



From Soil to Soul series continues online Wednesday evening, Ideals of Freedom Series returns in March, Charitable Receipts, Upcoming Programs and More – February 16, 2026

FROM SOIL TO SOUL: FARM-TO-TABLE ACROSS THE AGES IN ISRAEL



Farm to Community – Food Justice & Urban Agriculture

Wednesday, February 18, 7:00 pm ET (online)



In our closing session, we focus on how food becomes a tool for empowerment and community building. We'll feature Muslala, a Jerusalem-based initiative turning rooftops into green learning labs, combining art, agriculture, and activism to reconnect people with their environment. We'll also explore the work of Leket Israel, the country's largest food rescue network, which redistributes surplus produce to those in need, and organic food box projects that help support local farmers while making healthy food more accessible.

Gila Levitan moved to Israel in 2005. She decided to become a licensed tour guide in order to pursue her passion for exploring and travelling around Israel. Gila is very curious and likes to know all the little details and being a guide enables her to teach people about a place that she loves. Gila loves to add touches of local culture to her tours, off the beaten track places and local delicacies - the best way to travel she believes is to taste new flavors and make new friends. Gila is proud to have been awarded the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence for the past five years in a row.

Register here - <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/from-soil-to-soul-farm-to-community-food-justice-urban-agriculture-tickets-1978941771109?aff=oddtcreator>

Learn more about the series here - <https://walnutstreetsynagogue.org/from-soil-to-soul/>

IDEALS OF FREEDOM SPEAKER SERIES



“Filthy, Un-American, and Often Dangerous:” Antisemitism and the Emergency Quota Act of 1921
Wednesday, March 4, 7:00 pm ET (online)



After the destruction of World War I, hundreds of thousands of European Jews sought to escape violence and poverty by emigrating to America. American consuls in Europe viewed these desperate Jews through a deeply antisemitic lens, fearing that they were radicals trying to enter and destroy the country with help from an international Jewish conspiracy. Acting on these fears, officials at the State Department worked with Congressional leaders to release reports that publicized the dangers of Jewish immigrants and ultimately led to the passage of the 1921 Emergency Quota Act. That legislation was instrumental in establishing the quota system that would keep desperate European Jews out of the country only a decade later, as they attempted to flee the Holocaust.

Kirsten Fermaglich is Professor of History and Jewish Studies at Michigan State University. Her most recent book, *A Rosenberg by Any Other Name: A History of Jewish Name Changing in America* (New York University Press, 2018) was awarded the Saul Viener Book Prize by the American Jewish Historical Society in June 2019. From January 2022 through June 2023, she served as a National Archives Distinguished Fellow, tasked with studying antisemitism in the United States federal government. Fermaglich is also the author of *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-1965* (Brandeis University Press, 2006) and the co-editor of the Norton Critical Edition of Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (2013), with Lisa Fine. From 2016 through 2021, she was co-editor of the journal, *American Jewish History*, along with Daniel Soyer and Adam Mendelsohn. She currently serves on the board of the Association for Jewish Studies. *Community partners – Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center at American Ancestors, Massachusetts Antisemitism Synagogue Task Force (MAST), Orange County Jewish Community Scholar Program (CSP)*

Register here - <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/antisemitism-and-the-emergency-quota-act-of-1921-tickets-1977620146093?aff=oddtcreator>

Learn more about the series here - <https://walnutstreetsynagogue.org/ideals-of-freedom/>

CSP

We are pleased to be a partner congregation of the Orange County Jewish **Community Scholar Program (CSP)**. Please join us at an upcoming program!



God, Nature, and the Lens – How Spinoza Really Saw the World

Tuesday, February 17, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Most people hear one line about Spinoza—“God is Nature”—and assume they’ve gotten the point. In this session, we’ll see why that shortcut misses what’s most daring (and most useful) about Spinoza, and why he remains one of the most surprisingly modern thinkers in Jewish and Western intellectual history. Viewing him through the lens of his day job as an optician—someone who literally shaped how people saw—we’ll explore how his philosophy is less a slogan about pantheism and more a radical account of reality: a single infinite substance that can be understood in countless ways depending on the “lenses” we bring to it. The result is an eye-opening invitation to rethink perception, freedom, and the limits of what we think we know—Spinoza not as a dusty heretic, but as a guide to seeing the world differently.

Rana Werbin is an author, translator and editor specializing in philosophical and literary texts. She holds a B.A. in English and Comparative Literature and an M.A. in Philosophy (Cum Laude), both from Tel Aviv University, and also studied acting at the Circle in the Square Theatre School in New York and screen writing at Sam Spiegel film school, Jerusalem. A recipient of the prestigious Bernstein Prize for Literary Criticism in the Press (2005), she served for six years as the Editor in chief of *Hebrew Literature for Yedioth Books*. She has published two books: *Life is Good* (Yedioth Books, 2011) and *How to Live: An Adventurous Journey into the Expanse of Consciousness* (Arvei Nahal, 2020). Werbin has written for major Israeli newspapers, including *Ha'aretz* and *Yedioth*. In the last decade and a half, she had offered guided readings of Spinoza’s Ethics in many cultural institutions around Israel, focusing on the intersections between Spinoza, metaphysics, Jewish thought, and contemporary science.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/jeOFWcniQL6bPuKlHJvICg#/registration>

Expects the Italian Inquisition – Jews on Trial in Italy

Thursday, February 19, 1:00 pm ET (online)

On July 1, 1581, Pope Gregory XIII issued a decree that dramatically changed Jewish life in Italy: he expanded the Roman Inquisition’s authority so it could investigate and prosecute practicing Jews, not just Christian “heretics.” Suddenly, the Inquisition claimed oversight of a wide range of alleged offenses Jews might commit under canon law and papal decrees—turning everyday Jewish life into potential legal peril. In this session, we’ll follow the story in Northern Italy through the rare, surviving inquisitorial trial records from Modena—the only intact collection of its kind—bringing us into the courtroom, the streets, and the strategies of communal survival. How did Jews respond when a powerful new institution set its sights on them, and what creative legal, communal, and diplomatic tools did they use to defend themselves? Expect a gripping, archival “true story” look at Jewish resilience under papal power.

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Originally from London, **Dr. Katherine Aron-Beller** is Senior lecturer of Jewish History in the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University and currently Senior Research Fellow at FEMSMED, a research group that specializes in Mediterranean Female Slavery between 1500 to 1800 at Tel Aviv University. Her areas of expertise include the history of antisemitism, contemporary antisemitism, medieval Jewish history, early modern Jewish-Christian relations and the early modern Papal Inquisition. She is the author of *Jews on Trial: The Papal Inquisition in Modena 1598-1638* (Manchester University Press, 2011), the co-editor of *The Roman Inquisition: Centre versus Peripheries* (Leiden: Brill, 2018) and more recently *Christian Images and their Jewish Desecrators: The History of an Allegation* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024) as well as articles on the Catholic Inquisition, antisemitism and the Jews of Italy. She is a keen traveler to places of Jewish interest and has led Jewish historical tours to Alsace, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Sicily, Spain, Portugal, Provence and the United Kingdom.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/wnUaxGFvQIuLhddHnk1cQ#/registration>

Soviet Jews: From Revolutionaries to Refuseniks

Part 4 – The Thaw, the Struggle, the Exodus: Soviet Jews from the 1950s to the 1990s - Tuesday, February 24, 1:00 pm ET (online)

The story of Soviet Jews is not a story of a single identity or a single role. It is a story of builders and critics, of loyal citizens and disillusioned dissidents, of idealists who believed in the Soviet dream and victims crushed by the very system they helped create. Across seven decades, Jews stood on every side of the Soviet project — as passionate revolutionaries, administrators, cultural leaders, soldiers, skeptics, silent conformists, targets of repression, and ultimately as the men and women who helped bring Jewish life back to the world stage.

Evgenia Kempinski is a professional Jewish tour guide, born and raised in St. Petersburg, Russia. With over fifteen years of experience guiding Jewish heritage tours in her hometown, she has developed a deep passion for uncovering and sharing the stories of the Jewish Diaspora. With her family she spent six enriching years living in Israel and now resides in Barcelona, continuing her mission to connect people with Jewish history and culture around the world. She is the founder of the Online Jewish Travel Club, a vibrant community that brings together Jews from different countries through a shared love of travel, art, and Jewish heritage.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/rmrcJR0mSAqJuoFyISrC7A#/registration>

Hannah and Jewish Man Reading: Painting Nostalgia in 19th Century Europe

Sunday, March 1, 1:00 pm ET (online)

This talk brings together two compelling paintings by Jewish European artists that hang on the walls of the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston. These "very Jewish" works share an often-neglected common trait: they were made by Jewish painters who found success in the wider, secular society through other subjects and genres. In some cases, cosmopolitan artists were drawn to traditional Jewish sitters and scenes. How did depictions of Jewish life fit into their broader production? What do these works tell us about the journey of Jewish artists working in the 19th and early 20th centuries? Explore these questions and more with our speaker Simona Di Nepi as she traces the stories of these portraits and the artists who created them.

Simona Di Nepi is the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Curator of Judaica at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where she is responsible for building and displaying the Judaica collection, and for curating *Intentional Beauty: Jewish Ritual Art from the Collection*, the museum's first Judaica gallery. Originally from Rome, before moving to the United States, Simona studied and worked in London and Tel Aviv for 25 years. She filled curatorial roles—in both decorative arts and Old Masters—at the Victoria and Albert Museum, The National Gallery, and the Royal Academy of Arts in London, where she cared for permanent collections and curated exhibitions. In Israel, she worked as curator at 'Anu: The Museum of the Jewish People' and as Lecturer in Italian Renaissance art at Reichman University. Simona curated the exhibitions and wrote the accompanying catalogues for *Reunions: Bringing Early Italian Paintings Back Together* (The National Gallery, London, 2005), and *Dreyfus: The Story of a French-Jewish Family* (Anu: the Museum of the Jewish People, Tel Aviv, 2014). She is also the author of the National Gallery's collection catalogue *From Duccio to Leonardo: Renaissance Painting 1250-1500*. In Judaica, Simona wrote the essays 'Itinerant Sephardic Judaica: from Dutch Ports to the Harbours of Europe and the Americas', 'Jewish Things at the Museum of Fine Arts: a History', 'The Servi Shaddai: the Family History of an amulet at the MFA Boston', and 'Treasures from storage: Two Rediscovered Italian Jewish Textiles.'

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/3s2fWZMUSWeLk8tck0vOqw#/registration>

COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAMS

Imagining Early American Jews

Tuesday, February 17, 6:00 pm

(online program presented by the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center at American Ancestors)

Join the Jewish Heritage Center for a talk with Dr. Michael Hoberman regarding his upcoming book, *Imagining Early American Jews*. Dr. Hoberman will discuss popular interpretations of early Jewish

American history. He will discuss how the Jewish experiences of the American Revolution, the institution of slavery in the early republic and antebellum period, and westward migration have been imagined and commemorated. He will explore how interpretations and representations of the past are key to understanding Jewish American history and identity. Dr. Hoberman is a professor of English Studies at Fitchburg State University and has published several books on Jewish American history, including *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* and *A Hundred Acres of America: The Geography of Jewish American Literary History*. His articles can be found in *Tablet Magazine*, *The Jewish Review of Books*, and other popular and scholarly venues.

Register here - https://hubs.americanancestors.org/imagining-early-american-jews?utm_campaign=18167937-FY26%20JHC&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz--LPg5XscBFk4qUzSZKB605Wzc3xWXbRiiCTqZFoFs-vzjfUmeOAQ1MVQhkQQ7B4IHcb6MTkBoSV9XVihxzuA2Xf39fA&hsmi=397399891&utm_content=397399891&utm_source=hs_email

GIVING

Please visit our Giving page to send tributes, recognize yahrzeits and make other general donations to support the Walnut Street Synagogue and help us preserve, maintain and secure our 116-year-old building. Donations can be made online or through the mail. Tributes and other donations may be recognized on our Giving Page unless otherwise requested.

<https://walnutstreetsynagogue.org/giving/>

YAD CHESSED



Matanot LaEvyonim – Gifts for People in Need

The Walnut Street Synagogue is pleased to be participating again this year in Yad Chessed's Purim Campaign. From now until Purim Day (11:00 am on Tuesday, March 3), you can donate tzedakah to Yad Chessed to fulfill the Purim mitzvah of Matanot LaEvyonim. For over 35 years Yad Chessed, has worked to address the needs of Jews in Greater Boston and beyond who struggle with financial and food insecurity. With the support of donors and partner organizations, Yad Chessed's team of social workers provides swift emergency financial assistance, grocery gift cards, and compassionate care, advice, and referrals to those in need. Yad Chessed aids more than 2,400 Jewish individuals across Massachusetts annually. The mitzvah of Matanot LaEvyonim is central to the spirit of Purim and reminds us that we are obligated to offer a helping hand to those in our midst who need it most. Yad Chessed will use donations raised to fund vouchers that can be used on Purim Day so our neighbors in need can purchase food and celebrate the holiday.

Donate online here - <https://givebutter.com/YadChessedPurim2026>

You may also mail a donation to Yad Chessed at: (*Please include the word "Purim" and "Walnut Street Synagogue" on your check memo.*)

333 Nahanton Street
Suite 315
Newton, MA 02459

Any questions: email info@yadchessed.org or call: 781-613-3413

For more information about Yad Chessed's Purim Program visit www.yadchessed.org/purim/

VISIT US ONLINE

Website

<https://walnutstreetsynagogue.org/>

Facebook Page - Walnut Street Synagogue

<https://www.facebook.com/WalnutStreetSynagogue>

Facebook Group - Jews of Chelsea, MA Then and Now

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ChelseaJews>

The Walnut Street Synagogue is the center for Jewish history, education and culture serving Chelsea, Greater Boston and beyond and is the historic home of Congregation Agudas Sholom. (added to National Register of Historic Places in 1993)



Walnut Street Synagogue, 145 Walnut Street, PO Box 505265, Chelsea, MA 02150-5265
Contact us at: central.walnutstreetshul@gmail.com