees are part of Christian writings called the Apocrypha. The rabbis who compiled the scriptures did not think the story of Judah, the restoration of the temple and the Hasmoneans should be included into the Biblical canon, most likely for political reasons. You may be surprised at what is included in the story and what is not there.

The students in the Hebrew School learned about Chanukah with Morah Mindy and worked on a dreidel project. On Sunday, December 5th the students and their parents will have a Chanukah Program and Celebration. Thank you to the temple and Sherry Silver. Todah Sherry, for your wonderful act of chesed (kindness).

By this point all the college students should have received the Chanukah packages that were sent out to them. So happy that we can be part of their college lives in this way.

As Peter, Paul and Mary said in their Chanukah song, "Don't Let the Lights Go Out."

*Light one candle for all we believe in  
That anger not tear us apart  
And light one candle to find us together  
With peace as the song in our hearts.*

*Chag Chanukah Sameach!*

Tobi Innerfield

### Thank you for the donation

#### High Holiday Annual Appeal

Audrey & Mark Garro  
Donna & Jerry Gorelick  
Jeremy Gorelick  
Wendy & Steven Grossman  
Sara & Charles Herbstman  
Don Simkin

#### Yom Kippur Prayer Book in memory of Ruth & Solomon Goldman

Sylvia Reynolds

#### In honor of Bonnie Katz reading Torah for our Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur services

Susan & Marvin Katz

### Happy Anniversary

Alan & Linda Rajlevsky 12/16  
Drs. Jack & Joyce Rubenstein 12/27  
Dr. Paul & Greta Salzberg 12/28

### Happy Birthday

Taylor Jaffe 12/4  
Bea Brown 12/11  
Susan Elinoff 12/11  
Bruce Ellsweig 12/14  
Karen Ellsweig 12/15  
Lea Schwartz 12/16  
Ryan Weiner 12/16  
Dimona A. Galli 12/21  
Belle Shaff 12/23  
Linda Rajlevsky 12/31  
Joe Watson 12/31  
Jackie Chiger 1/1  
Diane Fishman 1/1  
Lewis Skolnick 1/1