



Ideals of Freedom Series returns next week, Upcoming Programs, Shul Tours and More – May 4, 2026

IDEALS OF FREEDOM SPEAKER SERIES



Immigrant Voices in Color: Murals and other Art from America's Synagogues

Wednesday, May 13, 7:00 pm ET (online)

Join art and architectural historian **Dr. Samuel D. Gruber** for an illuminating journey through the vibrant art and design of America's historic synagogues. This illustrated lecture explores how Jewish immigrants expressed their faith, identity, and aspirations in a new land through color, pattern, and imagery. Dr. Gruber will highlight the beautifully painted ceiling, pillars, and curtains of the Walnut Street Synagogue in Chelsea, one of the few surviving examples of the richly decorated immigrant-era sanctuaries that once flourished across the country. He will also present murals and artwork from other current and former synagogues, revealing how these sacred spaces became canvases for storytelling and memory. Through his engaging talk and striking visuals, Dr. Gruber will show how these works of art—created by and for immigrant congregations—continue to speak to us today, celebrating a legacy of creativity, resilience, and community that is central to the American Jewish experience.

Dr. Samuel D. Gruber has been a leader in the documentation, protection, and preservation of historic Jewish sites worldwide since 1988. He was founding director of the Jewish Heritage Program of World Monuments Fund (1988-1996) and Research Director of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (1998 through 2008). He presently directs Gruber Heritage Global, a cultural resource consulting firm and is president of the not-for-profit International Survey of Jewish Monuments. He has taught as part-time faculty in Art History and Jewish Studies at Syracuse University (1994-2022) and at Binghamton, Colgate, Cornell, and Temple universities and Le Moyne College. Sam received his BA in Medieval Studies from Princeton University, his Ph.D. in Art and Architectural History from Columbia University and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Rome, where he won the prestigious Rome Prize in Art History. Sam writes and lectures about Jewish art and architecture. He is author of *American Synagogues: A Century of Architecture and Jewish Community* (2003), *Synagogues* (1999), and scores of reports, articles, and book chapters. Since 2008, he has written the blog Samuel Gruber's Jewish Art and Monuments. He is a frequent invited speaker and consultant across the United States and in Europe. *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/immigrant-voices-in-color-murals-and-other-art-from-americas-synagogues-tickets-1977635831007?aff=oddtcreator>

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/>

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!



Jewish Vienna – Memory in Alsergrund

Tuesday, May 5, 1:00 pm ET (online)

This engaging talk explores challah not simply as bread, but as a powerful symbol of Jewish memory, identity, and connection across time and place. Blending personal childhood stories with ancient texts, global Jewish history, contemporary art, and moving examples from communities around the world, the presentation shows how food, and challah in particular, becomes a living bridge between generations, between diaspora and homeland, and between cherished tradition and creative renewal. Join us for a moving walk through Vienna's 9th district, Alsergrund, once the neighborhood with the highest concentration of Jewish residents in the city and a vibrant center of Jewish professional, cultural, and middle-class life. As we trace the streets where Jewish families built lives, sought opportunity, and navigated the promise and pressures of integration into Austrian society, we will look for the lingering marks of a world shattered in 1938 and visit the Wall of Names, the powerful memorial to Austrian Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Along the way, we will encounter the story of Sigmund Freud at Berggasse 19 and reflect more broadly on the extraordinary Jewish thinkers, families, and communities who helped shape Vienna before their world was broken apart.

Our tour guide, **Claudia** was born and raised in a city that is considered one of the most beautiful in the

world. She can often be seen walking the streets of Vienna, guiding guests from all over the world through the city's most beautiful and interesting neighborhoods with knowledge, enthusiasm, and spirit. Claudia also specializes in Jewish Heritage tours of Vienna, sharing the rich history, culture, and stories that have shaped the city's Jewish past and present.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/sSCw2TihSrGM5UEJ0QN6Vg#/registration>

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

Part 8 - Wednesday, May 6, 3:30 pm ET (online) **RESCHEDULED**

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/UMWvJFQNSu60wMTDgPfNQg#/registration>

Shining Light into the Fog of War – Rabbi Elie Spitz in conversation with Yossi Klein Halevi

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

Join Rabbi Elie Spitz for a timely and thought-provoking conversation with Yossi Klein Halevi, one of the most insightful and influential interpreters of Israeli society today. Drawing on decades of deep engagement with Israel's political, cultural, and spiritual life, Halevi will offer a deeply personal and sharply informed perspective on Israel's evolving identity in a time of crisis, resilience, and transformation, including the ongoing conflict with Iran and its wider regional and moral implications. Don't miss this chance to hear his latest reflections on Israel, antisemitism, and the challenges and possibilities that lie ahead.

Yossi Klein Halevi is an American-born Israeli author and journalist whose work explores Israeli society, Zionism, and interfaith relations. Raised in a post-Holocaust Orthodox Jewish home in Brooklyn, he later earned degrees in Jewish studies and journalism before immigrating to Israel in 1982. Halevi reported from Israel for American outlets, served as a senior writer at *The Jerusalem Report*, and has written widely for leading newspapers including *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. A senior fellow at Jerusalem's Shalom Hartman Institute, he co-founded its Muslim Leadership Initiative, fostering Muslim-Jewish engagement around Israel and Judaism. His books, among them *Memoirs of a Jewish Extremist*, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, *Like Dreamers* and *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*, have won major Jewish literary awards and shaped contemporary conversations about Israel.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/nEoazSUBRkeHG1dSCTKzQ#/registration>

Holy Loopholes – Adaptation and Integrity in Jewish Law

Part 1 - Sunday, May 10, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 2 - Sunday, May 17, 3:30 pm ET (online)

Part 3 - Sunday, May 24, 3:30 pm ET (online)

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/meeting/register/Cu3Xn9DKR5SnUOfuGE2urA#/registration>

COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAMS

Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center Open House

Thursday, May 7, 6:00 - 8:00 pm ET

(in-person program at American Ancestors, 97 Newbury Street, Boston)

The Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center
at AMERICAN ANCESTORS

Free In-Person Event in Boston

CELEBRATE JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

- Learn more about the mission and work of the JHC.
- View highlights from the archive.
- Meet our expert staff.
- Have a nosh and chat.
- And, for Shavuot: make a button or paper cut!

REGISTER

Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center Open House

Thursday, May 7, 2026 at 6 p.m. (ET)

Scan Me

Visit the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center at American Ancestors to explore materials from their archives of the New England Jewish community (photos, scrapbooks, objects, historical documents, and more!), to tour their space, to create some archive-themed Shavuot crafts, to learn about our educational programming and classroom visits, and to have a nosh with staff and other community members.

<https://hubs.americanancestors.org/wyner-family-jewish-heritage-center-open-house>

Sounds of American Music

Wednesday, May 20, 8:00 pm ET

(online program presented by the Massachusetts Antisemitism Task Force)

In honor of Jewish American Heritage Month
MAST Presents: Joe Alterman discussing and playing Jewish Contributions to American Music
WED, MAY 20 ZOOM 8 PM EST

A fun and fascinating concert that explores the profound Jewish contributions to music. This isn't just a history lesson—it's an exploration and celebration of the creativity, resilience, and cultural impact Jewish artists, songwriters, and entrepreneurs have had shaping the soundtracks of our lives. A must-see for music lovers, history buffs, and anyone curious about the deep connections between culture and music!

Joe Alterman,
acclaimed jazz musician

Please Press Here to Register

Community Partners
Am HaYam Cape Cod Havurah
Ahavat Torah Congregation-Stoughton
CAEF-Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation
Herut North America
ICSA-The Institute for the Critical Study of Antizionism
KTM-Kadimah-Toras Moshe Synagogue-Brighton
Mattathias Project

RICI-Rhode Island Coalition for Israel
StandWithUs -New England
Temple Beth Israel-Waltham
Temple Emanuel-Newton
Temple Emeth-Chestnut Hill
Temple Emunah-Lexington
Temple Ner Tamid-Peabody
Walnut Street Synagogue-Chelsea

Massachusetts Antisemitism Synagogue Task Force -mast1776@icloud.com

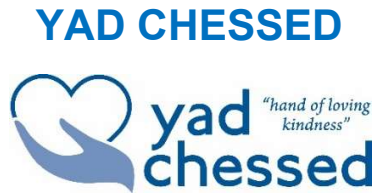
Join acclaimed pianist Joe Alterman for a fun and fascinating concert that explores the profound Jewish contributions to music. This isn't just a history lesson—it's an exploration and celebration of the creativity, resilience, and cultural impact Jewish artists, songwriters, and entrepreneurs have had shaping the soundtracks of our lives. From the golden age of songwriting to the Brill Building and beyond, this show promises insights, music and stories that will surprise and inspire. A must-see for music lovers, history buffs, and anyone curious about the deep connections between culture and music! Alterman carries forward their groove-heavy, life-affirming approach to the piano — blending blues feeling and melodic clarity into a voice that is deeply rooted yet unmistakably personal. Beyond the bandstand, Alterman is an accomplished writer and cultural historian. He has contributed liner notes to three albums by Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and was the subject of Nat Hentoff's final piece on music. He serves as Executive Director of Neranenah and hosts The Upside of Jazz on WABE 90.1 — Atlanta's NPR affiliate.

https://allevents.in/online/mast-to-host-jazz-pianist-joe-alterman-presenting-sounds-of-american-music-tickets/80001798164707?aff=u1gjbz&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

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/>

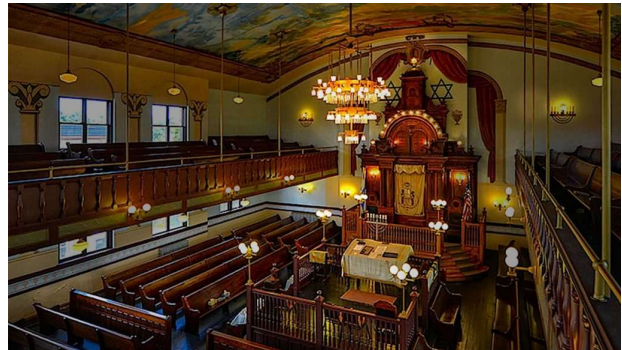
Facebook Page - Walnut Street Synagogue

<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)



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