



Rosh Hodesh Sh'vat

Tuesday, January 20, 2026 @ 5:30 pm

Program Facilitator: Barbara Spector

Agenda

Introductions and Opening Blessing	Page 2
Rosh <u>H</u> odesh: Marking the New Moon	Page 3
Rosh <u>H</u> odesh Shahr ^{it} Service	Page 4
Who are Women of the Wall?	Pages 4-5
Opposition to Women of the Wall	Page 6
Discussion Questions	Page 7
Closing Prayer	Page 8
Upcoming Events	Pages 9-11



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 melekh ha'olam
shehehyanu vekiyemanu
vehigi'anu lazman hazeh*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהֵחַיְנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ
וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזֶמֶן 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 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.

Rosh Hodesh: Marking the New Moon

- Rosh Hodesh (literally, “the head of the month”) marks the beginning of the new month on the Hebrew calendar.
 - The Hebrew word for “month,” **hodesh**, comes from the same root as the word for “new,” **hadash**. Jewish months begin with the new moon.
 - The length of the moon’s cycle is about 29.5 days. Hebrew months are 29 days or 30 days long. On 29-day months, we celebrate 1 day of Rosh Hodesh. On 30-day months, we celebrate 2 days of Rosh Hodesh (Day 30 of the outgoing month and Day 1 of the new month). **Sh’vat always has just one day of Rosh Hodesh**. Source: atthewellproject (Instagram).
 - **Midrash Pirke deRabbi Eliezer, chapter 45**, says that Rosh Hodesh was a reward given to women because they refused to donate their jewelry to build the Golden Calf. (A midrash is a body of Jewish literature that interprets, explains, and expands upon the Bible, filling gaps in the narrative.)
 - **“And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden rings” (Ex. 32:2). The women heard (this), but they were unwilling to give their earrings to their husbands; but they said to them: Ye desire to make a graven image and a molten image without any power in it to deliver. The Holy One, blessed be G!d, gave the women their reward in this world and in the world to come. What reward did G!d give them in this world? That they should observe the New Moons more stringently than the men, and what reward will G!d give them in the world to come? They are destined to be renewed like the New Moons, as it is said, “Who satisfieth thy years with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle.” (Ps. 103:5).**
 - Some women refrain from doing housework on Rosh Hodesh.
- “In recognition of the power of these traditions, Women of the Wall chose Rosh Hodesh as the day to gather and pray. We are proud to be the impetus for women’s reclamation and reshaping of traditional practices in a way that expresses their own spirituality.”**

Rosh Hodesh Shaharit (Morning) Service

- A special paragraph, *Ya'aleh v'Yavo*, is added to the **Amidah** (prayer said while standing) and the **Birkat HaMazon** (grace after meals).
- A shorter version of the **Hallel** (psalms of praise said on holidays) is recited after the **Amidah**.
- The Torah is read (4 aliyot on a weekday; a special Maftir reading [the final aliyah] on Shabbat). **The Torah reading includes the special sacrificial offerings to mark the new month.**
- The psalm for Rosh Hodesh (**Psalm 104**) is added at the end of the Shaharit service. It is a beautiful prayer focused on nature — and particularly meaningful today, given the threats to our environment.
- **Women of the Wall come to the Western Wall each Rosh Hodesh to hold this service. They are fighting for the right to say these prayers.**

Who Are the Women of the Wall?

Women of the Wall (Neshot HaKotel in Hebrew), founded in 1988, is a group of Jewish women who are advocating for the right to wear prayer shawls, pray, and read from the Torah at the Western Wall (Kotel) in Jerusalem. The group also advocates for recognition of women's prayer services by legal and religious Israeli authorities. The women's prayer section at the Kotel is only about one-fifth the size of the men's section. (Source for quotes on the next page: womenofthewall.org.il)



“The Western Wall is Judaism’s most sacred site and the principal symbol of Jewish peoplehood and sovereignty, and Women of the Wall works to make it a holy site where women can pray freely.”

“Freedom to worship at the Kotel is one of the most important outcomes of the Jewish people’s return to Jerusalem in 1967, but this great achievement is tainted by the fact that women are prohibited from praying freely at the holy site.”



“Women of the Wall not only seeks empowerment in group prayer and Torah reading at our most sacred site, but also strives for recognition of our prayer service by the legal and religious Israeli authorities, for the sake of all Jewish women. Our group, with a membership that is not only multidenominational but spans the political spectrum, embodies a message of tolerance and pluralism.”

“We work to further our mission through social advocacy, education and empowerment. In our social advocacy work, we aim to change the status-quo that is currently preventing women from being able to pray freely at the Western Wall. This goal has tremendous ramifications for women’s rights in Judaism and in Israel, and must be achieved through social advocacy in order to raise awareness and change social perception of these issues. We take it upon ourselves to educate Jewish women and the public about the social, political and personal ramifications of limiting or eliminating women’s right to pray as a group at a holy site. When the law and society silence women in prayer — literally, publicly and deliberately — it is a violation of civil rights, human rights and religious freedom. Education is the key to changing perspectives, laws and lives. Every time we meet to pray, we empower and encourage Jewish women to embrace religion freely, in their own way. We stand proudly and strongly in the forefront of the movement for religious pluralism in Israel, with the hope to inspire and empower women from all over the world and across the spectrum of Jewish movements to find their spiritual voices and create meaningful Jewish identities.”

Opposition to Women of the Wall

Summary from Wikipedia and other online sources: Women praying at the wall have been harassed (including being threatened, being spit on, and having stones thrown at them). Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) men have prevented the women from bringing Torah scrolls to the Kotel, and women have been arrested on charges such as “disturbing the peace.” The Haredi have taken their case against the women to the Israeli Supreme Court, which ruled against the women in 1994. However, a 2013 ruling gave the women the right to pray at the Kotel. In the early 2000s, the Israeli government created a plan to build a new plaza for egalitarian prayer at the Kotel that would be open to all Jews at all times, although gender segregation and Haredi control of the original Wall plaza would be made permanent. (Some women did not support this plan.) In January 2016, the government announced it would begin to build the new plaza — but in 2017, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under pressure from Haredi Jews in his coalition government, suspended the plan.

Women for the Wall — an opposition group:

Women for the Wall is a traditionalist, grassroots Jewish women’s organization formed to oppose Women of the Wall and preserve traditional, gender-segregated practices at the Kotel. (Note: I could not find any online references to Women for the Wall after 2017. However, the Women of the Wall are still praying there and are still being met with opposition.)

From an opinion piece by Women for the Wall founder Leah Aharoni in *The Jerusalem Post*, June 10, 2013: For years, Women of the Wall have decried their mistreatment at the hands of all and sundry. They have styled themselves as unfortunate victims of mindless oppression, who just want to be left alone. It would seem that what WOW activists see around them is but a reflection of their own scorn and disdain for anyone who dares to disagree with their militant agenda.

From *Women of the Wall hold prayer service with Torah scroll at Jerusalem’s Western Wall*, *The Times of Israel*, 8/25/25: There are over 100 Torah scrolls in the Western Wall compound, according to the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which manages the site, but none of them are located in the women’s section, in accordance with the customs of Orthodox Judaism. The Foundation also sets the rules for the holy site, barring private worshipers from bringing scrolls into the area, thus preventing women from bringing in their own.

Women of the Wall recently posted a video on Instagram showing police making them remove their Hanukkah menorah from the women’s section of the Kotel.



Discussion Questions:

- A *Jerusalem Post* article from the time when the opposition group **Women for the Wall** was active said this group **“performs a tricky balancing act between defending traditionalist values and using the language of women’s empowerment to oppose the objectives of a Jewish feminist group while presenting itself as an advocate for women’s rights.”** The founder of the opposition group, Leah Aharoni, runs a company that fosters women's entrepreneurship. These women have contended that the majority of people don’t want women to pray aloud at the Wall, and the majority opinion should prevail. **What do you think of this argument? Put yourself in these women’s shoes: What would you say to advocate for this viewpoint?**
- Women of the Wall have been sworn at, have had their prayers interrupted by whistles and screams, have been called Nazis, and have had eggs thrown at them. Nevertheless, they persist. **Would you participate in a Women of the Wall prayer service if you knew you would face this kind of opposition?**
- The ultra-Orthodox are a powerful voting bloc in Israel and have tremendous political power — which is why they control the Kotel and are exempt from army service. **Do you think there is any argument that could be made to get them to change their position on women praying aloud at the Wall?**

Closing Prayer: Prayer for Women of the Wall

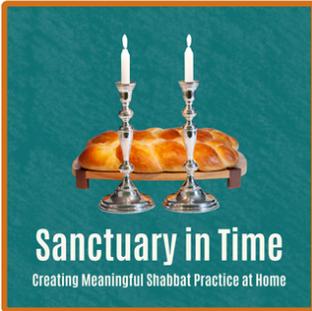
Written by Rahel Sharon Jaskow

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:



Adult Education – *Sanctuary in Time: Creating Meaningful Shabbat Practice at Home*

Thursday, Jan. 22 @ 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Faculty: Caroline Kamesar

Cost: Included with Synagogue Membership • \$18 for General Public

How do we create Shabbat as a true sanctuary in time — not only in synagogue, but within our own homes and lives? Join our Rebbetzin, **Caroline Kamesar**, for an evening of learning and conversation as we explore practical, meaningful ways to cultivate Shabbat practice at home. This session offers space to learn, share, ask questions, and imagine Shabbat rituals that meet us where we are now and grow with us over time.

societyhillssynagogue.org/adult-education



Young Friends (20s-30s): Winter Brews & Schmooze at Yards

Thursday, Jan. 22 @ 6:30-8:30 pm

Yards Brewing Co., 500 Spring Garden Street

Unwind mid-week with good conversation and great beer at our winter Brews & Schmooze at Yards Brewing Co.! It's a great way to meet new people and catch up with friends.

societyhillssynagogue.org/young-friends



Men's Club Meeting with Guest Speaker, Renowned Holocaust Educator Lise Marlowe – *Open to All Genders*

Thursday, Jan. 22 @ 7:00 pm

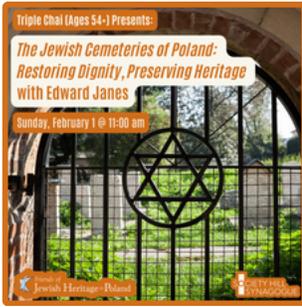
Our Men's Club members have a keen interest in Jewish history and society, and next Thursday, they will welcome **Lise Marlowe**, Education Director at the **Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center** in Elkins Park.

Lise will discuss the challenges and importance of Holocaust remembrance and education in current times, when Holocaust survivors and liberators are passing away, Holocaust history and imagery are being distorted by people across the political spectrum, and antisemitism is growing at record levels.

Ms. Marlowe was named the national History Channel "Teacher of the Year" in 2006, and she was awarded the NAACP Freedom Fund Award in 2011 and the Pennsylvania State Education Association's Human and Civil Rights Award in 2019.

Email mensclub@societyhillssynagogue.org to RSVP

Coming up at Society Hill Synagogue:



Triple Chai (54+): *The Jewish Cemeteries of Poland: Restoring Dignity, Preserving Heritage* with Edward Janes

Sunday, February 1 @ 11:00 am

Included with Society Hill Synagogue Membership • \$36 General Public

Join Triple Chai for brunch and a presentation by **Edward Janes** on his work preserving Jewish cemeteries with **Friends of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FJHP)**.

FJHP engages descendants and supporters to protect and commemorate the surviving sites and monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. This organization works at over 30 sites with the goal of preserving and protecting the abandoned cemeteries in this once thriving home to over 3.3 million Jews.

societyhillssynagogue.org/triple-chai



Our Israel Committee Presents: Artist Talk & Exhibition with Igal Fedida

Thursday, February 5 @ 6:00-7:30 pm

Advance registration required of all attendees

Join us for an evening of art and conversation with Israeli artist **Igal Fedida**, whose abstract and mixed-media work explores themes of creation, spirituality, and Jewish tradition through color, material, and form. Fedida's work incorporates raw structural materials — wood, metal, and unconventional construction paints — alongside brush and canvas, reflecting a deep engagement with process, building, and design.

The evening will begin with an open-house style gallery viewing, followed by an artist talk and Q&A. Guests are invited to browse selections of Igal's work, hear directly from the artist about his creative process, and engage in conversation together. Coffee, Israeli wine, and Middle Eastern delights will be served. Artwork will be available for purchase, and a portion of the proceeds from all art sold that evening will be donated to the synagogue. **Learn more and register:**

societyhillssynagogue.org/israel

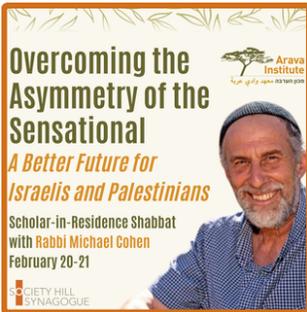


Belonging and Jewish Ritual: A JDAIM Dinner 'n' Discussion

Friday, February 13, following TGShabbat

In recognition of **Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance & Inclusion Month (JDAIM)**, join us for a Dinner 'n' Discussion featuring a screening of **THIRTEEN**, followed by a facilitated conversation led by members of our **Disability Inclusion Subcommittee**. Based on a true story, *Thirteen's* themes of disability, Jewish ritual, and belonging, will help us reflect together on how our community can continue moving beyond access toward genuine belonging. **All are welcome** to join this evening of learning and conversation as part of our ongoing commitment to inclusion and equity.

Coming up at Society Hill Synagogue:



Overcoming the Asymmetry of the Sensational: A Better Future for Israelis and Palestinians Scholar-in-Residence Shabbat with Rabbi Michael Cohen

Friday and Saturday, February 20-21, following Shabbat Services

Rabbi Michael Margaretten Cohen is the Director of Community Relations for the **Friends of Arava Institute**. He has been a part of the Arava Institute since its doors opened in 1996, dividing his time between Vermont and the Kibbutz Ketura campus of the Institute. He is a faculty member of Bennington College, teaching conflict resolution, the Bible, and the environment.

- **Friday evening:** During the Oneg dinner following TGIShabbat services, Rabbi Cohen will offer a teaching.
- **Saturday morning:** Following Shabbat services, Kiddush lunch will feature a special conversation between Rabbi Cohen and Rabbi Nathan Kamesar.

Rabbi Cohen has been a Policy Advisor to the Office of the Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, U.S. Department of State, and a Speechwriting Advisor to the Office of the White House Speechwriters. He has served on the Advisory Board of the Middle East Peace Partnership (MEPPA) of USAID. Rabbi Cohen is also rabbi emeritus of the Israel Congregation in Manchester Center, Vermont and an ongoing columnist for the Jerusalem Post. He is the author of Einstein's Rabbi: A Tale of Science and the Soul and a recipient of the Eliav Sartawi Award for Middle East Journalism from the Search for Common Ground.

RSVP for this special weekend using the link below:

societyhillsynagogue.org/rabbi-cohen-shabbat



