



Ideals of Freedom Series returns Wednesday evening, Upcoming Programs, Shul Tours and More – May 25, 2026

IDEALS OF FREEDOM SPEAKER SERIES



From Synagogue to Museum: The Journey of a Jewish Immigrant Woodcarver and His Torah Arks
Wednesday, May 27, 7:00 pm ET (online) **RESCHEDULED**

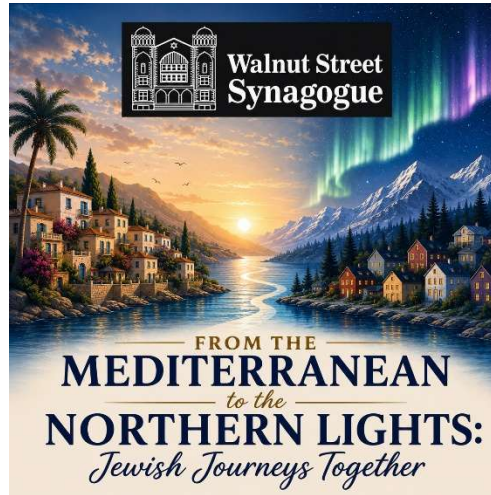
Torah arks and furnishings by immigrant woodworker Sam Katz once graced numerous synagogues in New England and beyond. One of his largest surviving works remains in Chelsea's Walnut Street Synagogue. **Simona Di Nepi**, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Curator of Judaica at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 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)*

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-journey-of-a-jewish-immigrant-woodcarver-and-his-torah-arks-tickets-1988210642553?aff=oddtcreator>

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

FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO THE NORTHERN LIGHTS: JEWISH JOURNEYS TOGETHER



Xueta Island Film Screening & Q&A with Filmmaker
Thursday, June 11, 12:00 pm ET (online)

Xueta Island is a documentary film that explores Inquisition history, Jewish revival, and identity. Some Catholics on the Spanish island of Mallorca (Majorca) have been discriminated against for centuries because their surnames have a connection to a Jewish heritage. They not only endured stigma and humiliation: they were also deprived of fundamental rights as citizens. While a few have been inspired to return to the faith of their ancestors, their recent entry into the leadership of the local Jewish community has caused an unforeseen controversy among its members. Are they the best suited to lead Mallorquin Judaism despite not having practiced their faith for centuries? **Join filmmaker Dani Rotstein on a Director Talkback after viewing the film that will be open for two days before the online discussion.**

Dani Rotstein is a content producer, entrepreneur, and storyteller from New Jersey whose international media career led him to Mallorca in 2014. There, he uncovered the island's little-known Jewish history, inspiring his co-direction of the documentary *Xueta Island* and sparking a mission to help revive Jewish memory in Spain. He founded Jewish Majorca, a travel company offering immersive Jewish heritage tours across Spain and Portugal. Dani also leads the Re-Emerge Project, a documentary series exploring emerging Jewish communities across Latin America. Through storytelling and travel, he connects past and present, one journey at a time.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/xueta-island-film-screening-ga-with-filmmaker-tickets-1989345346483?aff=oddtcreator>

Learn more about the series here - <https://walnutstreetsynagogue.org/mediterranean-to-northern-lights/>

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!



Dirshuni – Ancient Texts, New Voices

Part 3 – When Midrash Meets Devastation - Tuesday, May 26, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Join Tamar Biala for a three-part series exploring how ancient forms of storytelling are being reshaped to respond to the most urgent realities of our time. Through the lens of contemporary midrash, these sessions bring together scholarship, personal testimony, and creative expression. Guided by Tamar and her guests, we will encounter voices that bridge past and present, revealing how traditional Jewish interpretive tools can help process grief, hold complexity, and search for meaning in moments that defy understanding.

Part 3 – When Midrash Meets Devastation - Tamar will host Nurit Hirshfield Skupinsky, a survivor of Kibbutz Nahal Oz. Nurit, herself a Professor of Midrash, was for many years teaching the traditional midrashim describing the destruction of the First and Second Temples. After Oct 7 she found herself writing midrashim describing the destruction around her, intertwining the tragedies around her with those described in the traditional midrash.

Tamar Biala teaches in various batei midrash, rabbinical schools, and adult education programs in the United States and Israel. Biala earned her Master's Degree in Women's and Jewish Studies from the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem. She taught at the Shalom Hartman Institute, trained teachers and IDF army officers. She is the editor of *Dirshuni – Women's Midrash*, which was published in English by Brandeis in 2022, with a second volume forthcoming. She is also the co-editor of *Toratah, the Gender-Bent Torah of Beit Toratah*.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/j90dcWDFQfGsWBfx6INROg#/registration>

The Arch of Titus – From Jerusalem to Rome and Back

Thursday, May 28, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Join us for a fascinating journey through one of the most powerful and contested images in Jewish history: the Arch of Titus. Stretching from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem to the rise of the modern State of Israel, this rich and thought-provoking program will explore the Arch as an ancient Roman monument, a witness to Jewish encounter and memory in the classical world, a charged object in medieval and Christian imagination, and ultimately a symbol that has taken on outsized meaning in modern Jewish life. Guided by Professor Steven Fine, one of the leading scholars of Judaism in the Greco-Roman world, participants will gain fresh insight into how a single artifact can carry centuries of political, religious, artistic, and emotional meaning.

Steven Fine is a leading historian of Judaism in the Greco-Roman world and the Dean Pinkhos Churgin Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University in New York. He serves as director of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies and has led the university's Arch of Titus Project, bringing together scholarship on ancient Judaism, Roman history, art, archaeology, and Jewish memory. A prolific author and editor, Fine is also a founding editor of *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture*.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/U63XqutuS8mosVCTcKfh4A#/registration>

Holy Loopholes – Adaptation and Integrity in Jewish Law

Part 4 - Sunday, May 31, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 5 - Sunday, June 7, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 6 - Sunday, June 14, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 7 - Sunday, June 21, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 8 - Sunday, June 28, 3:30 pm ET (online)

(online in partnership with the Orange County Jewish Community Scholar Program)

Join us for a provocative and engaging series on some of the most eyebrow-raising practices in Jewish law — from the Eruv and selling Chametz to Heter Iska, Prozbul, Shemitah sales, Shabbat elevators, and more — beginning with an opening session titled “Are the Clever Jews Trying to Fake Us Out?” We start with the nagging question many people have when they encounter these practices: are these authentic expressions of halachic seriousness, or just brilliant religious workarounds dressed up to look legitimate? With honesty, nuance, and intellectual rigor, this series will explore how generations of rabbinic thinkers confronted real human needs while remaining deeply anchored to the framework of Jewish law, revealing that what may first look like legal sleight-of-hand often opens into a much deeper story about responsibility, creativity, and the moral life of halacha.

Marc Michael Epstein, winner of CSP's 4th Annual Maimonides Award for Excellence in Adult Jewish

Education and the 2015 National Jewish Book Award in Visual Arts for Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink, grew up in Brooklyn in a family of Slonimer and Lubavitcher Hasidim and Romanian socialists. Since 1992 he has taught at Vassar College as Professor of Religion (and founding Director of Jewish Studies), offering courses on medieval Christianity, Jewish texts, and the interplay of religion, art, and politics. An Oberlin and Yale graduate with research at the Hebrew University, he is the author of numerous studies of Jewish visual and material culture, including *The Medieval Haggadah: Art, Narrative, and Religious Imagination*, named a Times Literary Supplement "Best Book of the Year." Formerly Director of Hebrew Books and Manuscripts at Sotheby's, he now consults internationally for libraries, museums, auction houses, and private collectors; his newest book is *People of the Image: Jews and Art*.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/join/joinMeeting/register/Cu3Xn9DKR5SnUOfuGE2urA#/registration>

COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

The 23rd Annual Connie Spear Birnbaum Memorial Lecture

Sunday, May 31, 8:00 pm ET

(in-person program at location in Brookline presented by Connie Spear Birnbaum Foundation in partnership with Combined Jewish Philanthropies)

In a time of escalating global tensions and a renewed focus on the safety of our communal spaces, the Connie Spear Birnbaum Foundation, in partnership with Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP), presents Michael Masters, National Director and CEO of the Secure Community Network (SCN), speaking on *Security Through Strength: Ensuring the Safety of the Jewish Community in a Post-October 7 World*. Following his talk, Mr. Masters will be in conversation with Rabbi Marc Baker, President and CEO of Combined Jewish Philanthropies. Mr. Masters is a recognized expert on issues related to homeland and national security, terrorism, law enforcement, antisemitism, and targeted violence.

Register here – in person - https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-23rd-annual-connie-spear-birnbaum-memorial-lecture-tickets-1987134420544?utm_campaign=42211679-fy26-sjb-commengagement-event-birnbaum&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz--01kwznMkq1IYoA7GzVZWGKIDSaQSI2oOkUMs5KwOKPA3UUv9nbE3rzjouaYcYZcRR1PtopnHTmfrmJWFqhSeVC1fv4OMB7yRSRKcB6NDMBBALZqc&hsmi=414222596&utm_content=414222596&utm_source=hs_email

Register here – online - https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-23rd-annual-connie-spear-birnbaum-memorial-lecture-virtual-event-tickets-1987544735808?utm_campaign=42211679-fy26-sjb-commengagement-event-birnbaum&utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8XdDGt0it2wdSFklyiZCzgazCMxFeDcstpsX2tK6xDohCYrTAMYNooDJg72c8pznUgsXHNbrqCKV7weHnC5mQ99w0PeVrYn24I6e5XcwXXBvDMxFk&hsmi=414222596&utm_content=414222596&utm_source=hs_email

Challapalooza: Boston's Jew-ish Music Festival

Sunday, June 21, 11:00 am to 8:00 pm ET

(in-person program in Cambridge, exact location to be provided with tickets)

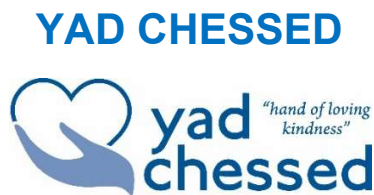


From 11:00 am to 8:00 pm Challapalooza will have Boston's greatest Jew-ish bands including Yiddish song band *Levyosn*, Old-Time dance band The Ruth and Ben String Band and many more! Alongside the music festival, teachers will present thought provoking and no-barrier-to-entry classes on anything from Jewish weaving, to Mishnah, to Klezmer history. Also present will be kosher food trucks and Jew-ish art makers selling their wares and tables from local Jewish organizations, synagogues and artists. **More information and tickets here - <https://www.challapalooza.org/>**

SHUL TOURS

If you live in the Boston area and have never seen our historic shul, or haven't visited in a while, or if you plan to visit the area, we welcome you to see our shul in person! Tour our historic synagogue that was built in 1909 and was added to the National Register of Historic Place in 1993. Come see our 1,109-seat sanctuary with its painted ceiling and wall frescoes, murals and carved wood Aron Kodesh. Check out our collection of Judaica, artwork, photos, documents, books, posters and plaques that come from our synagogue, synagogues in Chelsea that have closed along with fraternal, social and educational organizations from Chelsea and elsewhere in Greater Boston. Please follow the link below for more information and to request Individual/Family or Group tours.

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



Yad Chessed helps Jewish individuals and families who struggle with financial hardship pay their bills and buy food. As a social services agency rooted in the Jewish values of kindness (chessed) and charity (tzedakah), they are committed to helping those in need navigate a path toward financial stability while preserving their privacy and dignity. They provide emergency financial assistance, grocery gift cards and compassionate advice for those trying to make ends meet. Hundreds of families and individuals throughout the state rely on Yad Chessed to provide for their essentials, and even at times, a Jewish burial for a loved one. Members of our community, as well as others in the Jewish community, who need assistance may contact Yad Chessed by phone at 781-487-2693 or by Email at intake@yadchessed.org for a confidential conversation. Questions can be directed to info@yadchessed.org.

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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