



Ideals of Freedom Series returns this Wednesday, Upcoming Programs, Shul Tours and More – May 11, 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!



Dirshuni – Ancient Texts, New Voices

Part 1 – A New Voice in Ancient Conversation - Tuesday, May 12, 1:00 pm ET (online)

Part 2 – Midrash After Loss and Rupture - Tuesday, May 19, 1:00 pm ET (online)

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 1 – A New Voice in Ancient Conversation - In this opening session, Tamar Biala shares the story behind *Dirshuni* – how the project first began and the vision that inspired it. She will explore how this project reclaims and reimagines a traditionally male-dominated genre, opening new pathways for interpretation and spiritual expression by contemporary women. Through this lens, participants will gain insight into how midrash continues to grow as a living, dynamic form.

Part 2 – Midrash After Loss and Rupture - Tamar will host Liora Eilon, a survivor of kibbutz Kfar Aza. Liora, a veteran peace activist who lost her son on Oct 7, as he was defending the kibbutz as the head of the Emergency Squad. Liora will share with us two midrashim she wrote, offering ways to cope with

bereavement, and with ideological disagreements.

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/j/90dcWDFQfGsWBfx6INROg#/registration>

From Fanny to the Nanny: The Evolution of Jewish Women in American Comedy

Thursday, May 14, 11:00 pm ET (online)

Join actor and television maven **Callie Raynor** for a lively exploration of how Jewish women have been portrayed on the small screen, beginning with Molly Goldberg, America's first Jewish TV mom, who debuted in 1949. Through the work of stars and creators such as Fran Drescher, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Rachel Bloom, we'll trace the evolution of these portrayals, consider the impact of early Jewish characters, and reflect on both the progress made and the gaps in representation that still remain in American television. The program will conclude with a special conversation about Callie's own experience co-creating the contemporary comedy series *Front of House*, offering an insider's perspective on Jewish storytelling today.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/4n4Pjbbpm1QKePH2CThWFHDA#/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/j/4n4Pjbbpm1QKePH2CThWFHDA#/registration>

COMMUNITY PARTNER PROGRAMS

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/>

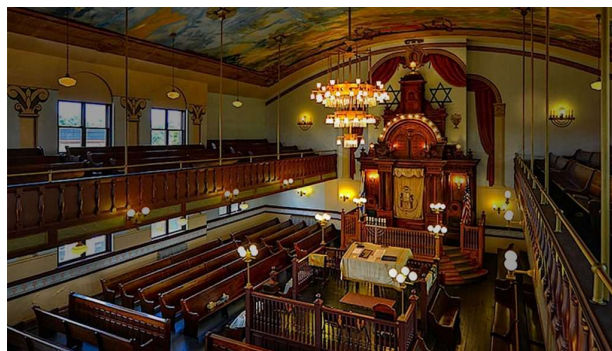
Facebook Page - Walnut Street Synagogue

<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)



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