

Agudas Achim Congregation

401 E. Oakdale Blvd., Coralville, IA 52241 Phone: 319-337-3813 www.AgudasAchimIC.org

March 2019 / Adar I – Adar II 5779

AGUDAS ACHIM PURIM CARNIVAL

Sunday, March 24



FROM THE RABBI Esther Hugenholtz

Not Either/Or but And/And

Sometimes a Haftarah hits the spot, like last week's (I Kings 18:1 - 18:39). It's an epic showdown between a tempestuous Prophet Elijah and the pagan Priests of the Canaanite storm god Ba'al—the kind of face-off that would work well in a reality show or a gangster movie. With bravado, Elijah challenges the Ba'alite Priests: whose God is more powerful? There's some drama and pyrotechnics involved where two altars are lined up; each bearing a sacrifice. Elijah challenges the people: they need to choose. Do they follow Ba'al (who fails to ignite his sacrifice) or will they follow the One True God, who zaps the altar and consumes the offering in hot flames?

There's both a lot to like and dislike about this Haftarah. Sometimes, when I read the texts of our tradition, I suspect they are not always so selfserious. I'm secretly convinced that there's humor in the Bible (and Talmud). The account is so over-thetop that one can't help but crack a smile. On the other hand, it is a distasteful display of theological supremacy. If organized religion is like that, many of us might think, well... count me out.

Still, there's an interesting lesson there. While I reject the absolutism of the text, its moral clarity is what our age demands. What Elijah is charging the people with is *choice*. Do we *choose* our Judaism? Can we hold our complex (and sometimes contradictory) feelings about our Judaism while at the same time wholeheartedly committing to what speaks to us? In a sense, our successful Introduction to Judaism program is set up to help people navigate those questions and find meaningful answers for themselves. How can we post-moderns, in a world

(Continued on page 2)

FROM THE RABBI Esther Hugenholtz (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

that cries for meaning, make *our* own Judaism meaningful?

I would suggest that the answer lies in Jewish theology, and that's why I started with the story about the Haftarah. I'm a quirky rabbi: I love Jewish theology and I love teaching it and inviting people into the conversation. Not because I want to 'Biblethump' people into a singular and uncompromising point of view but because theology is a discipline of asking deep questions of meaning, service and transcendence. There is a self-perception among Jews that Jews don't 'do' God-talk. But God-talk whether it takes you to a place of intelligent atheism, agnosticism or belief - is a placeholder for how we think about our Jewish values. We Jews should be conversant in the key ideas of our own tradition, just like we are conversant as world citizens (or American citizens) in the key ideas of civic life. This can be intimidating, of course, because Jewish learning and growth can be intimidating, but as someone who herself started this journey later in life, I promise you that it's worthwhile.

So why would you want to talk about a God in which you don't believe? After all, Judaism is 'the religion that believes in One God or less'! In today's world, confidence in our principles does not need to mean unwavering certitude. There is ample place for doubt, questioning, experimentation and affirmation in our tradition. But asking Big Questions means asking Clarifying Questions: even if the answer is a resounding No. Is this the God you don't believe in? Are there moments where you brush up against a transcendent experience you can't quite define? Either way, we can create a safe space to explore those questions. Are you drawn to more traditional learning and practice? Are you secular and a natural skeptic? We so want you to be part of the conversation. Ultimately, to talk about God or transcendence is to talk about what makes us uniquely human.

The above musings are part of the reason why I am stepping up my role as a rabbinic educator for our congregation. I will be teaching more Judaic content over the next few months, including a 'God Or Not' Sunday morning Schmooze in May, as well as Purimthemed co-teaching with David Weltman, our Hillel Director. It is why I believe in the power of a wellcrafted sermon, in teaching moments and discussions during services, in rousing song and friendly chatter at Kiddush. These are all conscious choices of how I shape my rabbinate: a little more space, an invitation for contemplation. All those relational moments are educational moments and irrespective of where we stand, we can all choose to be better Jews for it and to celebrate our curiosity while we are at it.

I want our community to have the following clarity: that we do not provide Either/Or options but And/ And. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) states that 'one who is *bayshan* (shy), does not learn.' If we are intellectually or theologically shy or reclusive, we cannot challenge ourselves, each other and grow. Our community is for God-seekers, God-wrestlers and the God-less. We are here to celebrate vibrant secular Jewish culture; from food to music, literature to science, Israel and the Diaspora and everything in between. We can create a space for worship from the heart, to be moved by what we cannot define yet what we can deeply love. We can create opportunities for deep learning and growth in Torah and mitzvot and challenge ourselves in the pursuit of justice and acts of kindness. None of these are contradictory aims, but rather complementary ambitions.

Elijah's mistake was not that he wanted clarity. It was that he went about it in the wrong way: with brute and coercive force. He didn't need the pyrotechnics nor did he need to invalidate those who choose to believe differently or not at all. All he needed was to present his people with compelling moral choice. A miracle far greater than fire upon an altar, is the fire in our souls. Let's make it burn and shine its light together in holy community.

TALMUD STUDY GROUP

The Talmud Study Group meets on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. All are welcome!

JCIC SURVEY

There will be a JCIC Hate Crime Survey done on **Friday March 8 at 7:30 p.m.,** just before our services. JCIC (Johnson County Interfaith Cluster) is working on social justice and racial inclusion and wants to monitor the incidence of or concerns regarding hate crimes towards minorities (including Jews) in our area. The printed survey is very short and strictly anonymous and people can take it home to fill out.

LEV SHALEM UPDATE

We have had 25 families donate so far to the new Lev Shalem Machzorim, covering the cost of 165 books. What a great start!

RABBI'S TISH

Rabbi's Tish: Death and Mourning

Saturday, March 23, 1:00 p.m.

Many Jews will know Jewish mourning rituals from the Kaddish prayer in the synagogue... but what else is done? Judaism's pragmatic yet spiritual support system through mourning is psychologically sublime and deeply humane. Come to the kiddush lunch to learn how we deal with this very final stage in life and how ancient wisdom speaks to modern concerns.

ALAN WEINSTEIN EVENT

Sunday, March 17, 11:00 a.m. Agudas Achim Social Hall

Alan Weinstein: Eve, Esther, Creativity and Aging

Thoughts on the metamorphosis of visual ideas and the mystery that for some artists old age is a period of ultimate fruition.

BEREAVEMENT GROUP

The Caring Committee is currently running a Bereavement Support Group facilitated by Martha Lubaroff in the conference room on Wednesdays from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m.

Anyone grieving the loss of a loved one is invited to participate. Those with questions or interest in participating can email Martha at <u>mlubaroff@gmail.com</u>

SHABBAT SERVICE SCHEDULE

Torah Portion	Date	Service Time	Service
Vayakhel	Friday, March 1	7:30 p.m.	Sim Shalom (Conservative)
(Exodus 35:1 – 38:20; 30:11 – 16	Saturday, March 2	9:30 a.m.	Mishkan T'filah (Reform)
Pekudei	Friday, March 8	7:30 p.m.	Mishkan T'filah
(Exodus 38:21 – 40:38)	Saturday, March 9	9:30 a.m.	Sim Shalom
Vayikra	Friday, March 15	7:30 p.m.	Mishkan T'filah
(Leviticus 1:1 – 5:26; Deuteronomy 25:17 – 19)	Saturday, March 16	9:30 a.m.	Sim Shalom
Tzav	Friday, March 22	7:30 p.m.	Mishkan T'filah
(Leviticus 6:1 – 8:36)	Saturday, March 23	9:30 a.m.	Sim Shalom
Shemini	Friday, March 29	7:30 p.m.	Mishkan T'filah
(Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47; Numbers 19:1 – 22)	Saturday, March 30	9:30 a.m.	Sim Shalom

FROM THE STACKS Dick Caplan

The Orientalist by Tom Reiss

This book is a biography but a strange one, because it is less the story of Lev Nussimbaum (1905-1942), a Jewish boy growing up in the city of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan on the west coast of the Caspian Sea, and more the story of the eras and locales where he happened to live. The protagonist, carefully groomed and protected by his wealthy oil-baron father, became a successful well-known writer in Europe,

publishing in diverse genres and using different names. Part of the biographer's challenge was to track his subject through the deliberate confusion of names and places. For me, the major pleasure in reading this book lay in the author's skill in depicting this subject's abodes during times of enormous civil and cultural turmoil—the ravages of the Bolshevik Revolution (1905-1917) as it affected the Caucasus and the West, the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI and the rise of modern Turkey, the wildness of postwar readjustment in Rome and Paris and then the "German Revolution" (1921-33)—a study of the Weimar era and the cynical bitterness best seen in Berlin with the rise of the Nazi movement. The Jew of the biography converted to Islam as a young man, but his religious impulses, whether Jewish or Muslim were pale and limp compared to the pain and excitement wherever he lived. If a closer look at these vibrant years and places would please you, this book is definitely for you. Find *The Orientalist* on the New in the Library shelf in the Braverman Library.



SCHOOL NEWS Sonja Spear

Purim! Purim! Purim!

One of the fun things about being part of a synagogue community is the opportunity to express sides of your personality that don't necessarily come out at work or at home. Maybe you have a talent for painting or making balloon animals, but your artistic talents aren't required at the office? Maybe you like to bake? Perhaps you have a flare for painting or woodworking?

Look no further! You can be anything you want to be on Purim. Help make the Purim carnival as fun and as magical as possible. We need volunteers willing to make balloon animals, paint faces, and to help decorate the space. We also need many, many people to bake Hamentaschen cookies. In addition, we could use someone willing to paint Haman on a piece of cardboard for a Toss the Hamentaschen at Haman game? Got other ideas for games? Please let me know!

In past years the talented Mr. Doug Jones and the artistic Mr. Michael Sellz collaborated to create a beautiful Wheel of Fortune. Doug also built a game of Skittles. Our children are going to remember these games as part of Purim for the rest of their lives. The games we rent are great, but it's the games and decorations that we create for ourselves that make the carnival a *Purim* carnival.

While the kids get ready for the carnival, adults will have the opportunity to raise money for the Crisis Center by assembling baskets of goodies for *misholoach manot*, a sort of Purim goodie exchange. (*"Mishloach manot"* means "sending portions." The custom refers to the end of the end of the Book of Esther which asks Jews to celebrate by sending "portions" of food to each other and especially to the poor.) We will have the Hamentaschen, other goodies, ribbon and baskets ready. You make a donation to the Crisis Center and create a beautiful basket to send to a friend.

I am hoping to revive the tradition of *mishloach manot* because exchanging Purim goodies was the best part of Purim when I was a kid. My mother and a bunch of us kids would bake Hamentaschen and assemble plates of goodies, usually including some candy and an orange. Then we drove all over town, leaving the plates of cookies on our friends' houses. There was always a crisis when we realized that we had run out of homemade Hamentaschen before we ran out of families in need of cookies. Fortunately, other people had been dropping cookies off at our house all day. So we assembled the last plates from donated cookies and hit the road again. Other families did exactly the same thing. I know this for a fact because, sooner or later, we always seemed to get a basket or two that included our own Hamentaschen!

If we could have seen the Hamentaschen exchange from above, we would have seen all the Jewish families in town connected by cookies, a map delineated by Hamentaschen. We started with cookies, but we made community. I would love to do that here in Iowa City.

Schedule of events for Purim:

As always, the carnival is free and open to everyone who is, has, or has ever been a child. It takes place during Sunday School, but it is open to the whole community. Please bring cash because there will be a



number of opportunities to donate money for the Crisis Center including: a Sunday School cocoa and lemonade sale, a guessing jar game, a raffle, and assembling baskets for *mishloach manot*.

Sunday, March 24

10:00: Sunday School – bring costumes!

10:20-10:50: Short and silly Purim service with dramatic English-language reading of the *Megillah*. The whole congregation is welcome!

10:50: Adults are invited to assemble baskets for *misholach manot* in the kitchen; Kids will get ready for the carnival

11:15-12:00: Carnival

SCHOOL NEWS Sonja Spear (cont.)

Snow. We have had an incredible number of snow days this last month. Through it all, the Hebrew School continued to work on understanding the order of the Shabbat service. The Rabbi explained the order of the service, then the students tried to put the prayers in order by memory. That went pretty well. But they really had a breakthrough when they started imagining the service as being like a party: a special day that starts by welcoming guests, climaxes in activities and an exchange of gifts, and ends with friends leaving. Notice that the service reaches a climax in the *Amidah*.

Here is their vision of the Shabbat service mapped onto a birthday party, as dictated to their teacher, Sari Lindner.



FROM THE PRESIDENT Kathy Jacobs

I just saw a bright red cardinal perched outside my window. His bright color seemed to be a harbinger of spring, despite this week's weather forecast that threatens of cold winds. February's weather, with its uncertainties, led to cancellations and postponements of religious school sessions and events. I hope March winds come with less snow and bad weather as we try to catch up and reschedule planned programs. Please check the synagogue calendar for new dates.

Board committees have been busy despite the weather. Adult education, the Rabbi, and Sisterhood have found new dates for their events and continue to work on spring programming. Take advantage of Tikun Olam's opportunities to heal the world by donating books to the Shelter House Book Sale and learn about the NAMI walk. The Education Committee is convening a small work group to review policies, curriculum, and update school information and registration packets. The Membership Committee is reviewing member materials and planning small group events. I was sorry I had to miss the recent Sephardic dinner and musical service at the last minute, and I hear I missed a really special evening (thanks to Kineret Zabner, Dina Janzen, Linda Wertz, and Rabbi Hugenholtz). We hope to bring you more events like this in the future! In fact, we are planning an early shabbat dinner on March 29. We're encouraging families to come for a dairy/vegetarian meal catered by Kineret.

So, despite the weather, we have actually accomplished quite a bit in February and are poised to work hard in March. I am grateful that we have such a hardworking staff and dedicated volunteers who work long hours to make Agudas Achim Congregation the wonderful community I love. Thank you to all who contribute time, energy and financial support to our efforts on your behalf.

Happy March!

WARM UP AMERICA Connie Berman



Warm Up America makes afghans that go to Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelters and other places. We have lots of volunteers and lots of afghans we've given away. Here is one of our volunteers, Eliana Friedman, delivering five of them to Ronald McDonald House. **Our meeting dates for March are the 3rd and 31st – 10:00 a.m. to noon at the synagogue.**

Warm Up America Starter Kits: Warm Up America now has starter kits for knitters and crocheters, complete with crochet hooks, knitting needles, yarn (synthetic non-shrinkable), and a template for our 7" x 9" rectanges. For some, this will be an activity done at home to contribute to our charitable mission; for most, you are also very welcome to join our meetings at Agudas Achim.

MIRIAM GILBERT TALK



Miriam Gilbert: How Jewish is Shylock?

Sunday, March 10, 11:00 a.m.

Shylock is perhaps the best-known fictional Jew in literature (with Fagin a close second). His representation on stage and in film varies considerably, sometimes stressing his outsider status, sometimes showing him as a would-be assimilationist, sometimes emphasizing his Jewishness, sometimes not. Jewish actors have played Shylock, Jewish directors have produced the play, but there are far more productions staged by and with non-Jews. So what do we



learn from considering the performance history of The Merchant of Venice, especially after the Holocaust?

TIKKUN OLAM EVENT Martha Lubaroff



Please join us for a Friday evening talk after services on March 29. We will have a presentation from Leslie Carpenter, 2019 President of the NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Board of Directors.

Leslie Carpenter is an

advocate for improving the treatment of people with serious mental illnesses in Iowa and across the United States. She believes that treating those with serious mental illnesses in a comprehensive and thorough manner leads to improved outcomes for those individuals. To improve access to care for people with all levels and acuities of mental illnesses, a continuum of treatment levels and care facilities is needed for mentally ill patients in settings that are appropriate at a given point in time. Leslie has practiced as a Physical Therapist since graduating with her BS in Physical Therapy in 1985. She practices and manages the Scott Boulevard location of Progressive Rehabilitation Associates, LLC in Iowa City. She also serves as an Adjunct Associate in the Physical Therapy & Rehabilitation Science Graduate Programs at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine.

Leslie is also a member of the Advocacy & Outreach Committee, and she teaches two of NAMI's signature programs, Family to Family and Provider Training.

Leslie will give a presentation on the work of NAMI of Johnson County. Please attend services and stay for the Oneg with Leslie Carpenter.



SISTERHOOD NEWS Beverly Jones

Spring / Summer Events

We're definitely looking forward to Spring after a long, grueling Winter. We regret having to cancel our Winter Tea, but the weather was just too risky that day to have anyone out driving. We're looking into celebrating the arrival of warmer weather with a rescheduled Tea. We want to thank Sue Weinberg for her email auction of homemade candy. And our thanks to everyone who participated in the candy auction. We'll also be planning our annual Mitzvah Fund Brunch, which raises money for charity, and we're happy to solicit programming ideas from you. We've been invited to participate in a Women of Reform Judaism event with the Sisterhoods in Davenport and Des Moines. Details will be coming out this Spring.

Dues

If you have yet to pay your membership dues, you can still send a check for \$36.00 to our Sisterhood Treasurer, Joni Caplan, 520 Brookland Park Dr., Iowa City, IA 52246. If you have questions, contact Joni at <u>jocaplan@aol.com</u>. You can also contact the Synagogue Administrator, Karen Brady, at 319-337-3813 if you would like to pay by credit card. Your dues help support synagogue projects throughout the year.

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TORAH ENHANCEMENT FUND

Nancy Sprince: In memory of Sari Sprince

MARCH 2019

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3	4	5	6	7	8 Office Closed	9
Sunday School	Sisterhood Board	Jewth 7-8:30 pm	Bereavement Group	Ritual Committee	Shabbat Evening	Shabbat Morning
10am-12pm	Meeting		12:30-1:30 pm	7:15-8:15 pm	Service	Service
Warm-up America	7-8 pm		Hebrew School		7:30-8:30 pm	9:30 am-12 pm
10 am-12 pm	Introduction to		4:15-6:15pm			Children's Shabbat
Biblical Hebrew for	Judaism					Club 10 am-12 pm
Adults 7-9 pm	7:30-9:30 pm		6			
10	11	12	13	14	15 Office Closed	16
Talmud Study	Hebrew School	Jewth 7-8:30 pm	Bereavement Group	Inclusion	Shabbat Evening	Shabbat Morning
Group 9-10am	4:15-6:15pm		12:30-1:30 pm	Committee 7-8 pm	Service	Service
Sunday School	Introduction to		Hebrew School		7:30-8:30 pm	9:30 am-12 pm
10am-12pm	Judaism		4:15-6:15pm		Concernance and the second	
Miriam Gilbert Talk	7:30-9:30 pm					
11:00 am - noon						
Biblical Hebrew for						
Adults 7-9 pm						
17	18	19	20	21	22 Office Closed	23
Talmud Study	Executive			PURIM	Family Chavurah	Shabbat Morning
Group 9-10am	Committee Meeting			Ritual Committee	6-7:30 pm	Service
Alan Weinstein	6:30-7:30 pm			7:15-8:15 pm	Shabbat Evening	9:30 am-12 pm
Presentation	Introduction to				Service	Children's Shabbat
11am-12pm	Judaism				7:30-8:30 pm	Club 10 am-12 pm
Biblical Hebrew for	7:30-9:30 pm					Rabbi's Tish on
Adults 7-9 pm						Death & Mourning
					1200 Contractor	1-2 pm
24	25	26	27	28	29 Office Closed	30
Talmud Study	Hebrew School	Jewth 7-8:30 pm	Free Lunch	Board Meeting	Family Shabbat	Shabbat Morning
Group 9-10am	4:15-6:15pm		11:30 am-1 pm	7-8 pm	Dinner 6-7:30pm	Service
Sunday School	Introduction to		Hebrew School	, opin	Shabbat Evening	9:30 am-12 pm
10am-12pm	Judaism		4:15-6:15pm		Service	Children's Shabbat
Purim Carnival	7:30-9:30 pm		Calendar Meeting		7:30-8:30 pm	Club 10 am-12 pm
11am-noon	1.00 5.00 pm		6:30-7:30pm		NAMI Oneg	cido to an it pin
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Sunday School	Sisterhood Board		4.15-0.15pm	•	7:30-8:30 pm	9:30 am-12 pm
10am-12pm	Meeting				7.50-6.50 pm	Children's Shabbat
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Warm-up America 10 am-12 pm	7-8 pm					Club 10 am-12 pm
Biblical Hebrew for						
Adults 7-9 pm	3		5	a	8	

Save the date: Sunday, April 7 for a talk by Shams Ghoneim entitled Islam, a Short Review.

MARCH YAHRZEITS

- Max Berkowitz Joan Clements Bryant Corinne Chapman Morris Dicker Hyman Dubin Stanley Edwards Arthur Gross Harriet Blakeslee Hall William Herman Benjamin B. Hertz Dora Joseph
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"As tiny scales join to form a strong coat of armor, so little donations combine to form a large total of good" *From the Talmud*

Should you desire to make a contribution, may we suggest any of the following synagogue funds:

Braverman Talmud Torah	The Rabbi Portman Program Fund
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