



# Rosh Hodesh Av

Sunday, July 12, 2026 @ 11:00 am

Program Facilitator: Judith Axler

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## Introductions and Opening Blessing

Introduce yourself! We invite you to use your first name and your mother's first name. It doesn't matter if your mother isn't/wasn't Jewish.

### Blessings:

*Barukh atah Adonai  
Eloheinu melek ha'olam  
shehehyanu vekiyemanu  
vehigi'anu lazman hazeh*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם  
שֶׁהֵחַיָנוּ וְקִיַמָנוּ  
וְהִגִיעָנוּ לַזְמַן הַזֶּה

Blessed are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe  
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season

May it be Your will, my God and God of my ancestors, to be gracious to me and to all my family and to give us, and all Israel, a good and long life. Remember us with goodness and blessing, and grant us salvation and mercy. Grant us abundant blessing, and fortify the places we call home. May Your Presence dwell among us as we gather here today. May we be blessed with wise and learned disciples and children, lovers of God who stand in awe of You, people who speak truth and spread holiness. May those we nurture light the world with Torah and good deeds.

Hear the prayers I utter now in the name of our mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. May Your light, reflected in these candles, surround us always. And let us say, Amen.

*Commentary on this blessing by LilyFish Gombberg:*

The reference to children in the blessing can apply to biological or adopted children, and it can also apply to anyone we nurture and teach within the community, the next generation of Jews we collectively hope to inspire.

The prayer is intended to be inclusive, speaking to our shared responsibility in helping to shape the future of the Jewish community.

In Sanhedrin 99b, Reish Lakish says, "Anyone who teaches someone else's child Torah is regarded by the Torah as though they have made them." R. Elazar adds that it is as though the teacher has "made" the child in terms of Torah, highlighting the importance of the role of teaching and mentorship in Jewish life.

## Rosh Hodesh Av

The month of Av is a month of mourning as it includes Tisha B'Av. Today we are going to focus on folk customs related to Jewish mourning. What did our great grandmothers do to mark the passage from this life to the beyond? Rosh Chodesh Av (the 1st of Av) marks the beginning of the month and the start of the "Nine Days" leading up to Tisha B'Av, during which traditional mourning practices are observed. It is the culmination of the "Three Weeks" of mourning for the destruction of the Temples which begins on the 17th of Tammuz.

Tisha B'Av (the 9th of Av) is the most solemn day on the Jewish calendar. It marks the historical destruction of both the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, along with other major tragedies.

By the time we get to Tu B'Av (the 15th of Av), there is a shift in focus, and this day is traditionally considered one of the happiest days on the Jewish calendar. It is often celebrated as a Jewish day of love, matchmaking, and renewal following the mourning of Tisha B'Av.

### ***Meqonenot***

Jewish women have long served as central figures in mourning tradition, from biblical portrayals of prophetic lament, through the rabbinic, medieval, and early modern periods, to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries across the Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, and modern Israeli worlds.

Women's lament functioned as a skilled, often professional practice involving ritualized wailing, embodied grief, and call-and-response performance.

The historian of the Cairo Genizah, Shelomo Dov Goitein, inspired by his observations of the traditional Yemenite community, identified a class of professional women in the ancient world—"women mourners" or female "dirge-singers" or "keeners" (Goitein 1957, 1988).

The prophets Nahum, Ezekiel and Jeremiah invoke images of women mourners or keeners. In Jeremiah (9:17-19) we find these words: <sup>17</sup> This is what the Lord Almighty says:

*"Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come;  
send for the most skillful of them.*

*Let them come quickly  
and wail over us  
till our eyes overflow with tears  
and water streams from our eyelids."*

Following the destruction of the Temple, many Jewish communities around the world were still served by mourning women. The Mishnah mentions a ruling in the name of Rabbi Yehuda: "Even the poorest man of the Jewish people may not be provided with fewer than two flutes and a lamenting woman (meqonenet) (for a funeral)" (M. Ketubot 4:4).

Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, the head of the Volozhin Yeshiva, Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, noted the popular "custom to pay mourning women and drumming women who beat on the heart" following a death (Haamek Dvar on Leviticus, 19:28). They were known in Yiddish as *klogmuters*, *klogvayber*, *klogerkes*, *klogerins* (wailers), or *baveynerins* (weepers). Ashkenazi mourning women worked in groups, appearing spontaneously following the news of a death. They performed their lamentations as a call-and-response, with one woman starting and the others repeating after her, beating their hands on their hearts and their heads. Wailing and "spilling out tears," they also "improvised unique prayers and petitions" in their native Yiddish, "extolling the virtues of the dead and begging for mercy for the living" (Rechtman, 1958). Following the funeral, at which they also sometimes followed the procession wailing or performed lamentations after burial, they would be paid for their work.

As late as the twentieth century, professional mourning women and wailers continued to work in Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, Morocco, Kurdistan, Uzbekistan, India, Iraq, Iran, and Israel. Despite efforts to suppress women's lament, the practice persisted before declining in the wake of the Holocaust and mass migration to Israel. In recent decades, ritual leaders have sought to revive the *meqonenot* tradition in contemporary contexts.

The wailing woman is not confined to the Jewish world. For example, Irish keening (*caoineadh*) is an ancient Gaelic vocal lament for the dead, blending wailing, crying, and improvised melodic chanting. Practiced by women known as "keeners," this raw, cathartic ritual was designed to vocalize grief, accompany the deceased to the afterlife, and provide emotional release for the community. At African American funerals (often called homegoings) open, vocal, and communal grief is not only permitted, but deeply respected as a form of cultural catharsis and healing. Women in nurses uniforms are available to help people overcome with emotion.

### Grave Measuring

Historically among Ashkenazi communities, women known as *feldmesterins* (cemetery measurers) performed rituals during times of severe illness or difficult childbirth. The *feldmesterins* were often paid professionals although others performed the ritual on behalf of their communities as a mitzvah. They would measure the graves of close relatives or the cemetery perimeter (in times of severe crisis) using thread, reciting personal prayers (*tkhines*) and songs which resembled incantations. The very thin, handmade thread was known as the *toyter fodem* – the dead thread. The thread would be used as the wick for a *neshome likht* (soul candle) donated to the synagogue, calling on ancestors to advocate with God on behalf of the living. The candles made with these threads were also used for *yahrzeits* or for *Yizkor* on Yom Kippur. They would also cut the strings into smaller pieces and wear them around the wrists or ankles as protective jewelry.

They would also measure gravesites during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and try to connect to the dead. The practice dates back to the 12th century, and was widely popular during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Printed *tkhines* for making soul candles listed the merits of biblical ancestors, asking God to have mercy on the living as their descendants. Memoirs and ethnographic studies show that most women wrote their own, spontaneous *tkhines* for soul candle making, calling on their own deceased family members to help them. Some women would also name their living relatives and friends, asking for mercy on their behalf and offering them blessings for the new year. In some places, it was customary to make two separate candles – one for the living – the *gezunte* (healthy) or *lebedike* (living) *likht* – and one for the dead – the *neshome likht*. On the eve of Yom Kippur, the candle for the living was lit in the home, and the soul candle in the shul.



*A photograph of three feldmesterins in a town in South Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.*

## Examples of *Tkhines*

I [name] have come to call out an evil presence. I order you out, I scream you out, I pull you out, I chop you out. This is no place for you to be, to rejoice, to suck up the red blood and break the white bones. Go to the black sea – there where chickens will not go, where geese will not honk, where a dog will not bark. That is where you should be, and there may you rejoice.

Dearest father (mother/grandparent etc.), your daughter (or granddaughter/friend/sibling etc)[name] has taken the trouble to come to you and to measure your grave. Take the trouble to pray to God for her and her husband and her children. Muster in yourself your earlier love and help her (etc.) ..

## Discussion/Activity

- In honor of our foremothers, we are going to measure an item (personally important to us) and then use the string to make bracelets.
- Break up into groups of 4 around tables. Share with the other members of your group what object you have brought to measure and why.
- As we measure, the group can discuss these questions:
  - Did you know about any of these traditions before today?
  - What do you think about women's roles in these folk traditions? Why is it that this was a particularly feminine tradition? Why don't we see men doing this?
  - Has learning about these traditions made you think differently about Judaism or Jewish culture?

## Closing

- What have we learned today?
- What do you think about efforts to revive this tradition?
- Is this something we should want to bring back?
- Does it bring value to mourning?
- Is it good for Jewish women?

### To Everything There is a Season... From Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything, there is a season,  
And a time to every purpose under heaven.  
A time to be born, a time to die.  
A time to plant, a time to reap.  
A time to kill, a time to heal.  
A time to laugh, a time to weep,  
A time to build up, a time to break down.  
A time to dance, a time to mourn.  
A time to cast away stones.  
A time to gather stones together.  
A time of love, a time of hate.  
A time of war, a time of peace.  
A time you may embrace.  
A time to refrain from embracing.  
A time to gain, a time to lose.  
A time to rend, a time to sow.  
A time for love, a time for hate.  
To everything, there is a season,  
And a time to every purpose under heaven.

## Closing Prayer: Prayer for Women of the Wall

Written by Rahel Sharon Jaskow

May it be Your will, our G!d and G!d of our mothers and fathers, to bless this prayer group and all who pray within it: them, their families and all that is theirs, together with all the women and girls of your people Israel. Strengthen us and direct our hearts to serve You in truth, reverence and love. May our prayer be desirable and acceptable to You like the prayers of our holy mothers, Sarah, Rivka, Rahel and Leah. May our song ascend to Your Glorious Throne in holiness and purity, like the songs of Miriam the Prophet, Devorah the Judge, and Hannah in Shiloh, and may it be pleasing to you as a sweet savor and fine incense.

And for our sisters, all the women and girls of your people Israel: let us merit to see their joy and hear their voices raised before You in song and praise. May no woman or girl be silenced ever again among Your people Israel or in all the world. G!d of justice, let us merit to see justice and salvation soon, for the sanctification of Your name and the repair of Your world, as it is written: Zion will hear and be glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, over your judgments, O G!d. And it is written: For Zion's sake I will not be still and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be silent, until her righteousness shines forth like a great light and her salvation like a flaming torch.

For Torah shall go forth from Zion and the word of G!d from Jerusalem.  
Amen, *selah*.

## Coming up at Society Hill Synagogue:



### Havdalah Down the Shore

Saturday, Aug. 22 @ 6:30 pm

Society Hill Synagogue members **Sivia and Leon Braunstein** are graciously hosting our congregation's Havdalah Down the Shore this summer, so come together for this special evening! We will meet at **6:30 pm** for a **light potluck dairy meal**, head to their bayside deck for our **8:30 pm** lay-led Havdalah service, and return for dessert.

[www.societyhillsynagogue.org/havdalah-down-the-shore](http://www.societyhillsynagogue.org/havdalah-down-the-shore)



### Young Friends (20s-30s) Brews & Schmooze

Tuesday, Jul. 14 @ 6:30 pm

Spruce St. Harbor Park

Pay your own way

Whether you're a beer aficionado or just looking for chill summer vibes, join us for **Brews & Schmooze** at **Spruce Street Harbor Park**! Come hang out by the waterfront, grab food and drinks, and enjoy the hammocks, games, and colorful lights that make this spot a Philly favorite. **It's a great way to meet new people, catch up with friends, and unwind mid-week.**

[www.societyhillsynagogue.org/young-friends-gathering](http://www.societyhillsynagogue.org/young-friends-gathering)

Hidden Gems of Mexico:  
A Jewish Heritage Journey



### Triple Chai (54+) Meeting to Discuss Trip to Mexico

Early August (Exact date TBD)

Pack your bags — we're headed to Mexico! Join us from **February 28 - March 10** for an unforgettable journey featuring **seven nights in the vibrant capital of Mexico City** and **three nights in the beautiful colonial town of San Miguel de Allende**. Curious to learn more? Join us for an informational meeting on **Tuesday, July 21 at 7:00 pm**. We'll share the complete itinerary, and representatives from the tour company will be there to answer all of your questions.

## Coming up at Society Hill Synagogue:



### Triple Chai (54+) Lunch and a Movie

Wednesday, Jul. 22 @ 11:15 am

Escape the heat and join us for lunch and a movie! We'll gather for **lunch at 11:15 am at PATTAYA Restaurant** (4040 Locust Street). After a delicious lunch, we will walk together to Cinemark University City for the ***The Merry Widow: Met Summer Encore 2026* at 1:00 pm**. This opera features the acclaimed 2015 production starring soprano Renée Fleming.

[www.societyhillsynagogue.org/triple-chai-lunch-and-movie](http://www.societyhillsynagogue.org/triple-chai-lunch-and-movie)



### Erev Tishah B'Av Candlelit Service

Wednesday, Jul. 22 @ 8:15-9:30 pm

Join us for a soulful, candlelit service as we commemorate **Tishah B'Av** — the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av — the anniversary of the destruction of the ancient Temples. This is a service that serves as a space for collective grief and mourning, where we lament not only this foundational loss, but communal losses in each generation, including our own.



### Save the Date: Open House Shabbat

Friday, Aug. 28 and Saturday, Aug. 29

Join us for our Open House Shabbat at the end of August, and invite your friends for a warm and welcoming introduction to our community! The Open House weekend will include **TGISHabbat, Young Families Shabbat, our popular Shabbat morning Torah discussion during services, and special treats!** Please note that there will be no TGISHabbat on Friday, September 4 (Labor Day Weekend); weekly TGISHabbat will resume with Erev Rosh Hashanah on Friday, September 11.

# Society Hill Synagogue Rosh Hodesh Gatherings

## Our Community Guidelines

Rosh Hodesh Gatherings at Society Hill Synagogue are an open space where women (cis- and trans-gender) and non-binary people can be in community around issues affecting modern day Jewish women and explore religious, spiritual, and historic topics of Jewish women, womanhood, and the feminine. We acknowledge that these topics are often difficult to discuss, bringing up deep personal connections or strong moral or political feelings. We welcome a wide variety of opinions on these topics and aim to provide a supportive environment where all participants feel free to share their thoughts and opinions without judgment.

To foster this atmosphere of acceptance and support, we ask that all participants follow these community guidelines:

1. Treat all participants with respect. Be mindful of your language, your tone of voice, and the way you take up space in the group.
2. Assume good intentions. Start from the belief that people mean well.
3. All of us walk into the room with a variety of identities and experiences that inform who we are and how we see the world. Do not make assumptions about people's identities or opinions. Speak from your own experience. Use "I" statements rather than generalizing with "you" or "we."
4. Be accepting when someone offers an opinion you disagree with; you do not have to share their opinion to hear them out.
5. When offering your own opinion, be mindful of the language you choose. Avoid categorizing or stereotyping a whole group of people.
6. Feel free to push back on a thought or opinion you disagree with — that makes for healthy debate, but please use respectful language and tone.