



Happy Passover, Ideals of Freedom Series returns in April, Upcoming Programs and More – March 30, 2026

Passover starts Wednesday evening!

חג פסח שׁמח

IDEALS OF FREEDOM SPEAKER SERIES



From Synagogue to Museum: The Journey of a Jewish Immigrant Woodcarver and His Torah Arks
Wednesday, April 15, 7:00 pm ET (online)



Torah arks and furnishings by immigrant woodworker Sam Katz once graced numerous synagogues in New England and beyond. One of his largest surviving works remains in Chelsea's Walnut Street Synagogue. **Simona Di Nepi**, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Curator of Judaica at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, will tell the behind-the-scenes stories of two works by this artist in the museum's collection, from the acquisition of a mysterious gilded lion 65 years ago, to the recent display of a rescued Torah Ark from Chelsea and its transformation into the focus point of the MFA's Judaica gallery. The presentation will also highlight other works by American Jewish immigrant artists represented in the gallery.

Simona Di Nepi is the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Curator of Judaica at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), 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 a Lecturer in Italian Renaissance Art at Reichman University, Herzliya. Simona guided Boston University students in the development of "Real and Imagined: Rembrandt and the Jews of the 17th-Century Dutch Republic," an in-focus MFA exhibition that opened in December 2025. *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/the-journey-of-a-jewish-immigrant-woodcarver-and-his-torah-arks-tickets-1977623699722?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!



The Israeli Soundscape – A Journey Through Jazz, Pop, and Rock

Part 3 – Rock - Tuesday, March 31, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Dive into the high-energy evolution of the Israeli soundscape in this three-part journey through the music that defines a nation. From the 1970s to today, we'll explore the dynamic collision of Eastern soul and Western groove, tracing how Israel "Israelized" global trends to create something entirely its own.

Part 3 – Rock - Experience the raw, visceral rebellion of a generation finding its voice.

Join us to uncover the identity, politics, and passion behind the melodies that resonate far beyond Israel's borders.

Yael Cherni is a conductor, soprano, and founder of Kol HaMusica, Israel's only classical music radio station. A recipient of the Gary Bertini Biennial Prize for Promising Young Conductors, she has performed worldwide and served as assistant conductor to Maestro Claudio Abbado. As a soprano, she has sung with leading orchestras in Israel and abroad. Cherni has been a visiting lecturer at Harvard University and Shenkar College, and a presenter and editor for Israeli radio, where her acclaimed series *It's All About the Classics* explored links between music and society. She was also a founder and participant in several Jewish-Arab classical music initiatives. Her first book *It's All about the Classics: An Updated View on the World of Classical Music*, was based on that praised series and was published in Israel in 2016 by Modan. Her new book *Classical Music: Undressed* dedicated to "anyone who appreciates the beauty of art" was recently published.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/PCy6rb-gSN64FZhnddOTYw#/registration>

Ancient Echoes, Modern Verse

Thursday, March 19, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Discover the profound dialogue between contemporary poetry and ancient tradition in this immersive session led by Dr. Eve Grubin. By examining the works of modern masters, including Marie Howe, Yehoshua November, Lucille Clifton, Dan Pagis, and Sharon Olds, we will explore how today's poets breathe new life into the timeless language and philosophy of the Torah, Talmud, and classic commentaries.

Dr. Eve Grubin is an acclaimed poet and scholar, the author of four collections including *Boat of Letters* (Four Way Books), *Morning Prayer* (Sheep Meadow Press), *The House of Our First Loving*, and *Grief*

Dialogue (Rack Press). A specialist in the “poetics of reticence,” she earned her PhD from Kingston University London and shares her expertise as a lecturer at NYU London and a tutor at the Poetry School. Her work and teaching bridge the gap between academic rigor and creative inspiration, making her a leading voice in contemporary Jewish poetics.

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

The Holocaust – A History of Decisions, Places, and Moral Collapse

Part 5 - Sunday, April 5, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Part 6 - Sunday, April 12, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Part 7 - Sunday, April 19, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Part 8 - Sunday, April 26, 1:00 pm ET (online)

In this powerful eight-part series, Prof. Stephen Berk guides us through the Holocaust, not as a single, inevitable catastrophe, but as a series of historical choices made by governments, institutions, communities, and individuals across Europe. Moving chronologically and geographically, the series explores how the “oldest hatred” was transformed into state-sponsored genocide, how different countries responded to Nazi pressure, and how moments of action, or inaction, shaped the fate of millions. With clarity, moral seriousness, and historical depth, Prof. Berk helps us understand not only what happened, but *how* it happened, and why those lessons still matter.

Stephen M. Berk, who served as CSP’s 10th Annual One Month Scholar in Residence in February 2011, is Professor of History at Union College in Schenectady, New York, former Chair of the Department of History, Director of the Program in Russian and Eastern European Studies and Faculty Advisor to the Jewish Student Organization. He is the author of *Year of Crisis, Year of Hope: Russian Jewry and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Greenwood Press, 1985). He is currently writing a book titled: *Our People Are Your People: American Jewry and the Struggle for Civil Rights 1954-1965*. The book provides an interesting discussion of an extremely important chapter in the history of the civil rights movement and attempts to dispel the myths and misunderstandings surrounding the Black-Jewish relationship. A recipient of the Citizens Laureate Award of the University of Albany Foundation, Professor Berk has been a consultant to the Wiesenthal Holocaust Center in Los Angeles, has written articles on Russian and Jewish history, anti-Semitism, and the Middle East and has lectured on throughout the United States and Canada including such distinguished colleges and universities as Princeton, Vanderbilt, The University of Texas at Austin and Williams College.

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/gNWiQkm_Txm2WQXi05WPCQ#/registration

Seder Night With My Ancestors – From Marjorie Morningstar to Chava Alberstein

Thursday, April 7, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Step into Pesach through the voices of modern Jewish writers in a lively and thought-provoking session that brings the holiday’s stories, themes, and celebrations to fresh literary life. Together we’ll explore powerful Israeli poems and songs by Yehuda Amichai and Chava Alberstein in Hebrew and translation, alongside evocative English-language works by writers such as Joanne Limburg, Marge Piercy, and Isaac Rosenberg. Along the way, we’ll also savor the wit, warmth, and occasional chaos of memorable literary seders in the fiction of Michael Chabon and Herman Wouk, discovering how modern Jewish literature captures both the depth and the delight of the Passover experience.

Dr. Aviva Dautch is the Executive Director of *Jewish Renaissance*, the United Kingdom’s quarterly Jewish arts magazine and the leading English-language Jewish cultural publication in Europe. She is an academic in the field of Jewish literature: her PhD received Royal Holloway’s Reid Scholarship and a research award from Brandeis University, and she is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Aviva frequently lectures on modern Jewish culture at the London School of Jewish Studies, JW3 Community Centre and Limmud. She has worked as a curator, producer and educator for many of the major London arts institutions, including the British Library, the British Museum, The Royal Academy and Tate Modern. Aviva is also an award-winning poet and a regular arts broadcaster for BBC Radio 4.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/gLt1IUPPQyeFb0QKigZbJQ#/registration>

COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAMS

Declarations of Americanism: Jewish-American Displays of National Identity

Thursday, April 16, 4:00 pm ET

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

As we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, questions of national identity and democratic commitment are top of mind. Jewish Americans have long grappled with these topics, navigating assimilation while encountering suspicions of dual loyalties. With the dramatic rise of immigration in the late 19th century, Jewish immigrant communities encountered heightened pressures and possibilities to exhibit American identity. In this talk, Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) Historian in Residence Madeline DeDe-Panken considers why Jews leaned into American iconography throughout the 19th and early 20th century and how such displays shaped Jewish life in America. Madeline DeDe-Panken is a historian with broad interests in culture, gender and public knowledge. Her current research explores the rise of popular mycology at the turn of the twentieth century. Madeline has multifaceted experience in museums and non-profits, having held fellowships at institutions including the Schlesinger Library, Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Center for Women's History at the New-York Historical Society.

https://hubs.americanancestors.org/declarations-of-americanism-jewish-american-displays-of-national-identity?utm_campaign=18167937-FY26%20JHC&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-Rmkjsl_HL3VftRLjbJHueO6iAjiD36o7QwDjJph4-wL8dGf9x30WTkKNVDIt7xIIPTOC7bYGfVq6aOkr95nmsWjVZ_g&hsmi=408259099&utm_content=408259099&utm_source=hs_email



As Passover approaches, we all have the opportunity to fulfill the beautiful mitzvah of Maot Chittim (“wheat money”) by making a donation to Yad Chessed to ensure that every member of our community can afford food and joyfully celebrate this cherished holiday. Maot Chittim is a mitzvah which dates to ancient times when individuals would contribute funds so that everyone in their community could afford the necessary provisions for the Passover holiday. Yad Chessed, an organization focused solely on assisting Jews in our community currently struggling with financial hardship and food insecurity, is committed to upholding this tradition by helping families purchase food on Passover. Your generous donation will contribute to ensuring that no one is left behind during this special time of year. By giving to Yad Chessed, you are not only fulfilling a fundamental mitzvah but also spreading hope, joy, and unity throughout our community. And, if you know of someone in our community who is struggling with financial challenges, please encourage them to reach out to Yad Chessed at yadchessed.org/intake-form for assistance. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of those who need it most.

Support Yad Chessed - <https://givebutter.com/yadchessed>

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/>

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)



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