



# AGUDAS ACHIM CONGREGATION

## קהילת אגודת אחים

Dear Congregants,

In Chapter 32 of the Book of Jeremiah, the Prophet engages in an odd real estate investment. The Babylonians are about to conquer ancient Israel, raze Jerusalem to the ground, exile its population and Jeremiah himself has been imprisoned. Needless to say, both his personal circumstance and the national condition are dire. Still, Jeremiah chooses to acquire a field in Anathoth, trusting in the future. While in the colloquial understanding, Jeremiah is seen as a ‘Prophet of Doom’, he was actually surprisingly resilient and hopeful. Jeremiah knew that a crisis presents us with challenges ready to be transformed into opportunities.

Like Jeremiah, we are facing existential questions as a synagogue community during the global pandemic and the economic crisis. This is a time of moral urgency and a call for sacred community, be it across the globe or in our own local area. Our hearts are turned towards doctors, nurses, essential workers and research scientists as they play their crucial part in overcoming our current predicament. At the same time, it is more important than ever for us as a synagogue community to keep on doing what we do best: create safe and sacred spaces for relationships, worship, learning, social connection and justice work. Even though we have been shuttered for in-person activities, our synagogue is thriving online with Zoom services, learning events, community engagement, pastoral work, outreach and social justice work through our wider networks continuing unabated. We are the beating heart for pluralistic religious Jewish life and a hub for connection and friendship.

Please continue supporting the synagogue and fill in your Fair Share forms. Our future is uncertain but our destiny remains clear: to serve where we are called; to bring the light and love of our Judaism, to bind our hearts together and keep Jewish culture thriving in Iowa City. As we face the financial challenges of the immediate and long-term future, trusting in the solidity and generosity of your contribution will allow us to continue to do all we do passionately and with the integrity of our institution intact.

In closing, I would like to share some wisdom from the Prophet Jeremiah, whose hopeful purchase of the field worked out in his favor. As he faced the exile of the Jewish community of his day to Babylon, he encouraged his community to build houses, plant gardens, get married, have children and to seek the welfare and peace of their local community; to continue being invested in the future. Jeremiah prophesied in the Name of God:

“...For I am mindful of the plans I have made concerning you—declares the Eternal—plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you – *acharit v’tikvah* - a hopeful future.” (Jer. 29:5-11)

During these difficult times, we too need to be reminded of our *acharit v’tikvah*, our ‘hopeful future’. The work of building our community and planting our (metaphorical) garden continues. I look forward to sharing this holy work with you and am grateful for your contributions.

*B’shalom u’vrachah,*

In peace and blessing,

Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz