

The Agudagram

May 2023 Volume 72, No. 9
Iyar/Sivan 5783

Agudas Israel Congregation

77 North Pine Street
Hazleton, PA 18201
570-455-2851

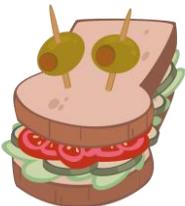
Officers:

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Debbie Walko, President
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Richard Rockman, Secretary
Helene Kline, Treasurer
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SHABBAT CANDLELIGHTING & HOLIDAY SERVICE TIMES

5/5- Parshat Emor- candlelighting 7:46pm
5/12- Parshat Behar-Behukotai- candlelighting 7:54pm
5/19- Parshat Bamidbar- candlelighting 8:00pm
5/25- Erev Shavuot candlelighting 8:06pm
5/26- Shavuot:
-9:30am service at AIC and on Zoom
-candlelighting from existing flame at 8:07pm
5/27- Shabbat Yizkor service at 9:30am at AIC and on Zoom



JCC Leisure Lunch: Tuesday, May 9th at noon @ Agudas Israel Synagogue featuring a homemade kosher lunch prepared by Laurie Klemow including tuna salad sandwiches with coleslaw, chips, drinks, & dessert. Please RSVP by May 7th to Christina at hazleton.jcc@gmail.com or 570-455-2851.

What is Lag B'Omer?

Lag B'Omer is one of those little-known Jewish holidays, the kind that passes unnoticed among most American Jews. Perhaps they would be more interested if they knew it involved barbecue – and a couple of really good stories. Widely celebrated in Israel, it's known as a family-focused celebration filled with grilled meats and carob cakes and bows and arrows.

So what exactly is Lag B'Omer? It's a holiday with a numerical name: "Lag" is a Hebrew acronym of the letters "lamud" and "gimmel" which equals 33, because the holiday falls on the 33rd day of the Omer.

The Omer, which means, "a sheaf," referencing the grain that was brought as an offering to God at the Jewish Temple, is a time of mourning. During this time, Orthodox Jews don't shave, don't listen to music and don't get married. It begins on the second day of Passover and ends on Shavuot, when the Jews accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai.

One reason for the holiday has to do with the teaching that the manna that sustained the Jews as they wandered in the desert for 40 years began falling on the 18th of the Hebrew month of Iyar, which coincides with the 33rd day of the Omer.

Origins in the Roman period

But the reason for Lag B'Omer is mainly derived from two Talmudic stories that take place during the Roman period. The first is the story of Rabbi Akiva and his 24,000 students. Rabbi Akiva was a famous tanna, a man who went from being an illiterate farm boy to a venerable Torah scholar with thousands of students. Because of his prestige, his students became cocky and competitive, and they began to quarrel.

As a result, God sent a plague that struck down Rabbi Akiva's students. It was only on the 33rd day that it stopped, and all was forgiven. And so Lag B'Omer is a day of joy and celebration.

The second story behind this holiday is the story of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and the cave. Rabbi Shimon, one of Rabbi Akiva's students, was forced to flee from the Romans after Bar Kochba's defeat. He fled to a cave with his son Elazar. Miraculously, the story goes, a carob tree sprung up out of the blue next to a stream, which nourished the pair as they spent every day learning and praying for the next 12 years.

During his time in the cave, Rabbi Shimon composed the Zohar, a key kabbalistic work. When they finally emerged, Rabbi Shimon was unable to handle the baseness of humanity, and condemned materialistic endeavors. But for this, he was condemned by God and was forced to live in the cave for another two years. It was only after Rabbi Shimon learned that holiness is not just between man and God, but also between man and his friend, that he was able to leave.

Why do people gather at Mount Meron?

Before he died, Rabbi Shimon told his disciples that the day of his death should be a day of joy. And so Lag B'Omer is a celebration commemorating the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. In Israel, many Jews make the pilgrimage to his tomb in Meron, which is located near Safed.

There, Jews light bonfires, eat barbecued meats from freshly slaughtered animals and sing kabbalistic hymns to honor the light that Rabbi Shimon brought into the world through his kabbalistic teachings. Some Hasidic Jews also bring their 3-year-old sons to have their hair cut for the first time, in what is called an upsherin. Many people also eat carob in honor of Rabbi Shimon's 12 years hiding in a cave.

What both these stories teach us is that Judaism is not just a religion that is about serving God, it's about the quality of one's relationships. You cannot turn Torah learning into a battlefield, you cannot remove yourself from humanity in your attempt to get closer to God. Godliness can only be achieved by being a decent person to others.

And that's why Lag B'Omer is a holiday that is about family, about reaffirming our dedication to our relationships.

The Twisted History of Shavuot: Do Modern-day Jews Have It Wrong?

According to the Bible, Shavuot isn't exactly a real holiday. What changed?

The Jewish holiday of Shavuot has been through so many changes and adaptations over the centuries that the holiday Jews celebrate today is almost certainly nothing like the one it's based on. After all these years, it's unclear what the real date of the holiday is, and even what it's named. In fact, according to the Bible, Shavuot may not be a holiday at all.

So what do we know about the twisted history of Shavuot?

Kindergarten children opening the Shavuot parade at Kibbutz Shamir. Credit: Eliyahu Hershkowitz



Shavuot has its origins in the ancient mid-summer harvest celebrations of the Canaanites, the ancient people from which Israelite society sprang during the Bronze Age. These early religions' celebrations, in which revelers rejoiced in the harvesting of wheat, were local affairs probably celebrated in communal threshing grounds, where the wheat was separated from the chaff, and other cultic sites.

All that started to change in the 7th and 8th centuries BCE, when the Jerusalem monarchs and priesthood consolidated power, bringing formerly separate tribes under the helm of one ruler. As part of this program, they co-opted these local affairs and supplanted them by unified rites that could only be performed in the Temple in Jerusalem. This program would create a sense of peoplehood for the people of the land and enrich the coffers of both palace and Temple.

Shavuot is referenced as one of the three pilgrimages or “Shloshet Haregalim” in the Book of Exodus, which was probably written during the exile in Babylonia. But in its earliest stages, during the First Temple period, Shavuot was an appendage to Passover, the first of the two major agricultural holidays. Shavuot marked the end of the festival (Atzeret) of the 50-day period called the Omer, between the harvest of barley – Passover - and the harvest of wheat. Sukkot, the second agricultural holiday, involves the same pattern, in this case with a seven-day period between the start of the holiday and the Atzeret.

Since Shavuot is not a holiday in its own right, according to the Bible, we don’t actually know the exact date of the celebration, only that it comes 50 days after Passover, which begins on either the sixth or seventh day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, depending on which rabbis you ask.

It doesn’t have a set name either - it is cited as The Festival of Weeks (Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:10), The Festival of Reaping (Exodus 23:16) and The Day of First Fruits (Numbers 28:26).

Shavuot and Passover indeed share many customs. For example, matza, unleavened bread made out of the first crop of barley, plays a major part in Passover, and leavened bread made out of the first crop of wheat, “wave loaves,” are a major part of Shavuot. Two of these specially prepared loaves – “they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first fruits unto the Lord” (Leviticus 23:17) – would be brought to the Jerusalem Temple by each Israelite farmer. And the farmers would present the loaves to the priests while chanting a Hebrew text reaffirming the fealty to God and the common history of the tribes (i.e. the Exodus and conquest of the land promised by God), who in turn offered them to God.

This would have been a complicated, bloody, and expensive ceremony. The Bible explains that the loaves were “waved before The Lord” together with wine and a complicated array of animal sacrifices, much like those sacrificed on Passover - seven lambs, two rams and two goats.

But this form of the holiday could not last, and like so much of the Jewish religion it had to be adapted to the new realities that faced the Jewish people after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. With no temple to make a pilgrimage to, and no place in which to offer sacrifices to God, Judaism was being reshaped under the guidance of the rabbis.

It was the rabbis of the first decades after the destruction of the Temple who changed the significance of Shavuot and proclaimed that Atzeret, as they called it, was the celebration of the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai.

“All agree in respect to Atzeret that it is required because on that day the Torah was given,” Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus is quoted in the Talmud as saying during the early second century CE (Pesachim 68b). Eliezer based this assertion of an ancient tradition that placed the giving of the Torah in the month of Sivan, a tradition that appears in the apocryphal 2nd century BCE Book of Jubilees, and that is based on a passage in the Book of Exodus that reads: “In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai” (19:1).

From the 2nd century on, Shavuot began to focus on the Torah. The Torah portions read on the holiday revolve around the theophany, the physical manifestation of God, atop Mount Sinai, namely the receiving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-20).

Aside from these readings, few traditions were assigned to Shavuot during late antiquity (after 70 CE) and the early Middle Ages. This began to change during the Middle Ages, however. This is when traditions such as the act of decorating synagogues with greenery first became associated with Shavuot. This particular custom is said to have its roots in a midrash about the giving of the Torah according to which before the Torah was given on Mount Sinai the entire mountain blows. Other traditions that took shape during the Middle Ages included the tradition of inducting young Jewish boys to Hebrew school on Shavuot, so that they could begin receiving the Torah on the anniversary of the giving of the Torah. It is likely that this is how dairy became associated with Shavuot: When families celebrated their boys’ induction into Hebrew school, Jewish mothers most likely served dairy rather than meat, since it is less expensive.

But as time went by, ex post facto explanations of why dairy food was eaten on Shavuot began to arise. One of these explanations was that when the Torah was given to the Jews in the desert, they couldn’t prepare a meat meal according to the new commandments right away, so a dairy meal was made instead. Another explanation is based on one reading of the erotic Song of Songs verse: “Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honeycomb: honey and milk are under thy tongue.” According to this particular reading of the verse, it is not the lips of a lover but rather the Torah itself that is likened to honey and milk. If that is true, what better way, the explanations goes, to celebrate the receiving of the Torah than by eating cheese blintzes.

An even later tradition to become associated with Shavuot is that of all-night Torah study sessions. The tradition started in the 16th century by Rabbi Joseph Caro. Later, under the influence of the Kabbalah revolution of the Ari, these were dubbed “Tikkun Leil Shavuot,” which is what they are called to this very day.

A surprising twist on the story of Shavuot came in the 20th century, when Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, started to settle Israel and establish agricultural communities. Suddenly, Jews were once again tilling the land and reaping wheat in the summer. In the Kibbutz Movement, Shavuot was resurrected as an agricultural holiday and adapted to these Jews’ socialist ideology. The agricultural produce was presented - not to God or priest but to the community itself - in

jubilant processions featuring singing and dancing. This secular, agricultural take on Shavuot spread across Israel, even to the cities, but as time went by and agriculture played a smaller part in Israeli life, the celebrations became more modest. Today celebrations of this kind are less common and largely used as a photo-op for dressing children in white clothes and putting wreaths of flowers on their heads, much like the old European May Day festivals.

While religious Jews still celebrate Shavuot as the holiday of the receiving of the Torah, among secular Israeli Jews little is left of Shavuot. For most, the only tradition to survive to this day is the coincidental connection with dairy products – for many, if you do anything to celebrate the holiday, you probably eat some cheesecake.

GET WELL WISHES ARE EXPRESSED TO:
BRUCE MILLER, BOBBIE KLEMOW, LEANNE
TRATTNER, SHIRLEY BRENNER, & EILEEN
BRENNER.

SHOULD ANYONE HAVE ANY NEWS TO
SHARE WITH THE AIC FAMILY, PLEASE EMAIL
IT TO
AGUDASISRAELHAZLETON@GMAIL.COM TO
RUN IN THE NEXT AGUDAGRAM!



SHEILA IS RESIDING AT ST. LUKE'S PAVILION.
VISITATION AT ST. LUKE'S IS NOW OPEN TO THE
PUBLIC. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEND HER A CARD OR
VISIT, YOU MAY FIND HER AT:
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HAZLETON, PA 18201

May (Iyar/Sivan) Yahrzeits

May the memory of the righteous endure as a blessing.

The yahrzeit plaque lights are on in the sanctuary in memory of our departed loved ones.

*Numbers before each name correspond to the Hebrew date of their passing. The date after each name is the secular day of the yahrzeit. Yahrzeit candles should be lit the evening before this date burning through the day of their passing. Kaddish should be said the evening before and the day of the date of passing.

IYAR

10 Rudolph Seuss 1
10 Nathan Gersteen 1
11 Jerry Brownstein 2
11 Nathan Cenower 2
11 Anna Shupack 2
11 Annabelle Trattner 2
12 Edith Wagner 3
13 Carrie Mandelberg 4
15 Esther Williams 6
16 Cecelia Miller 7
17 Samuel Gandell 8
17 Thelma Tybie Cohen 8
17 Ethel Clark 8
19 Anna Shlesinger 10
21 Naomi Jaffe 12
21 David Grossman 12
22 Israel T. Klapper 13
23 Ruth Klemow 14
23 Sarah Goldstein 14
24 Herbert Clark 15
24 Isaac Figlin 15
24 Joseph Soller 15
25 Hal Goldstein 15

28 Hannah Cohn 19
28 Stella Gold 19
28 Isaac Jaffe 19
29 Sidney Schwartz 20

SIVAN

3 Anna Fishman 23
4 David Bishop 24
4 Jonas Steiner 24
4 Samuel Jaffe 24
7 Stanley Brenner 27
7 Louis Matlow 27
7 Sylvia Narrow 27
8 Harry Goldberg 28
9 Gertrude Gordon 29
10 Eva Kahn Landy 30
10 Rabbi Joseph Miller 30
10 Rochelle Goldman 30
10 Blanche Schwartz 30
11 Benjamin Glass 31
11 Benjamin Levine 31
11 Sidney Bauer 31
11 Aaron Lintz 31

PLEASE REMEMBER
THE MITZVAH OF
GIVING TZEDUKAH TO
YOUR SHUL OR THE
SHUL OF YOUR LOVED
ONE WHO HAS
PASSED, ON THE
OCCASION OF THEIR
YAHRZEIT IN THEIR
MEMORY.

REFLECTION WHICH MAY BE READ WHEN LIGHTING A YAHRZEIT CANDLE FOR
YOUR LOVED ONE:

"I light this candle to bring peace to the soul of _____ (insert Jewish name) ben/bat (son of/daughter of) _____ (insert father's Jewish name)."

The human soul is a light from God. May it be your will that the soul of (*insert name*) enjoy eternal life, along with the souls of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, and the rest of the righteous that are in Gan Eden. Amen.

Neir Adonai Nishmat Adam. Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha, Adonai Eloheinu Veilohei Avoteinu, Shetehei Nishmat (insert name) Tzerurah betzeror hachayim, im nishmot Avraham Yitzchak ve'Ya'akov, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel VeLeah. Tehi Menutchatah kavod, Selah

APRIL DONATIONS RECEIVED

<u>Donated by</u>	<u>In Memory of</u>
Bruce & Catherine Miller	Cecelia Miller, mother
Faye & Richard Bishop	Sam Gandell, grandfather Rose Narrow, mother & grandmother
Howard Narrow, Rhona Narrow, David Narrow	Bella Narrow, mother
Larry Janowitch	Joseph Brenner, father
Leonard & Ann Louise Brenner	Jean Sugarman, mother-in-law
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Lois Sugarman	Kalman Sugarman, father-in-law
Lois Sugarman	Fannie Greisberg, aunt
Michele Goldberg	Joseph Lander, grandfather
Ronald & Nancy Feller	Bonnie Klemow, sister
Sherri Klemow, MD	

Agudas Israel Endowment Fund

In honor of the 100th Anniversary Celebration of Agudas Israel &
The 101st Birthday of Beulah Bishop by
Richard & Faye Bishop

In Memory of Mark Burkat
By Richard Rockman

In Memory of Phyllis Landau
By Valerie M. Vivian

In Memory of Bonnie Klemow, passed away April 8, 1962
A fun-loving person and wonderful friend who will always be remembered!
Donation by Mary (Scatton) Rock





AIC NEWS

-We regretfully inform our community of the passing of longtime member Phyllis Landau on April 21.

-JCC Leisure Lunch: Tuesday, May 9th at noon @ Agudas Israel Synagogue featuring a homemade kosher lunch prepared by Laurie Klemow including tuna salad sandwiches with coleslaw, chips, drinks & dessert. Please RSVP by May 7th to Christina at hazleton.jcc@gmail.com or 570-455-2851.

-Reminder to make your reservation for the June 3 Centennial Celebration! Donations in honor of our centennial may still be made.

-Thank you to our Centennial Sponsors & Donors and those who attended the event on 4/23. Listing included.

-Please email Christina photos from the 4/23 Centennial event.

We greatly appreciate donations for yahrzeits, life events, and other celebrations! They truly keep the shul running and show how strong our congregation is.

If you'd like information about donating, please email us at agudasisraelhazleton@gmail.com or call the shul.

Thank
You

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AGUDAS ISRAEL SYNAGOGUE

Celebrating 100 years!

77 N. Pine St. Hazleton PA 18201
(570) 455-2851 | Agudasisraelhazleton@gmail.com

Mark your calendars for two AIC centennial events this spring!
Advanced tickets required for both events.

SUN
APR. 23
10-2pm

Centennial & Israeli Independence Day Commemoration at Agudas Israel Synagogue

Featuring musical performances by Dr. Ramon Tasat & Roanne Pitluk, AIC speakers & centennial tributes; followed by touring comedian Joel Chasnoff & Kosher deli luncheon in our social hall.



SAT
JUNE 3
7-11 pm

Centennial Celebration at Valley Country Club

Enjoy an evening of fun at the Valley Country Club in Sugarloaf, with entertainment from NYC comedian Carie Karavas and Motown/Soul dance band EPICSOUL. Tickets include hors d'oeuvres & a drink. Cash bar available.



MAY PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Thank you all who joined us for our 100 years celebration and for also celebrating the 75th year of Israeli Independence Day. I am truly grateful for the hard work and long hours spent by the centennial committee, Marlene Leonard, Howard Narrow, Lenny Brenner and the event would not have been possible without the work of Christina Ferry, Office Manager, along with the help of our longtime friend and past member, audio expert Larry Berman, not only did he assist with sound and technical support he also provided wonderful recordings from past celebrations which were viewed in the downstairs chapel. Please feel free to go onto agudasisrael.us - our website to view those cherished memories.

Unfortunately, we were upstaged by the White House with extremely talented musician, Cantor Ramon Tasat. However, with Christina's and Larry's savvy tech abilities, they devised an excellent audio/visual system for us to share Cantor Ramon's messages.

Thank you to Cantor Ramon Tasat for his specialized personal and creative musical and video-graphic talents.

I would like to thank our Ritual Leader, Richard Kline who performed blessings for us.

I'd also like to thank my husband, Larry, sister, Cindy and mother, Shirley for their patience while I've been on edge preparing for the special day. I know it hasn't been easy on them.

We are so appreciative to the foundations, sponsors and friends, who throughout the years, donate generously. We thank Hazleton Mayor Cusat, Senator Argall, Representative Watro and all of the special people that have looked out for us during the past century. We are grateful to the Hazleton Police Department who have assisted us whenever necessary.

As president, I had an idea to make this the celebration of the century and with your participation we have certainly succeeded.

To view last week's celebration, please check out our videos and pictures on our Facebook page and our website. If you have pictures, please share them with Christina to be added.

If you have not yet made your reservations for our fun evening event on June 3rd at the Valley Country Club, please do so soon by calling the office or by obtaining tickets on our website.

Hope to see you there!

Sincerely,