**Mazal/Constellation**

Lamb. This symbol represents the lamb sacrificed as the Passover offering.

**Significance of this Month**

Nisan is the first month of the Jewish calendar, and the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh was given on Nisan. According to the Mishnah, Rosh Chodesh Nisan is one of four New Years marked by the Jewish calendar. It marks the New Year for counting the rule of kings and for the holiday cycle.

**Holidays**

**Passover** begins on the 15th of Nisan. Passover marks the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. On the first two nights, Jews around the world gather to celebrate the Passover Seder. Tradition teaches that the seventh day of Passover marks the day that the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. After their miraculous rescue, they burst into song. Miriam led the women in their own song.

On the Shabbat that falls during Passover, we read the *Song of Songs* in synagogue. This Biblical book tells the story of two young lovers and is often understood as a metaphor for God’s relationship to the Jewish people.

The second night of Passover marks the beginning of the **Counting of the Omer**. This represents a seven-week period culminating in the holiday of Shavuot. Originally, the Omer represented a daily barley offering that was brought in the Temple. Over the years it has developed into a penitential period leading from the Exodus of Passover to the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot. According to tradition, 24,000 pairs of Rabbi Akiva’s students died during this period. Every night we count the Omer by indicating how many days and weeks have passed since the beginning of the period.

Drawing on the fact that Rosh Chodesh Nisan marks the New Year for Kings, the State of Israel has designated it as a day to honor its former prime ministers and presidents. It is customary each year to focus on one deceased president and prime minister, with individuals and institutions receiving prizes from the incumbent president and prime minister.

The 27th of Nisan is Yom Hazikaron L'shoah V'l'giborah, or Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day, more commonly known as **Yom Hashoah**, or **Holocaust Remembrance Day**. This day commemorates the six million Jews who died during the Holocaust. At the same time, it marks the anniversary of the heroic Warsaw Ghetto
uprising of 1943. In Israel a siren is sounded and people stand in silence to honor the
dead. Jews around the world hold memorials and vigils, often lighting six candles in
honor of the Six Million Holocaust victims. Many hold name-reading ceremonies to
memorialize those who perished.

Women to Celebrate

Miriam – Miriam is one of seven prophetesses in our tradition. Miriam figures
prominently in the Passover story and in the Israelites’ celebration at the Red Sea.
According to tradition, the Children of Israel had water in the desert for 40 years because
of Miriam. For more details about her life and achievements, go to
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Weekly_Torah_Commentary/hukkat_artson5762.htm

Shifra and Puah – The Hebrew midwives who refused to obey Pharaoh’s commandment
to kill Hebrew boys. According to tradition, Shifra was Yocheved, Moses’ mother, and
Puah was Miriam. In Tel Aviv the maternity hospital is located at the intersection of
Shifra and Puah Streets.

Serach bat Asher – The daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob and namesake of one of the
12 Tribes of Israel. Midrashic literature links Serach to the Exodus story and the rest of
Jewish history. Serach offers a wonderful female character to incorporate into the
Passover story. As her character is developed in the midrashic sources, she also raises
important questions about Jewish memory.

Rachel bat Kalba Savua -- She married Rabbi Akiva and according to some sources is
responsible for his rise to prominence as a Torah scholar. For more details about her life
and achievements, see Avot de-Rabbi Natan, Nusach B, Chapter 8.

Anne Frank – A young German Jewish teenager who went into hiding from the Nazis
with her family. Though Anne was captured and eventually killed, her memory lives on
in the diary that she kept. Her story was made into a play, which is often performed on
Yom Hashoah. For more details about her life and achievements, go to
http://www.annefrank.nl/ned/default2.html

Hannah Senesh – A paratrooper in the British Army, Hannah helped to organize Partisan
efforts in Yugoslavia and Hungary. She was captured by the Nazis who tortured her and
killed her in 1944. Hannah wrote poetry that is often read and sung in Holocaust
memorial services. For more details about her life and achievements, go to
http://www.hannahsenesh.org.il/documents/frameseteng.html

Famous Women’s Yahrzeits:
Molly Picon – 3 Nisan 5752 (April 6, 1992). Actress, dancer. For more details about her
life and achievements, go to
http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/picon/

Miriam the Prophetess – 10 Nisan. See description in the “Women to Celebrate” section.

Rachel Blaustein – One of Modern Hebrew’s greatest poets, she is known by her first name only, “Rachel.” Rachel's poetry is lyrical, excelling in its musical tone, simple language and depth of feeling. Her love poems stress a feeling of loneliness, distance, and longing for the beloved. Other poems deal with human fate, with the poet's relation to her own difficult life, and death. Some of her best-known verse expresses love for the Land of Israel and nostalgia for the Sea of Galilee, where she grew up. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.ithl.org.il/author_info.asp?id=207.

Text Studies:
- **Serach bat Asher** – Learn more about the daughter of Asher, one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. She receives very little mention in the Bible, but is depicted extensively in Midrashic literature, which says that Serach never died. Serach offers a wonderful female character to incorporate into the Passover story. As her character is developed in the Midrashic sources, she also raises important questions about Jewish memory.
- **The Charoset Riddle** – Everybody loves this dish of apples, nuts, and wine that is served at the Passover Seder. Not as well known is the Talmud’s connection of this dish to the heroic actions of the Israelite women. This text study explores that connection.

Activities:
- **Plant a Window Herb Garden** --- This is a wonderful way to celebrate the onset of spring. Certain herbs (parsley, horseradish, etc.) figure prominently in the Passover Seder.
- **Kite Making** – What better way to celebrate spring than to fly a kite?! Kits can be purchased on the Internet or at craft stores.
- **The Shifra and Puah Award** - Al Axelrad, the Hillel rabbi at Brandeis University for three decades, established this annual award for non-violent resistance to tyranny. He named it after the midwives who resisted and outsmarted Pharaoh and saved the Hebrew infants from drowning. To whom would you give this award this year?

Conversations:
- **Feelings about Spring** – Spring is the season of rebirth. In much of the country, the weather turns warmer, the trees begin to blossom, and the birds return from their winter migration. How do you feel as this season begins?
- **Passover** – How do you celebrate Passover? Does your family have any unique Passover customs? What freedoms do you celebrate? How is Passover different now that you are away at college?
• **Personal Connections to the Holocaust** – As we commemorate Yom HaShoah, have a conversation about the impact of the Holocaust on members of the group. Was their family directly affected by the Holocaust? Do they know any Holocaust Survivors? Has anyone in the group been on a trip to the Concentration Camps, such as March of the Living?
Iyyar

Mazal/Constellation

Ox.

Significance of this month

Iyyar, the second month of the Jewish calendar falls between the Biblical holidays of Passover and Shavuot. This period is also known as the Omer. In Temple times a daily barley sacrifice was offered during this time. Nowadays, the Omer is seen as a spiritual preparation from the Exodus of Passover to the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot. Every night we count the Omer by indicating how many days and weeks have passed since the beginning of the period.

Holidays

During Temple times, every person was responsible for participating in the offering of a Passover sacrifice. In order to participate, one could not be ritually impure. In the event that one was impure, or too far away from the Temple on Passover, the Torah allowed them to bring a compensatory sacrifice known as Pesach Sheni, or “the Second Passover.” This sacrifice was brought on the 14th of Iyyar, exactly a month after Passover.

Rabbi Akiva, one of the great Rabbinic sages, had 24,000 pairs of students who died of a plague during the Omer. The plague ended on the 33rd day of the Omer, which is known as Lag B’Omer, and which falls on the 18th of Iyyar. In Israel, Lag B’Omer is celebrated with picnics and bonfires. Lag B’Omer is also the yahrzeit of the great Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who is considered the founder of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. In the Middle Ages, many Jewish communities in Europe were massacred during the Crusades, which took place during the Omer period.

Yom Haatzma’ut, the anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel’s Independence Day, is on the 5th of Iyyar. The day before, Yom Hazikaron, is a memorial day for soldiers who have fallen while fighting for Israel’s independence and defending its security. The juxtaposition of these two days is intentional: the soldiers who gave their lives were directly responsible for the existence of Israel as an independent state. In this way, a day of solemn commemoration can be followed by joyous celebration and song. During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli forces took control of Jerusalem on the 28th day of Iyyar. This day is known as Yom Yerushalayim and is a day on which we celebrate the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people and Israel’s miraculous victory during the Six-Day War.
Women to Celebrate

Golda Meir – On March 7, 1969, Meir was nominated by the Labor Party to be Israel’s first woman Prime Minister. She held this esteemed position until 1974. At the time of her appointment, Meir was the world’s third woman Prime Minister. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/meir.html.

Rachel Blaustein – One of Modern Hebrew’s greatest poets, she is known by her first name only, “Rachel.” Rachel's poetry is lyrical, excelling in its musical tone, simple language and depth of feeling. Her love poems stress a feeling of loneliness, distance, and longing for the beloved. Other poems deal with human fate, with the poet's relation to her own difficult life, and death. Some of her best-known verse express love for the Land of Israel and nostalgia for the Sea of Galilee, where she grew up. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.ithl.org.il/author_info.asp?id=207.

Naomi Shemer – Known as the “First Lady of Israeli Song,” Naomi Shemer has composed many well-known Israeli folk songs, including “Yerushalayim Shel Zahav” (Jerusalem of Gold) and several of Rachel’s poems (see above). Many of her songs recreate the landscape that was such a part of her youth and reflect her love of the topography and scenery of the Land of Israel. For more details about her achievements, go to http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/shemer.html.

Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Emma Goldman – 6 Iyyar 5700 (May 14, 1940). A major figure in American radicalism and feminism, Goldman was an early advocate of birth control, free speech, women’s equality and independence, and union organization. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/goldman/

Nellie Sachs – 6 Iyyar 5730 (May 12, 1970). German-born poet and writer who wrote about the Holocaust. She was awarded the 1966 Nobel Prize for Literature. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.nobel.se/literature/laureates/1966/sachs-autobio.html

Text Studies

Oh Jerusalem: A Conversation – Explore your own vision of Jerusalem through these evocative verses. This conversation weaves together three texts: a Psalm that includes a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrash Esther Rabba.

A Tale of Two Anthems: Hatikvah & Psalm 126 – During the fourth Zionist Congress in 1900, these two poems were submitted as contenders for the Zionist national anthem. Hatikvah is a 19th-Century poem while Psalm 126 was traditionally chanted before reciting the grace after meals on Shabbat, festivals, and special occasions. These poems are often sung, but rarely learned. Borrowing from the format of a traditional page of
Talmud, these poems have been positioned as the central text bordered by traditional commentary and modern poetry in postmodern Talmudic dialogue.

**First Amendment: Free Speech Versus Ethical Speech** – Emma Goldman, an early advocate of free speech and whose Yahrzeit we commemorate this month, said: "We shall soon be obliged to meet in cellars, or in darkened rooms with closed doors, and speak in whispers lest our next door neighbors should hear that freeborn citizens dare not speak in the open." This special Talmud page compares notions of free speech in Jewish and American traditions.

**Activities**

**Israeli Dancing/Singing** – Celebrate the month of Yom Ha’atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim by singing your favorite Israeli songs and/or Israeli dancing.

**End of the Year Ceremony** – For many campuses Iyyar is the last time that Rosh Chodesh groups will meet before summer vacation. Take time to reflect on the year and the Rosh Chodesh group, honor graduating seniors, and to share everyone’s plans and blessings for the summer. This may be coordinated Hillel’s text study “Blessed Be Your Coming, Blessed Be Your Going.”

**Conversations**

**The State of Israel** – Discuss your relationship to the State of Israel. Have you ever visited? Do you have friends and family who live there? What is Israel’s significance to the Jewish people?

**Preparing for Momentous Events** – During the period of the Omer, when the Jewish people are counting the days until Shavuot and the receiving of the Torah, discuss how you prepare for momentous events in your life.

**Second Chances** – In the spirit of Pesach Sheni, talk about second chances. Do people in the group agree with the statement “everyone deserves a second chance”? When do people deserve a second chance? When do they not? Why is there a second chance to offer the Passover sacrifice? Can you point to times in your life that you wish you had had a second chance?
Sivan סיוון

Mazal/Constellation

Twins.

Significance of this month

Sivan is the third month of the Jewish calendar. Traditionally it marks the time that the Jewish people became a nation by receiving the Torah at Sinai. According to tradition, the people arrived at Mt. Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Sivan.

Holidays

The holiday of Shavuot is on the Sixth of Sivan. This holiday is also known as z’man matan Torateinu, the “Time of the Giving of Our Torah.” During Temple Times, pilgrims for the holiday would bring their first fruits as offerings to God. Shavuot marks the end of the seven-week Omer period that began on Passover. Traditionally, Jews stay up all night on the first night of Shavuot learning Torah to show our excitement to receive the Torah. The Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot because it shows Ruth’s acceptance of the Torah. Traditionally, Jews eat dairy foods on Shavuot because we presumably did not know the laws of slaughtering animals until after receiving the Torah and therefore could not eat kosher meat. Another tradition is to decorate the synagogue with flowers and greenery to represent Mt. Sinai.

Women to Celebrate

Ruth – The heroine of the Biblical book named after her. Ruth willingly converted to Judaism and displayed loyalty and friendship to her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David.

Ruth Calderon – A leader of a fast and growing movement in Israel that seeks to bring Jewish learning and culture to secular Israelis without trying to make them more religious. Ruth’s goal is to put Israelis in touch with their Jewish texts because she finds Jewish texts and culture beautiful. She is the founder and executive director of Alma, a liberal arts college for the study of Hebrew culture, which also serves as a community center to foster the sense of belonging to the Hebrew culture. Calderon was a co-founder and director of Elul, the egalitarian Bet Midrash for religious and secular men and women, in Jerusalem. One of Alma’s most popular events is its annual all-night study session on Shavuot, in which thousands of secular Israelis gather on the beach of Tel Aviv to engage in Jewish learning. To learn more about Ruth Calderon and Alma visit http://www.alma.org.il/eng/e3.html
Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Gertrude Weil – 6 Sivan 5731 (May 30, 1971). Outspoken activist on many issues including women’s suffrage, labor reform and civil rights. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/weil/

Text Studies

Understanding Shavuot – These three Talmudic sources help you delve into the meaning of Shavuot.

Shavuot and the Lecha Dodi Connection – Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, the author of Lecha Dodi, also helped invent the practice of Tikkun Leil Shavuot, the all-night study session on Shavuot. This learning piece helps you explore the connections between the Sabbath Bride and Shavuot, while also providing a window into the relationship between God and the Jewish people.

Activities

End of the Year Ceremony – Sivan may mark the final month Rosh Chodesh groups meet before summer break. Take time to reflect on the year and the Rosh Chodesh group, honor graduating seniors, and to share everyone’s plans and blessings for the summer. This may be coordinated with Hillel’s text study “Blessed be Your Coming Blessed be Your Going.”

Study Torah – choose a topic of interest to the group and spend time studying traditional Jewish sources on it. For a variety of text studies visit www.hillel.org

Eating Dairy – There is a tradition to eat dairy foods on Shavuot because we presumably did not know the laws of slaughtering animals until after receiving the Torah and therefore could not eat kosher meat. Some traditional Shavuot foods include cheesecake and blintzes. Spend time preparing a dairy dish, or have an ice cream sundae party.

Conversations

Torah – On Shavuot we received the Torah. The Torah is the central book of Judaism, and the word Torah often stands for the entire collection of Jewish sacred texts, and may even be synonymous with Judaism. Discuss what the Torah and Jewish tradition mean to you. Do you engage in Torah study on a regular basis? What topics most interest you?

School’s Out for Summer – Sivan may mark the final time your Rosh Chodesh group meets before summer break. Take time to reflect back on the school year that is coming to a close and discuss everyone’s plans for the summer.
Tammuz 
מָעוֹן

Mazal/Constellation

Crab.

Significance of the Month

Tammuz is the fourth month of the Jewish calendar. It is a month known for the tragedies that befell the Jewish people.

Holidays

The 17th of Tammuz is one of four fast days associated with the destruction of the Temple and the Exile of the Jews. The 17th of Tammuz marks the day when the walls of Jerusalem during the Second Temple were breached. According to Jewish tradition, four other tragedies occurred on this day: the tablets containing the Ten Commandments were broken; the daily sacrifice was discontinued; Apustamus, a Greek officer, burned a Torah scroll; and an idol was erected in the sanctuary of the Temple. The 17th of Tammuz begins a three-week period known as bein ha-metzarim (literally, “between the straits”) or more colloquially known as the “Three Weeks.” From the 17th of Tammuz until Tisha B’Av, customs vary over what prohibitions one follows. Many people do not shave or get haircuts or listen to live music from the 17th of Tammuz. Additionally, many refrain from having weddings during this period. With the advent of the month of Av, the mourning practices intensify.

Women to Celebrate

Rachel the Matriarch – Rachel has become associated with the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av because of an often-cited Midrash. The Midrash comments on Jeremiah’s prophecy which says: “A cry is heard in Ramah – wailing, bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children who are gone” (Jeremiah 31:14). The Midrash wonders why Rachel is buried in Bethlehem when all of the other patriarchs and matriarchs are buried in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron. The Midrash explains that as the Jews were being exiled after the destruction of the first Temple, all of the matriarchs and patriarchs petitioned God that the exile should not be permanent, but none of them succeeded. Rachel then argued that when she was set to marry Jacob, her father Lavan plotted to switch her with her sister Leah. Rachel could have sabotaged the plan but chose not to so as not to embarrass her sister. God agreed that the exile would not be permanent because of Rachel’s unselfish act.
Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Zivia Lubetkin – 7 Tammuz (July 12, 1978). A leader of the Polish Underground and the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. She later was a found of Kibbutz Lochemei ha-Ghetta’ot (Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz). For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.interlog.com/~mighty/valor/bios4.htm


Text Studies

Tisha B’Av Text Study – Explore the reasons for fasting on the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av.

Oh Jerusalem: A Conversation – Explore your own vision of Jerusalem through these evocative verses. This conversation weaves together three texts: a Psalm that includes a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrash Esther Rabba.

Conversations

Does it upset you that the Temple is no longer standing in Jerusalem? How do you relate to the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av?
Av

Mazal/Constellation

Lion

Significance of the Month

Av, the fifth month of the Jewish calendar, is known as *Menachem Av* or “Comforting Av.” Av represents the saddest point in the Jewish calendar, and according to the Mishnah, “when the month of Av enters we become less joyful.” Rosh Chodesh Av falls in the three-week period known as *bein ha-metzarim* (literally “between the straits”) in which we mourn the destruction of both the first and second Temples. As the month progresses, we move forward from our mourning and begin to find comfort. We begin to look forward to the New Year, which is only seven weeks away.

Holidays

*Tisha B’Av*, or the Ninth of Av, is the saddest day in the Jewish calendar. On Tisha B’Av both the first and second Temples were burned to the ground. According to the Mishnah, five tragedies befell the Jewish people on Tisha B’Av: it was decreed that the generation of the desert would not enter the Land of Israel; the first Temple was destroyed; the second Temple was destroyed; Betar, the last Jewish stronghold after the destruction of Jerusalem, was conquered; and Jerusalem was plowed under. Tradition further teaches that other tragedies throughout history occurred to the Jews on Tisha B’Av. Some examples include the beginning of the First Crusade in 1095; the expulsion of Jews from Spain by King Ferdinand in 1492; and the beginning of World War One in 1914. Tisha B’Av has been adopted as a national day of mourning for all tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people. Restaurants and theaters are closed in Israel on Tisha B’Av. The mourning practices that began on the 17th of Tammuz intensify with Rosh Chodesh Av. At this point many people refrain from eating meat, drinking wine, wearing freshly laundered or new clothing, and from engaging in any joyous activity. Some begin the more severe restrictions only during the week during which Tisha B’Av falls. Tisha B’Av itself is a full fast day, just like Yom Kippur. In addition to refraining from eating and drinking, bathing, anointing oneself, wearing leather shoes and marital relations are prohibited.

The healing process from Tisha B’Av begins almost immediately. Just six days later, on the 15th of Av, we observe *Tu B’Av*. According to the Mishnah, “There were no holidays so joyous for the Jewish people as the 15th of Av and Yom HaKippurim.” On this day, unmarried Jewish women would borrow white dresses and dance in the fields, where single men would be waiting for them. Additionally, on this day in Biblical times, various bans against marrying between tribes were lifted.
Women to Celebrate

Rachel the Matriarch – Rachel has become associated with the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av because of an often-cited Midrash. The Midrash comments on Jeremiah’s prophecy which says: “A cry is heard in Ramah – wailing, bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children who are gone” (Jeremiah 31:14). The Midrash wonders why Rachel is buried in Bethlehem when all of the other patriarchs and matriarchs are buried in the Cave of Machpela in Hebron. The Midrash explains that as the Jews were being exiled after the destruction of the first Temple, all of the matriarchs and patriarchs petitioned God that the exile should not be permanent, but none of them succeeded. Rachel then argued that when she was set to marry Jacob, her father Lavan plotted to switch her with her sister Leah. Rachel could have sabotaged the plan but chose not to so as not to embarrass her sister. God agreed that the exile would not be permanent because of Rachel’s unselfish act.

Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Justine Wise Polier – 5 Av 5747 (July 31, 1987). The first woman justice in New York. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wise/

Lillian Wald – 28 Av 5700 (September 1, 1940). Internationally recognized activist for public health nursing, housing reform, suffrage, world peace, and the rights of women, children, immigrants and working people. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/wald/

Text Studies

Tisha B’Av Text Study – Learn some traditional explanations of Tisha B’Av.

Tisha B’Av Guide – Learn more about the practices and traditions of Tisha B’Av.

Oh Jerusalem: A Conversation – Explore your own vision of Jerusalem through these evocative verses. This conversation weaves together three texts: a Psalm that includes a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, the Babylonian Talmud, and Midrash Esther Rabba.

Activities

Clothing Drive – On Tu B’Av, the Jewish women would all trade clothes so no one would be dressed more nicely than anyone else as they went to dance in the field. In the spirit of Tu B’Av, conduct a clothing drive for the poor.

Conversations

Does it upset you that the Temple is no longer standing in Jerusalem? How do you relate to the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B’Av?
Love and Marriage – In the spirit of Tu B’Av, discuss your views on love and marriage.
Elul
אלול

Mazal/Constellation
Young Child.

Significance of the Month

Elul, the sixth month of the Jewish calendar, marks the beginning of our preparation for the High Holidays. We begin the process of repentance, or Teshuva. The Shofar is blown every morning (except Shabbat) as a wake-up call to start doing Teshuva. The rabbis teach that the letters of the name Elul stand for the verse in the Song of Songs Ani L’Dodi ve-Dodi Li “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3). According to the majority opinion in the Mishnah, Rosh Chodesh Elul is one of the four New Year days during the Jewish year. It marks the new year for counting of animal tithes.

Holidays

There are no holidays in Elul. It is marked by our preparations for the High Holidays. Beginning with Rosh Chodesh Elul through Sukkot, we recite Psalm 27 after daily morning and evening prayers. Starting the Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah, selichot, or special penitential prayers are said every night until Yom Kippur. These prayers should ideally be said very late at night, which is considered a time of mercy.

Women to Celebrate

Beruriah – She is a fascinating figure in the Talmud and Rabbinic literature. Beruriah was married to the great sage Rabbi Meir, but she achieved prominence in her own right for her vast knowledge and strong personality. In one famous Talmudic passage, Beruriah chastises her husband who prayed for the demise of hooligans who were bothering him. Rather, she told him to pray that they change their ways. This passage is often cited when discussing Teshuva and repentance. For more on Beruriah, see Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 10a.

Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Rebecca Gratz – 20 Elul 5629 (August 27, 1869). Philanthropist who founded the first American Jewish institutions run by women. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/gratz/

Lane Bryant Malsin (Lena Himmelstein) – 26 Elul 5711 (September 29, 1951). Pioneer in women’s fashion. She invented maternity clothing and founded Lane Bryant stores
that now specialize in plus sizes. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.ajhs.org/publications/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=283

Text Studies

**Teshuva and the Dilemma of Free Will** – As we begin the process of Teshuva (repentance) in the month of Elul, this text study presents some classical sources regarding the dilemma of free will.

Activities

**Set goals for the Rosh Chodesh group** – Elul is the month that most Rosh Chodesh groups will meet for the first time. During the first meeting it is important to establish goals for the group. You may want to use Hillel’s text study “Blessed be Your Coming, Blessed be Your Going.”

**Wake Up Your Soul** – According to Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish philosophers of all time, the shofar that we blow every day during Elul serves as a spiritual alarm clock. He writes that the blowing of the Shofar sends the following message: “Wake up slumberers from your sleep and sleepers from your sleep: Examine your deeds, repent, and remember your Creator.” In the spirit of Maimonides, have everyone in the group make their own clocks. Clock-making kits can be purchased on the Internet or at local craft stores.

**Start the Year Right: Design a Calendar** – During Elul we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, the upcoming Jewish New Year. Elul also falls near the beginning of the school year. A perfect activity to mark the beginning of a new year is to design calendars. Most word processing software has templates to design calendars. Have Jewish calendars available so you can mark Jewish holidays and Rosh Chodesh.

Conversations

**Teshuva/Repentance** – Central to the month of Elul is *teshuva*, the process of repentance. Discuss how you engage in this process and how you prepare for the upcoming new year.

**Welcome Back to School** – Elul is the month that most Rosh Chodesh groups will meet for the first time. Discuss members’ hopes and aspirations for the new school year. Share and reflect on what everyone did over summer break.
Tishrei

Mazal/Constellation

Scales, symbolizing the fact that individuals and the world are judged during this month.

Significance of the Month

Although it is the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, Tishrei feels like the beginning of a new year. Tishrei is the month richest with Jewish holidays. During this month individuals and the world are judged. Tishrei also marks the harvest season and the beginning of the rain season. Tishrei is the only month in which Rosh Chodesh is not formally observed, since the first of Tishrei is Rosh Hashana.

Holidays

Tishrei contains more holidays than any other month in the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, is on the first and second of Tishrei. According to the Mishnah, Rosh Hashana is the New Year for the counting of calendar years, Sabbatical and Jubilee years, planting, and vegetables. Furthermore, all inhabitants of the world are judged on Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana, the shofar is sounded 100 times each day (unless it is Shabbat). On the second day of Rosh Hashana, Tashlich, a symbolic casting away of our sins, is said next to flowing water. Traditionally, we eat food that symbolizes the new year and our wishes that it should be sweet and healthy. Apples and honey are an old-time favorite. The days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur are known as the Ten Days of Repentance.

The day after Rosh Hashana, the 3rd of Tishrei is called Tzom Gedaliah, or the Fast of Gedaliah. After the First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, a small Jewish community remained in the Land of Israel with Gedaliah ben Achikam serving as governor. This small community was the last vestige of Jewish autonomy. Gedaliah was assassinated by a fellow Jew hired by the King of Ammon.

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the 10th of Tishrei, is the most holy day in the Jewish calendar. On this day, spent fasting and praying we receive atonement for all of our sins.

Sukkot, the Fall Harvest festival falls on the 15th of Tishrei. On this joyous holiday we leave the comforts of our homes and dwell in Sukkot, or temporary huts. Along with dwelling in the sukkah, we celebrate by lifting and shaking the four species - a palm branch, three branches of myrtle, two willow branches and a citron – commonly referred to as lulav and etrog.
**Shemini Atzeret** occurs immediately after Sukkot, on the 22rd of Tishrei. It is considered its own holiday, but is often associated with Sukkot. On Shemini Atzeret the world is judged for water, and we say special prayers asking for rain. Shemini Atzeret also focuses on God’s special relationship between the Jewish people and God.

**Simchat Torah** is celebrated the same day as Shemini Atzeret in Israel and by Reform Jews. Outside of Israel, where Jewish legal tradition requires that two days be kept, Simchat Torah occurs on the day following Shemini Atzeret. On Simchat Torah we celebrate the completion of the yearly cycle of Torah reading and begin it anew. We mark our celebration by dancing and singing with the Torah. There is a tradition that everyone is called up the Torah on Simchat Torah to recite the Torah blessings, in order to celebrate the Torah and every Jew's relationship to it.

**Women to Celebrate**

**Eve** – The first woman. We read about Eve in the section of the Torah that deals with the creation of humans.

**Lilith** – She is referred to in Isaiah 34:14. Not much is known about Lilith and there are several conflicting traditions about Lilith in Jewish sources. The Talmud identifies Lilith as wild-haired and winged creature with nymphomaniac tendencies; and as the mother of demons. The Alphabet of Ben Sirah, which was probably written some time between 600-1000 CE identifies her as Adam’s first wife and the predecessor of Eve. Midrashic literature depict her as a child slayer. Lilith has been claimed as a hero by modern feminists. To learn more about Lilith, go to [http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lilithmag.com%2Fresources%2Flilithsoures.shtml](http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.lilithmag.com%2Fresources%2Flilithsoures.shtml)

**Sarah the Matriarch** – During Tishei we blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashana. Many Jewish sources connect the Shofar with Sarah. For more see the text study “Sarah is the Shofar” below.

**Famous Women’s Yahrzeits**

**Ray Frank** – 8 Tishrei 5709 (October 10, 1948). The first woman to preach publicly from a pulpit, she was known as “the Girl Rabbi of the Golden West.” She was never ordained as a rabbi, but paved the way for women to serve as rabbis and other leadership positions. For more details about her life and achievements, go to [http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/frank/](http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/frank/).

**Beatrice Alexander** – 14 Tishrei 5751 (October 3, 1990). The founder of The Alexander Doll Company, she was known as the “First Lady of Dolls.” From the obscurity of an immigrant neighborhood, she became one of the foremost female entrepreneurs of the Twentieth Century. For more details about her life and achievements, go to [http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/alexander/](http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/alexander/)
**Text Studies**

**Sarah is the Shofar** – The following text study connects Sarah our Matriarch with the shofar that is sounded on Rosh Hashana.

**Teshuva & the Dilemma of Free Will** – The process of Teshuva (repentance) intensifies greatly with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This text study presents some classical sources regarding the dilemma of free will.

**Into the Mystic** – On Sukkot there is a Kabalistic tradition to invite different Ushpizin, or historical guests, into the Sukkah. Learn about this tradition and think of which other guests from Jewish history you would like to invite.

**Activities**

**Set goals for the Rosh Chodesh group** – Tishrei is the month that many Rosh Chodesh groups will meet for the first time. During the first meeting it is important to establish goals for the group. You may want to use Hillel’s text study “Blessed be Your Coming, Blessed be Your Going.”

**Make decorations for the Sukkah** – Your decorations may include historical women that you would like to invite into the Sukkah. For more on this see the text study “Into the Mystic.”

**Tashlich** – On Rosh Hashana this ritual is performed by running water and is a chance to metaphorically cast away our sins from the previous year. Have each woman take scraps of paper and write down either a sin or regret from the past year. As a collective, these scraps of paper are burned together. Then, each woman should construct and decorate a “Hope Box,” in which she will record her hopes and wishes for each new month.

**Symbols for the New Year** – We are familiar with the tradition to eat apples and honey to symbolize a sweet New Year. It is customary to be inventive with food puns on Rosh Hashanah and customize a blessing that can belong uniquely to the person who expresses it. Think of your own food puns that express your wishes and blessings to the group for the New Year.

**Conversations**

**The High Holidays** – What do Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur mean to you? How do you celebrate them? How do you prepare for them?

**Thanksgiving a Little Bit Early** – Sukkot is the Jewish Thanksgiving. In ancient times during this holiday Jews would rejoice over all that God had provided for them. Talk about those things for which you are thankful. How do you express your gratitude?
Welcome Back to School – Tishrei is the month that many Rosh Chodesh groups will meet for the first time. Discuss members’ hopes and aspirations for the new school year. Share and reflect on what everyone did over summer break.
Cheshvan חשון

Mazal/Constellation

Scorpion.

Significance of the Month

Cheshvan, the eighth month of the Jewish calendar, is often referred to as *Mar Cheshvan* ("Bitter Cheshvan") because it has no holidays. In Israel the rainy season, which marks the onset of winter, begins in Cheshvan.

Holidays

There are no holidays in Cheshvan. However, two tragic events occurred during this month. **Kristalnacht**, the Night of Broken Glass, and the beginning of the Holocaust, was on 15 Cheshvan 5699 (1938). In 5756 (1995), **Yitzhak Rabin**, the Prime Minister of Israel, was assassinated on 12 Cheshvan.

Women to Celebrate

**The Matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah** – The weekly Torah readings during the month of Cheshvan focus on the stories of our Matriarchs and Patriarchs.

**Famous Women’s Yahrzeits**

**Rachel our Matriarch** – 11 Cheshvan. The favorite wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Rachel is buried in the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem.

**Hannah Senesh** – 20 Cheshvan 5705 (November 6, 1944). A paratrooper in the British Army, Hannah helped to organize Partisan efforts in Yugoslavia and Hungary. She was captured by the Nazis who tortured and killed her. Hannah wrote poetry that is often read and sung in Holocaust memorial services. For more details about her life and achievements, go to www.hannahsenesh.org.il

**Rachel Yanait Ben-Tzvi** – 24 Cheshvan 5740 (November 14, 1979). Rachel Yanait Ben Tzvi immigrated to what was then Turkish Palestine as a young pioneer in 1908. She became one of the leading activists in the Zionist movement and the Haganah (the pre-state, Jewish military organization) and married Yitzhak Ben Tzvi, who was later elected second president of Israel.
Text Studies

Hannah and Prayer – In this month of celebrating the matriarch, learn about another Biblical woman who has had a profound influence on us. Our way of prayer is modeled after Hannah, Samuel the Prophet’s mother.

Activities

Celebrating the Mundane – Cheshvan is best known for its lack of holidays. How do we find meaning in the ordinary? Discuss this question and create ways to celebrate the ordinary.

In her memoirs, Rachel Yanait Ben-Tzvi describes her first trip to Jerusalem a short while after arriving in the country:

Light-drenched memories of my first days in Jerusalem fill my heart. I board the train to Jerusalem, and from the first moment, I am enveloped in an indescribable feeling of exaltation. In the same train car with me sits an Orthodox Jew of the old settlement of Jerusalem in his traditional dress, and next to him an Arab, resplendent in black with a red tarbush on his head, his entire bearing signifying his importance. . . . Suddenly a Jew sitting behind me addresses me: "Why are you so happy?" he asks, "The Effendi asks why you are so happy." He explains the reason for my happiness to the Effendi, that I am going up to Jerusalem, and everyone knows that a Jew's heart is happy when he goes up to Jerusalem. (Rahel Yana'it Ben Tzvi, Anu Olim)

Have each woman write a description of his or her favorite place and then discuss what makes a person happy.

Conversations

Jewish Women Role Models – During this month when we read about the matriarchs, discuss your Jewish women role models and how they have influenced you.

Peace – Yitzhak Rabin, the late Prime Minister of Israel who was assassinated during the month of Cheshvan, left a legacy of peace. Discuss your definition of and vision for peace.
Kislev

Mazal/Constellation

Arching bow. Some say that God showed Noah a rainbow after the flood in the month of Kislev.

Significance of the Month

Kislev is the ninth month of the Jewish calendar. It occurs during the winter, and often the winter solstice takes place during Kislev.

Holidays

Chanukah begins on the 25th day of Kislev. It lasts for eight days, and therefore carries over into the next month of Tevet. On Chanukah we celebrate the Hasmoneans’ victory over the Greeks and the rededication of the Temple, which had been defiled. The Hasmoneans found only enough ritually pure oil to burn for one day, but a miracle happened and it lasted eight days until they could make more oil. We celebrate by lighting the Chanukah Menorah beginning with one candle and then adding one each night, culminating with eight candles on the final night of Chanukah. Traditional Chanukah foods include potato pancakes, donuts, and other things fried in oil.

Women to Celebrate

Judith – The apocryphal Book of Judith is not included in the Hebrew Bible, but is mentioned in Jewish sources, some of which associate Judith with the holiday of Chanukah.

Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

Emma Lazarus – 3 Kislev 5648 (November 19, 1887). One of the first successful Jewish American authors, her poem “The New Colossus” is inscribed on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/lazarus/

Bobbie Rosenfeld – 4 Kislev 5730 (November 14, 1969). A Canadian athlete who gained international fame for her performance in track at the 1928 Olympics. Though her athletic career was cut short by arthritis, Rosenfeld was instrumental in paving the way for women’s participation in sports. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/rosenfeld/
Golda Meir – 8 Kislev 5739 (December 8, 1978). On March 7, 1969, Meir was nominated by the Labor Party to be Israel’s first woman Prime Minister. She held this esteemed position until 1974. At the time of her appointment, Meir was the world’s third woman Prime Minister. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/meir.html.

Hannah Greenbaum Solomon – 28 Kislev 5703 (December 7, 1942). Founder of the National Council of Jewish Women, the first national association of Jewish women. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/solomon/

Text Studies

Judith: A Canukah Heroine – The apocryphal Book of Judith is not included in the Hebrew Bible, but is mentioned in Jewish sources, some of which associate Judith with the holiday of Chanukah.

Activities

Wine and Cheese Party – Celebrate Judith, who according to some versions of her story, fed the Assyrian governor cheese and then killed him. Combine this activity with the text study “Judith: A Chanukah Heroine.”

Self-Defense Class – Following the model of Judith, who saved the Jewish people with her strength and bravery, empower women to fend for themselves.

Dreidel – Everyone’s favorite Chanukah gambling game!

Conversations

End of the Semester – On most campuses Kislev marks the end of the semester and the beginning of winter break. Reflect on the semester and discuss plans for the upcoming break. Give blessings to the group as they prepare for finals.

Sports – Bobbie Rosenfeld, whose yahrzeit we observe this month, is one of the most accomplished female athletes ever. Discuss what sports, competition, and sportsmanship mean to you and what their role in an ideal society should be? Do you agree with the stereotype that girls play with dolls and boys play with balls?

Immigration – During Kislev we celebrate Emma Lazarus, whose poem “The New Colossus” is inscribed on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty. Have a conversation on the family histories of members of the Rosh Chodesh group. Where do members’ families come from? Have any members of the group emigrated from a different country? What was their experience like? What does America mean to you?
You may want to start the conversation by reading “The New Colossus.”

**The New Colossus**  
By Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she With silent lips.  
"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"
Tevet טבת

Mazal/Constellation

Goat.

Significance of the Month

Rosh Chodesh Tevet always falls during the holiday of Chanukah. Tevet is the tenth month of the Jewish calendar.

Holidays

Chanukah, the celebration of the Jews’ victory over the Greeks and the rededication of the Temple, which begins on the 25th of Kislev, carries over into the first few days of Tevet. We celebrate by lighting Chanukah Menorah beginning with one candle and then adding one each night, culminating with eight candles on the final night of Chanukah. Traditional Chanukah foods include potato pancakes, donuts, and other things fried in oil.

The Tenth of Tevet is a fast day on which the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem during the First Temple Period. The siege lasted for three years and was the “beginning of the end” of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews. In modern Israel the Tenth of Tevet has been designated as Yom haKaddish haKlali, the day on which we mourn those whose date or place of death is not known. Many people use this day to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

Women to Celebrate

Judith – The apocryphal Book of Judith is not included in the Hebrew Bible, but is mentioned in Jewish sources, some of which associate Judith with the holiday of Chanukah.

Serach bat Asher – The daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob and namesake of one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. Midrashic literature links Serach to the Exodus story and the rest of Jewish history. Serach offers a wonderful female character to incorporate into the Passover story. As her character is developed in the Midrashic sources, she also raises important questions about Jewish memory.

Dina – During Tevet we usually read the Torah portions toward the end of the Book of Genesis. One of the characters that we encounter is Dina, the daughter of Jacob and Leah. One of the most troubling stories in the Bible is the story of the rape of Dina by Shechem, and the subsequent reaction of Jacob and his other sons. This episode has recently been reexamined by Anita Diamant’s popular book The Red Tent. To learn more
Famous Women’s Yahrzeits

**Barbara Myerhoff** – 14 Tevet 5745 (January 7, 1985). Renowned anthropologist whose work shaped the anthropological study of ritual and of life histories. Myerhoff redefined academic and public perceptions of the elderly and was a pioneer in her scholarship on women and religion. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/myerhoff/


Text Studies

**Judith: A Chanukah Heroine** – The apocryphal Book of Judith is not included in the Hebrew Bible, but is mentioned in Jewish sources, some of which associate Judith with the holiday of Chanukah.

**Serach bat Asher** – Learn more about the daughter of Asher, one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. She receives very little mention in the Bible, but is depicted extensively in Midrashic literature, which says that Serach never died. Serach offers a wonderful female character to incorporate into the Passover story. As her character is developed in the Midrashic sources, she also raises important questions about Jewish memory

**Eshet Chayil** – The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, whose yahrzeit is observed this month, was a pioneer in the study of women and religion. The following is a post-modern Talmud page, based on *Eshet Chayil*, the Bible’s portrayal of the ideal Jewish woman. This Talmud page examines the tensions and sparks between the Eshet Chayil text (Proverbs 31:10-31), traditional Jewish commentary, and the voices of modern "Women of Valor." Join Beruriah, Bella Abzug, and several others in a dynamic conversation about the meaning and impact of a woman of "chayil."

Activities

**Dreidel** – Everyone’s favorite Chanukah gambling game!

**Red Tent Book Discussion**– Anita Diamant’s wildly popular historical-fictional account of Dina’s story and experience, which deals with issues of womanhood and familial relationships in Biblical times. In preparation for this month’s meeting have everyone read the book and come prepared to discuss it. You may want to invite a university faculty member to lead the discussion.
Self-Defense/Rape Prevention Class – The story of Dina in the weekly Torah portion serves as a yearly reminder of the danger of rape and domestic violence against women. Bring in an expert to teach members of the group self-defense methods and to discuss domestic violence awareness. Many universities have groups on campus that can help to facilitate this workshop. (Try contacting campus police or the women’s resource center.)

Conversations

Women and Religion – During Tevet we celebrate the anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, who was a pioneer in scholarship on women and religion. Have a discussion about women’s role in religion in general and Judaism in particular. Are there distinct roles for women and men? Should there be?
Shevat שבט

Mazal/Constellation

A vessel filled with water.

Significance of the Month

Shevat is the 11th month of the Jewish calendar. Moses began explicating the Book of Deuteronomy, his final address to the Children of Israel, on Rosh Chodesh Shevat. Shevat contains the final new year of the Jewish calendar, the New Year for Trees. The House of Shammai maintains that this New Year occurs on the first of Shevat, while the House of Hillel (which we follow) holds that it is on the 15th.

Holidays

Tu B’Shevat, the Jewish New Year for Trees is on the 15th of Shevat. This holiday was significantly developed by the Kabbalists of 16th Century Safed who saw it as a way to celebrate the Kabbalistic understanding of the world, which is best symbolized by nature. To celebrate Tu B’Shevat, the kabbalists developed a Tu B’Shevat seder in which we eat many types of fruit and recognize the different kabbalistic realms through which our world exists. The holiday was further developed by the Zionist movement which saw in the New Year for Trees a natural opportunity to promote its goal of developing the Land of Israel.

Shabbat Shira, the Shabbat on which we read the Torah portion Beshalach from the Torah, which contains the Song of the Sea, always falls during the month of Shevat. This portion also contains the Song of Miriam in which Miriam leads the Israelite women in singing and dancing to celebrate their salvation at the sea. The haftarah for this portion contains the song of another woman leader – Deborah the Prophetess. Deborah’s song celebrates the victory of the Israelites over the Canaanites and Sisra their general. Sisra was killed by another famed Jewish woman, Yael.

Women to Celebrate

Miriam – Miriam is one of seven prophetesses in our tradition. Miriam figures prominently in the Passover story and in the Israelites’ celebration at the Red Sea, where she led the Israelite women in song and dancing. According to tradition, the Children of Israel had water in the desert for 40 years because of Miriam. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Weekly_Torah_Commentary/hukkat_artson5762.htm
**Deborah** – She was a prophetess and one of the earliest Judges. She would sit under a palm tree known as “the Palm of Deborah” and the Children of Israel would come to her for judgment. She helped to lead the war against the Yavin, the King of Canaan. Upon the Israelites’ victory Deborah composed a victory song known as the Song of Deborah. To learn more about Deborah see the Book of Judges, chapters 4 and 5.

**Yael** – In Deborah’s battle against the Canaanites, the Canaanite general was Sisra. He escaped the battlefield and sought refuge in Yael’s tent. Yael invited him in and told him that she would provide cover for him from the pursuing Israelite army. She then fed Sisra warm milk so he would fall asleep. When he was sleeping Yael drove a tent peg through Sisra’s skull, thereby finalizing the Israelites’ victory.

**Famous Women’s Yahrzeits**

**Henrietta Szold** – 29 Shevat 5705 (February 12, 1945). Founder of Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization. Hadassah is the largest Jewish organization in America. Szold was a forerunner of Jewish women’s liberation. She was granted permission to study Jewish texts at the then male-only Jewish Theological Seminary. When her mother died in 1916 Henrietta refused the offer of a family friend to say the mourners’ Kaddish on her behalf, opting instead to say it for herself. Szold spent a large part of her life overseeing Hadassah’s operations in Palestine. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/szold/

**Text Studies**

**Trees, Life, & War** – In discussing the rules of war, the Torah makes a statement comparing humans to the trees of the field. What is the connection? This modern Talmud page examines the value of trees in the Torah and subsequent traditional commentaries.

**Parshat Beshalach Archives** – The month of Shevat always contains the Shabbat on which we read Parshat Beshalach, which includes the Song of the Sea and Miriam’s Song. The haftarah is about Deborah’s victory over the Canaanites and the song that she composed. Hillel’s Torah Portion Archives contains many interesting text studies that deal with these topics.

**Activities**

**Tu B’Shevat Seder** – The Kabbalists of 16th Century Safed developed the Tu B’Shevat seder as a unique way to celebrate the Jewish New Year for Trees. The Seder involves drinking four cups of wine and eating fruit that represent different realms of creation and different universes in the Kabbalists’ understanding of the world. Tu B’Shevat seders have been more recently influenced by the rise of Zionism and environmentalism. Hillel’s Tu B’Shevat seder provides an interactive and engaging format to discover Tu B’Shevat.
**Composing our Own Songs** – In Shevat we celebrate the songs of two Biblical women – Miriam and Deborah. Take time to compose your own song. It has been noted that song functions as the voice that gives life to a person’s uniqueness. Think of how you would compose your own song. What style of music would it be? What kinds of instruments would you use? What would the words or themes be?

**Conversations**

**Judaism and the environment** – Tu B’Shevat has become a holiday that celebrates Judaism’s connection to the environment. How do you relate to the environment? Do your Jewish values impact this at all?

**Song & Music** – One of the prevalent themes of Shevat is song – we read and celebrate the songs of Miriam and Deborah. Discuss your feelings about song and music. Do you express yourself musically? Through poetry? What kind of music do you listen to? Do you listen to different music depending on your mood?
Adar נב

Mazal/Constellation

Two fish.

Significance of the Month

Adar is the 12th and final month of the Jewish calendar. The Talmud teaches, “When the month of Adar comes we increase our happiness.” Adar is known for its frivolity and joy, because in it we celebrate the holiday of Purim and we begin preparations for Passover. Adar is so fun that during a leap year we get to do it twice.

To compensate for the fact that the lunar year is eleven days shorter than the solar calendar, the rabbis developed a way to include an extra month in the year to ensure that the months fell in their proper season. During a leap year, the month of Adar is repeated and we observe Adar I and Adar II. In this situation, Purim falls during Adar II.

Holidays

Adar contains a number of special Shabbatot on which special Torah portions and haftarot are read. The Shabbat immediately before Rosh Chodesh Adar is known as Shabbat Shekalim, on which we learn about the Half-Shekel that every Jew had to donate to the Temple. The Shabbat before Purim is called Shabbat Zachor (Remember) on which we read of the atrocities done to the Israelites by the nation Amalek, and the commandment to erase all memory of Amalek. Haman, the villain of the Purim story, is descended from Amalek. The Shabbat after Purim is known as Shabbat Parah, and we read about the ritual of the Red Heifer which purified people who had become ritually impure through contact with the dead.

The Fast of Esther is on the 13th of Adar. This day commemorates the fast that Esther imposed on the Jews of Shushan before she beseeched King Achashverosh to save the Jews from Haman.

Purim falls on the 14th of Adar and celebrates the heroine Queen Esther, who saved the Jews of Persia from the evil Haman. Purim is the holiday of hidden miracles, on which we read the book of Esther. Jews wear costumes on Purim to show that like the Book of Esther, one must go beyond the surface appearance to gain a true understanding. We are commanded to give charity to the poor, send packages of food to friends and family and to have a festive meal.

Women to Celebrate
**Vashti** – Queen of Persia, who refuses to dance for the King at his party, resulting in her subsequent exile. Though often overlooked in the Purim story, she is one of the earliest champions of women’s rights.

**Esther** – Vashti’s successor as Queen of Persia and heroine of the Purim story. She used her power as the Queen of Persia to save the Jewish people of Persia from certain death. Esther is a model of grace, dignity, courage, and profound beauty.

**Famous Women’s Yahrzeits**

**Gertrude Elion** – 5 Adar 5759 (February 21, 1999). Chemist who was influential in creating drugs to cure many diseases, including Leukemia, herpes, gout, and immunity disorders. She was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize in Medicine and she was inducted to the Inventors Hall of Fame and the National Women’s Hall of Fame. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/elion/

**Anna Ticho** – 12 Adar 5740 (February 29, 1980). Israeli painter, famous for her etchings of her beloved Jerusalem landscape. Her house has become a Jerusalem landmark. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.go-out.com/ticho/houseEng.html

**Anna Sokolow** – 22 Adar 5760 (March 29, 2000). Dancer and choreographer who was influential in the development of Modern Dance. Her philosophy as a choreographer led her to create works of dramatic contemporary imagery, showing both the lyric and stark aspects of human experience. For more details about her life and achievements, go to http://www.jwa.org/exhibits/sokolow/

**Text Studies**

**Purim Guide** – This resource guide contains several text studies about different aspects of Purim, as well as suggested Purim programs.

**Activities**

**Mask Making** – On Purim, the holiday of hidden miracles, we wear masks to show that things are never as they seem. To gain a true understanding, we must go beyond the surface. Make masks to wear for Purim. This activity can be combined with a conversation on “The Masks We Wear.”

**Jerusalem Landscape Painting** – Celebrate Anna Ticho by painting landscapes of Jerusalem.

**Interpretative Dance** – In the spirit of Anna Sokolow, run an interpretative dance workshop. You may want to invite a dance group from campus to this event.
**Matanot La-Evyonim & Mishloach Manot Making** – On Purim there is a special commandment to give *matanot la-evyonim*, gifts to the poor. Another commandment of Purim is to give *mishloach manot*, baskets of food, to friends and family. Combine these two commandments by preparing food baskets for the poor.

**Conversations**

**The Masks We Wear** – Purim is the holiday of hidden miracles. On it we wear masks and costumes to show that things are never as they seem on the surface. Have a conversation where you discuss the metaphorical masks that members of the group feel they wear in their daily lives. Does society force us to “wear masks” or to cover up our true identity?

**Roles of Women in the Workplace Throughout History** – During Adar we celebrate several women who were revolutionaries in their field. Beginning with Queen Esther who broke all precedent in her proactive efforts to save the Jewish people, to Gertrude Elion, the Nobel Prize winning chemist who faced severe career obstacles because she was a woman. Are there specific roles for women in the workplace? Do women still face obstacles? What are the career goals of members of the group?

**Combating Evil: Understanding the Commandment to Obliterate the Nation of Amalek** – On Shabbat Zachor we read about the Biblical commandment to destroy the nation of Amalek and to erase their memory. Does this sound like the appropriate way to deal with one’s enemies? Is it possible for an entire nation to be corrupt? What is the proper way to deal with evil?