

THINK THAT YOU MIGHT BE WRONG

Haar Stresses the Importance of Asking Questions

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There's a Jewish story that says when you die and get to heaven, they will not ask you about your faith or what you did. Instead, they will say, "So, you were down there so long. What questions do you have?"

And woe to the person with no questions, says Murray Haar, because questions are a sign of wonder.

Haar, a professor in Augustana's Religion Department, knows a thing or two about questions. Born the son of Holocaust survivors, he grew up without any extended family. They had all been killed in camps.

"This raised terrible questions for me, and I tried to run away from these questions, but the further I ran the more they were in front of me," Haar said. "So I think I was always a person, because of the way I grew up, that wrestled with certain questions, and these questions became the heart of my teaching."

In each of Haar's classes, he challenges his students to question their personal beliefs.

"Dr. Haar taught me it can be okay to be wrong," said Robert Haggar '18, "and that what matters most is that I approached the challenge to begin with."

Being wrong is part of learning to think, according to Haar. "I think it is so easy for us to deceive ourselves. You know, we wear glasses, yes? The glasses enable us, but they also disable us. They open us up to all sorts of new ideas, and worlds, and people, but they also close us. They are blinders," Haar said. Blinders that Haar believes can be dismantled by learning about other traditions and beliefs, some that may conflict with what a student already believes.

Haley Pluckeck '18 remembers Haar's "Justice and the State of Israel" class as one of the most thought-provoking courses she took at Augie.

"That class undoubtedly challenged and changed my understanding of the world. Dr. Haar put together a course about a conflict that has a convoluted history and an unseen resolution, and in doing so he taught me the importance of challenging my beliefs," Pluckeck said.

Taylor Stacey '18 felt similarly. "He has helped me become a better reader and questioner, and to appreciate different perspectives, not to spite faith but to enhance it."

Haar admits, though, that this type of questioning is not easy. But it is still necessary.

"It is threatening to hear another tradition say 'you are wrong and I am right,' but it is still valuable," Haar said. "There's so much to learn by engaging other people, even though it's scary, even though it's frightening, and it takes a lot of effort."