



Rosh Hodesh Heshvan

Tuesday, October 21, 2025 @ 5:15 pm

Program Facilitator: LilyFish Gomberg

Agenda

Introductions and Opening Blessings	Page 2
The Niddah–Onah Cycle and “Purity”	Pages 3-4
Discussion Prompts	Page 5
Closing Poem	Page 6
Upcoming Events	Pages 7-8



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:

Commentary by LilyFish Gomberg:

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.

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.

*Barukh atah Adonai
Eloheinu melekh ha'olam
shehecheyanu vekiyemanu
vehigi'anu lazman hazeh*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֵחַיֵנוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ
וְהִגִיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵן 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

The Niddah-Onah Cycle

Leviticus 15:19, 24

(19) When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her menstrual separation seven days; whoever touches her shall be impure until evening.

(19) וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־תִהְיֶה זֹבַח דָּם יִהְיֶה זֹבַח בְּבִשְׂרָהּ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדְתָּהּ וְכָל־הַנִּגָּע בָּהּ יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:

(24) And if a man lies with her, her menstrual separation applies to him; he shall be impure seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become impure.

(24) וְאִם שָׁכַב יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אֹתָהּ וְתִהְיֶה נִדְתָּהּ עָלָיו וְיִטְמָא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים וְכָל־הַמְּשֻׁכַּב אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁכַּב עָלָיו יִטְמָא:

Exodus 21:10

If he takes another [into the household as his wife], he must not withhold from this one her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights.

אִם־אֶחָרָת יִקַּח־לָהּ שְׂאֵרָה כִּסּוּתָהּ וְעֵבֶרָתָהּ לֹא יִגְרַע:

Onot Prisha:

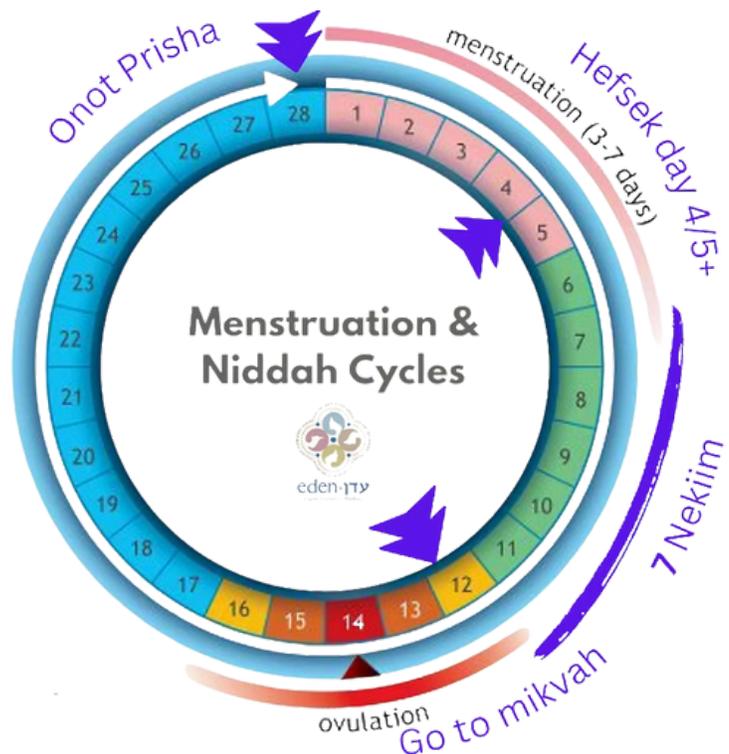
A woman anticipates her period on certain days, based on her previous menstrual pattern. These days are called *onot prisha* (times of separation) or *veset* days.

Hefsek:

An internal examination performed by women in Orthodox Judaism to verify that menstrual bleeding has ended, a necessary step before they can begin to count seven "clean days" to become ritually pure again.

Neki'im:

Beginning the night after the *hefsek taharah*, a woman counts seven blood-free days (*shivah neki'im*). She performs internal examinations to confirm that bleeding has not recurred, and wears white underwear to ensure that she is aware of any staining.



From *How Ancient Rabbis Can Help Combat STI Stigma* By Rebecca Epstein-Levi

The sages, or rabbis, whose teachings were collected in the Mishnah, had a concept they called tumah, or ritual impurity. This term isn't at all the same as the sexual purity preached by today's abstinence peddlers. Rather, it's a socially transmissible state of being that cannot be in contact with the Temple or ritual objects connected to it. Importantly, this wasn't a simple matter of "dirty" or "clean." It was a complicated and fluid web of contact, transmission, treatment, and attentiveness... .. Whether someone was pure or impure was morally irrelevant. Someone who touched a corpse wasn't wrong—in fact, properly preparing a corpse for burial was a moral imperative. **In the rabbis' world, everyone cycled between states of purity and impurity, and anyone not only could, but almost certainly would, come into contact with someone or something that transmitted impurity.**

This lack of moral stigma was necessary because of how ubiquitous impurity was in the world of the Mishnah.

"The Yom Kippur Avoda within the Female Enclosure" from *Beginning Anew*, Rabbi Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman z"l

Enclosed space is often understood to indicate a female aspect of the material world. The holy space of the Jewish people, the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple, and even later, synagogues, are located in the center of the encampment, surrounded and protected by the people. They are nested chambers that enclose holy objects... Greatest intimacy is found in the Holy of Holies, the deepest internal space within the Tabernacle and Temple... It may seem extraordinary to suggest an analogy between the Tabernacle, Temple, and synagogue and the female body; between the Holy of Holies and the womb. But this analogy arises from my deep reverence for the holy place of our prayer and my sense of our bodies as formed in God's image, partaking in the holiness of Creation. (249) ...In this context the blood stands for life; it is in lieu of life itself. The blood runs down to the earth from the corners of the altar. It functions in the Tabernacle as menstrual blood does in a woman's body. We can see the enactments of the Avoda as replicating the menstrual cycle of purification. (Page 252)

For Discussion

1. Understanding the Texts

- The rabbis viewed tumah (impurity) as a social and physical state, not a moral one.
- → How might this reframe the way we talk about bodies, sex, or illness today?
- What strikes you about the idea that everyone becomes impure sometimes?
- → How does that challenge notions of “clean” vs. “dirty” that we’ve inherited from modern culture?

2. Body and Shame

- Epstein-Levi notes that the rabbis’ detailed conversations helped reduce shame.
- → When has talking honestly about something private or uncomfortable helped you feel less alone or more at ease?
- What topics—Jewish or otherwise—still feel hard to name openly in your circles?

3. Cycles and Sacredness

- Bonna Devora Haberman imagines the Temple and the womb as mirrors—each containing holiness and life.
- → How does this image feel to you?
- What would it mean to see our bodies as sacred spaces rather than as sources of embarrassment?

4. Expanding the Circle

- How might niddah and onah speak to all genders and life stages today?
- What helps you notice or honor your body’s natural rhythms—of energy, rest, or renewal?
- How can our community normalize conversations about care, health, and pleasure with compassion and curiosity?

Embodied Rhythm, Celebration, and Blood

by Kohenet Ellie Barbarash, via Ritualwell

For some of us, there was such shame and secrecy around girl's and women's monthly periods; especially when attending services in synagogue. I wanted to imagine growing up hearing a prayer in synagogue that normalized and even welcomed the fact of menstruation as just one of the many, many forms of embodied rhythm we celebrate as Jews.

Blessed are You, Source of Blessings, Who formed human beings with wisdom and created within us the ability to mark time.

Blessed are the music makers, time-keepers, drummers, and all who celebrate the rhythms of our ancestors.

Blessed are those who observe the new moon and the holidays as they move through the cycle of the year.

Blessed are those who bleed without violence each month, our bodies marking potential and creativity, generation after generation.

It is obvious and known before Your Throne of Glory that if but one of these embodied time-keeping abilities were missing it would be impossible for Israel to survive into the future.

Without rhythm in our bodies it would be impossible to praise you with stories, music, dance, and song.

Without our sacred monthly rhythms, it would be impossible to bring forth new generations of children.

Blessed are You, Holy One, Who acts wondrously and forms us as beings who make rhythm and mark time. We praise Your sacred cycles as we celebrate our creativity, families, communities, and lives.

Blessed are the wondrous ways you have created us in blood and sacred rhythm.

Adult Education at Society Hill Synagogue

We believe that learning is a lifelong endeavor, and our adult education classes are thought-provoking, engaging, and a wonderful way to build new connections — with the material and with your fellow participants!

Check out our 2025-2026 course offerings and register at:

societyhillsynagogue.org/adult-education



If you liked today's Rosh Hodesh session, you might like LilyFish's course:

Sacred & Sensual: Sexuality, Relationships, and Judaism

Dates: Mondays — February 2, February 16, March 16, March 23

Time: 6:00 – 8:00 pm

Mode: In-Person Only

Faculty: LilyFish Gomberg

Fee: \$18 for Society Hill Synagogue Members • \$72 for General Public

This class is a deep dive into sex, sexuality, and Jewish tradition. We'll explore ancient and modern Jewish texts — from Torah and Talmud to contemporary responsa — to ask big questions about desire, consent, health, relationships, and the body. Each session will blend textual learning with practical wisdom and joyful curiosity. Topics include stigma around sexually transmitted infections and purity, birth control, pleasure, and queer and straight experiences alike. Whether you're a longtime learner or just curious, come ready to learn, laugh, and think.



Security Training for Synagogue Members

Sunday, Oct. 26 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Join us for a special session of **Countering Active Threat Training (CATT)** for Society Hill Synagogue members. The training will be led by the top security staff at the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia: **Scott Kerns**, Security Director, and **Cortney Voorhees**, Deputy Security Director.

Bagels, pastries, fruit, and coffee and tea will be served at the beginning of the program, with the training beginning at 10:15 am sharp.

societyhillsynagogue.org/securitytraining2025



An Evening with Members of the Israel Symphony Orchestra, Rishon LeZion

Wednesday, October 29 @ 7:00 pm

Tickets: \$18 for Society Hill Synagogue Members | \$36 General Public

On October 29 at 7:00 pm, experience a stirring repertoire weaving together beloved Israeli and Jewish songs with European chamber music masterpieces. We are honored

to welcome musicians from the **Israel Symphony Orchestra, Rishon LeZion (ISO)** for an evening of music that bridges Israeli, Jewish, and classical traditions. Featuring **Yana Mering** (violin), **Doron Alperin** (viola), and **Eyal Heiman** (cello).

Founded in 1988 in Rishon LeZion, Israel's fourth largest city, the ISO is also the resident orchestra of the Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv. It has performed at festivals across Israel, toured internationally, and earned acclaim for its wide-ranging repertoire, from Schubert to beloved Israeli music. Coffee, pastries, and fruit will be served following the concert.

societyhillsynagogue.org/iso



Winter Clothing and Gift Card Drive for Vare-Washington Elementary School Families through November 21

For almost 20 years, our congregation has had a close relationship with Vare-Washington Elementary School, and we want to help make winter warm and joyful for Vare-Washington families.

We are collecting new and lightly worn winter coats, hats, gloves, and scarves primarily for students from kindergarten through 8th grade; **adult sizes are also welcome, but the primary need is for children's warm outerwear.** Please drop off clothing at the synagogue in the labeled bins in the first floor gallery of the Paula Kline Learning Center and ensure that used clothing has been washed prior to donating.

We're also collecting donations to purchase gift cards for families to use for essentials. Our goal is to raise \$3,000. Please visit societyhillsynagogue.org/donate to contribute and note "Vare-Washington Gift Cards." Our collection will continue through **November 21**. Please email **Joan Roller** with questions at varewashington@societyhillsynagogue.org. Todah rabah — thank you very much!