"WHEN JOHN WESLEY MET THE BAAL SHEM TOV (WITH LITTLE ESTHER): A PURIM TALE"

In this imaginative Purim tale, the Methodist preacher John Wesley and the Baal Shem Tov are drawn into a shared encounter that exposes the tragic legacy of Christian contempt for Jews while revealing the reparative power of storytelling, memory, and Scripture. Their meeting invites listeners to consider Esther's story as a call to interfaith remembrance and moral courage "for such a time as this."

Robert W. Bleakney, Ph.D., Associate Professor at Hebraic Christian College

HOW DID CHABAD HOUSES BECOME A WORLDWIDE PRESENCE AND PHENOMENON?

In many Jewish communities today, the center of activity has become an unlikely source- the Chabad House. Why do hundreds of young rabbis and their wives move to remote areas of the world for a lifetime of dedication to fellow Jews? And what are the reactions and relationships with the established Jewish communities? We will take a closer look behind the scenes to better understand this phenomenon.

Rabbi Yaakov Blotner, Congregation Sha'arai Torah West

"DOES TAROT HAVE JEWISH ROOTS-OR IS IT JUST A GOOD STORY?

If you look closely at a “traditional” Tarot deck, you will see multiple cards with Hebrew letters. And in conversations about Tarot, you will often hear Kabbalah (*Jewish Mysticism*) sometimes spelled Qabbalah or Cabbalah. Is this actually true, or a story that got repeated until it sounded like fact? In this class, we’ll dig into the real history of tarot’s supposed Jewish origins, look honestly at where the evidence holds up and where it falls apart, and examine Stav Appel’s The Torah in Tarot: is his theory compelling or just reading Judaism into the cards? No prior knowledge of tarot or Kabbalah needed — just an open mind.

Rabbi Valerie Cohen, Temple Emanuel Sinai, Jewish Studio Project Fellow and Brielle Stovall, MSW, Therapist & Interdisciplinary Wellness Artist

HYSTERICAL HYSTORY

Some might find Jewish history a roller coaster ride between deep despair and miraculous achievement, but if you were to ask Mel Brooks, there are a lot more historically funny stops along the way. Let's take a light look at Jewish history using pieces from Mel Brooks' History of the World part I and part II, then I will add my own take on even more historical events. A fun program….guaranteed.

EJ Dotts, Beth Tikvah Synagogue, Grafton

FACT OR FICTION: IS OUR FOOD REALLY JEWISH?

Most of us have our favorite "Jewish" foods. What, however, is the true origin of these delicious eatables? Do they really originate in Jewish culture, community and food laws, or do they tell a story of migration and influence by others. Learn some surprising origins of your favorite "Jewish" foods. We'll also explore Jewish influences on other popular dishes in other cultures and cuisines. Come and enjoy!!

Rabbi Eve Eichenholtz, Congregation Agudat Achim, Leominster

“THE DRIVING TESHUVA”

There is much discussion these days about the future of the various denominations in the organized Jewish community. Learn how a piece of law proscribed to be "the demise of the Conservative Movement" has, in fact, been a topic of discussion marking a thriving denomination for over 70 years. Come and learn!

Rabbi Aviva Fellman, Congregation Beth Israel, Worcester

JEWS IN MUSICAL THEATRE-AND BEYOND

Between 95% to 97% of all Broadway musicals have had a Jewish composer, lyricist, or book writer (Even Cole Porter commented to Richard Rogers that if he (Porter) wanted to be more successful he needed to write more 'Jewish tunes'). We will take a journey through nearly a century of Broadway and explore Jewish stories and even Jewish liturgical melodies that have ended up on Broadway (and we probably didn't even notice them).

Mitch Gordon, Educator, Musician, Jewish Radio Host and Producer

AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY THROUGH A BOURBON GLASS: FROM TEMPERANCE TO PROHIBITION - JEWS, WHISKEY, AND THE BATTLE OVER AMERICAN DRINKING, 1880-1920

As the temperance movement grew into a campaign for national Prohibition, Jewish distillers, rectifiers, merchants, and rabbis found themselves drawn into debates over alcohol, morality, immigration, and American identity. Through a cast of colorful personalities, this presentation traces the Jewish stories behind this era of American history and the ways these stories would be distorted by the antisemitism and accusations of Henry Ford.

Note: This lecture is the next in the series that follows on from last year's presentation on Bernheim. No need to have attended last year to enjoy this year!

Rabbi Rachel Gurevitz, PhD, Congregation B'nai Shalom, Westboro

JEWISH NOBEL LITERATURE LAUREATES

Einstein wasn't the only one! And Science and Math scholars are not the only recipients. In this session, we will visit some of the notable Jewish Literature Laureates, including Isaac Basheva Singer, Saul Bellow, Boris Pasternack (Dr Ziavago) and Bob Dylan. The power of their words runs deep!

“When a day passes, it is no longer there. What remains of it? Nothing more than a story. If stories weren't told or books weren't written, man would live like the beasts, only for the day. The whole world, all human life, is one long story.” Isaac Bashevis Singer

Rabbi Suri Krieger, Rabbi Emeritus of B’nai Or-Jewish Renewal of Greater Boston

JACOB ON THE RUN

A Kabbalastic analysis of our forefather Jacob on the run and how it relates to our soul's spiritual journey in a modern
world.

Rabbi Moshe Liberow, Associate Rabbi-Torah Center, Worcester, and Director of Boston Rabbinical Court

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE AND PEACE? CREATE YOUR TRUTH THROUGH ART
Come have a great time while participating in a fun, hands-on art project celebrating peace, freedom, and hope! A dove appears in the story of Noah in the Torah: *"The dove returned to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf."* (Genesis 8:11). Also, the official emblem of the State of Israel, featuring the menorah flanked by two olive branches, is a symbol of hope and renewed life. Together, we will talk about these symbols and create our very own *Dove of Peace.*
Ziva Rosenhand, Hebrew Teacher, Artist, and Occupational Therapist

HOW "BABY IT'S COLD OUTSIDE" LED TO OSAMA BIN LADEN'S EXTREMISM

Do we ever think about the sources of extremism in our world? It could be the philosophy of an historical figure or a political movement. It could have originated from some kind of natural disaster. In this session, you will hear the almost unbelievable story connecting the rise of extremism to a popular song in the early 20th century. Our discussion will focus on the origins of the Muslim Brotherhood and its impact since. A fascinating story!

Steven Schimmel, Executive Director, Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

In this conversation about Israel, I hope to accomplish three things:
(1) I will be sharing some observations and impressions, as I will be fresh off the plane from a rabbinic mission, (2) I will explore with you some of the fiction, misinformation and lies—among them “genocide” and “colonialism”--that have become all too pervasive in today’s highly charged discourse about the region, and (3) I will provide and review an extensive list of resources that offer positive message about Israel and the region that I have found very useful and informative, and that I think you will as well. Come join me!

Rabbi Michael Swarttz, Beth Tikvah Synagogue, Grafton

INHERITANCE: A MEMOIR OF GENEALOGY, PATERNITY AND LOVE

It has been suggested that all memory is fiction.
In her engaging and personal memoir, Dani Shapiro shares her journey into her family and into her own identity. Raised in a modern Orthodox home on the Upper West Side of New York City, assumptions have been made that she learns are far from the truth of her birth. As an adult, Dani discovers that her beloved Orthodox Jewish father is not her biological parent. She takes her reader with her on this quest which is fascinating and sometimes heartbreaking as the truth of her discovery leads her to seek out her biological father. This story is a memorable journey and we will explore this memoir and the many facets of identity and love that comes with it.
(You need not have read the book to join in the discussion.)

Marcia Tannenbaum, Educator, Family Law Attorney, Grandmother