



Congregation Ahavath Sholom

The Creative Spirit Dwells Here

THE CAS NEWSLETTER

October 2025

Upcoming services and events

Wednesday, October 1 at 7:00 PM: Erev Yom Kippur / Kol Nidre at Berkshire South Regional Community Center

Thursday, October 2 at 10:00 AM: Yom Kippur at Berkshire South Regional Community Center
at 5:00 PM: Neilah at Berkshire South Regional Community Center, followed by Break Fast

Sunday, October 5 at 11:00 AM: Decorate the Sukkah at the synagogue
[Monday, October 6 at 11:00 AM: Rain date]

Wednesday, October 8 at 10:00 AM: Café Kehillah with Rabbi Jennifer Rudin via Zoom

Friday, October 10 at 5:00 PM: Kabbalat Shabbat with Kiddush in the Sukkah

Sunday, October 12 at 11:00 AM: Simchat Torah Celebration and Learning

Monday, October 13 at 7:00 PM: Photography Workshop with Arthur Hillman via Zoom

Monday, October 20 at 12:00 AM: Memoir Workshop with Barbara Janoff via Zoom
at 5:00 PM: CAS Board Meeting

Wednesday, October 22 at 10:00 AM: Café Kehillah with Rabbi Jennifer Rudin via Zoom

Friday, October 31 at 5:00 PM: Kabbalat Shabbat / Rabbi Rudin's Installation / Dinner to follow services

Saturday, November 1 at 10:00 AM: Installation Weekend continues / Kiddush Lunch to follow Shabbat Services

Note: Unless indicated, all services & events take place at the synagogue at 15 North Street, Great Barrington

This month's newsletter features:

Rosh HaShanah Sermon from Rabbi Rudin

Yom Kippur Sermon from Rabi Rudin

Upcoming CAS October Events

CAS Receives Hadar Grant to Launch a Hadar Community Group

Rabbi Rudin's Installation

Community Gathering in Commemoration of October 7

Our new shed

October Creative Arts Workshops

October Yahrzeits

Donations

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Rosh HaShanah Sermon from Rabbi Rudin

When I was pregnant with my first daughter, I was given a red string by my Rebbetzin (the wife of my Rabbi), Mrs. Lindenthal. She had been in Israel and visited Rachel's Tomb—the resting place of our matriarch Rachel, wife of Jacob. While there, Mrs. Lindenthal wrapped a red string around the tomb seven times, as tradition teaches, imbuing it with protective. She cut the string into pieces and brought one back for me. Her instructions were simple: wear it throughout my pregnancy, then tie it on my daughter's crib for the first year of her life to guard against the evil eye, as my Grammy Dot would say, a *kein a hara*. It would keep both of us safe. And so, I did. I saved that string and used it again when my other daughters were born.

Since then, I've had a thing about wearing a red string. Maybe the string connects me to Rabbi and Mrs. Lindenthal, who I consider among my greatest mentors and teachers. Maybe the string reminds me of my daughters. Maybe it's my longing for some measure of protection in an unpredictable world. Whatever the reason, I feel better when I wear one. But there's a problem: they always break. Thin or thick, braided or clasped—it doesn't matter. Inevitably, the string frays and falls apart. My most recent one even had a little charm that said *ahavah*, "love." It lasted a month.

And maybe that's the point.

There's a concept in Buddhism called *anicca*—the idea that all things are impermanent. In Buddhism, brokenness isn't failure—it's a reminder to let go. Judaism, too, has this wisdom. Many Jewish homes in Israel are intentionally left unfinished—one piece of tile missing, one patch of plaster undone—as a way of remembering that only God creates wholeness. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, a Hassidic Rabbi, said it best, "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart". He meant that through pain, humility, and imperfection, our hearts open wider to love, to compassion, and to God. It is in our vulnerability and imperfection, according to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, where we can find spiritual wholeness. Leonard Cohen put it his own way in his song "Anthem": "There is a crack in everything—that's how the light gets in."

I have my own way of thinking about things that break. Whether it's a bracelet, a treasured knick-knack, or some other object in my home, when something breaks, my first instinct is to see it as meant to be—a sign that I no longer need that item in my life. But what about when what breaks is not a thing, but something deeper—an important relationship, a part of our community, or even our sense of security in the world? How are we to understand that kind of brokenness? And what does it mean to teach us?

This past year, in one unexpected moment, I felt that breaking in my own life. My father died, suddenly and traumatically. The rhythm of our conversations, the warmth of our connection, the steady presence of his love—broken. I did not want to let go. I still don't. And yet, somehow, even in this deep brokenness, I've found that love is still here. Changed, yes. But still here.

And we know this brokenness is not mine alone. Our world is so broken. Brokenness has, in fact, been an overarching theme of the past year. So many families torn apart in the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel. Hostages still in Gaza. Gazan families displaced, grieving, hungry. Israeli families unable to return home. Soldiers in danger, parents waiting for children to come back. The fractures of war are vast and devastating. And here at home, we feel the cracks too. Political polarization has made enemies of friends, divided families, and weakened the bonds that once held us together. Immigrants seeking safety meet suspicion and rejection. Truth and civility—once the bedrock of public life—no longer feel sacred. The institutions we trusted, the sense of stability we once carried, are no longer sacred or guaranteed. The toll of this brokenness will be felt for generations to come. And yet, in this breaking, we are called to ask: what is truly sacred? What must we hold onto with all our strength, and what must we release, so that something more whole can emerge?

And yet, in all of this brokenness—personal, communal, global—I return to that little red string. Fragile, impermanent, imperfect, always breaking. Every broken string I've worn reminds me that love is never destroyed—it changes form, it moves through us, and it calls us to act. And every time it breaks, I tie on a new one. Not because I believe it will erase the pain of loss, not because it can guarantee protection, but because it reminds me that even in the breaking, there is still connection, there is still memory, there is still love. The connection is not destroyed. Love endures. Memory holds. And brokenness can be a beginning.

What we need right now is the courage to sit with our brokenness, to learn from it, and to let the light come through the cracks. Then, we can be partners with God in the sacred work of mending—stitch by stitch, string by string, heart by heart.

So on this Rosh HaShanah, as we step into a new year—may we have the courage to face what is broken. May we let the light in through the cracks. And may we take up the sacred work of repair until we weave together a world that is more whole, more compassionate, and more filled with love.

Ken yehi ratzon—may it be so.

Yom Kippur Sermon from Rabbi Rudin: The Holiness of Conversation

We have journeyed from Rosh HaShanah through the ten days of teshuvah, returning, tefillah, reconnecting and tzedakah, repairing and now, here we are together on this holiest of days, Yom Kippur. The day when we stand before ourselves, as if looking in a mirror. The day when we stand with our community, holding one another's pain, misdeeds, and misgivings. And the day we stand before God, however we understand God, in reflection, having engaged in the work of repair. Today, I want to speak about something that feels both ancient and urgent: the importance of engaging in, remaining in, and seeking out conversation with people whose beliefs differ from our own.

It is no secret that we live in fractured times. I spoke about this on Rosh HaShanah. The facts speak for themselves. A September 2024 poll from the American Psychiatric Association revealed that 41% of adults have argued with a family member over a controversial political issue. The same poll revealed that 38% of American adults avoided family they disagreed with politically over the 2024 holidays. And, one in five American adults (21%) had become estranged from a family member because of political arguments. And this poll only addressed personal relationships. Can you imagine what the numbers would be if we included social relationships, work relationships, school relationships, and community relationships? I would venture to guess that everyone in this room holds the memory of a relationship broken by differences.

Often, when we encounter people whose perspectives challenge us, unsettle us, or even anger us, the temptation is to withdraw, to close the door, to decide that the distance is safer than the dialogue. But Jewish tradition calls us to something braver, deeper, and more sacred: the practice of staying in conversation.

In our tradition, words are not mere tools. Words are creation itself. In the very beginning of Bereisheet, Genesis, we read *“And God said, ‘Let there be light’—and there was light.”* The world itself came into being through speech. That means that every time we speak, every time we listen, every time we dare to engage across difference, we are participating in the ongoing work of creation. We are shaping and sustaining our shared world.

The rabbis of the Talmud understood this too. The Talmud, compiled between 200 and 500 CE is not a book of simple rulings; it is an ongoing conversation. In the Talmud, the voices of Rashi and Rambam, **Hillel and Shammai**, and so many others, argue, contradict, reinterpret—sometimes over the span of centuries. And yet, the contradictions are not edited out. They are preserved. Why? Because truth, in Judaism, is not a single, final decree. Truth emerges from dialogue. From the willingness to listen and to wrestle together.

Consider Hillel and Shammai. Their schools argued constantly—sometimes fiercely—over matters of Jewish law. For example, the school of Hillel believed the candles of the Chanukah menorah should increase each night, while the school of Shammai believed the Chanukiyah should be fully illuminated to start and should decrease with each lighting. And yet, the tradition teaches that their disagreements were *“I’shem shamayim”—for the sake of Heaven.* The Talmud even tells us that in the end, the law often followed Hillel’s school not only because of the content of their arguments, but because of *how* they argued: Hillel, we learn, spoke their opponents’ views before their own, honoring the perspective of the other even while disagreeing. This is not just a legal principle. It is an ethical model: humility, curiosity, respect.

In Pirkei Avot, ethics of our elders, we learn: *“Who is wise? One who learns from every person.”* Every person. Not just those who think like us, not just those whose views affirm our own, but everyone. That is the call of Jewish wisdom: to meet the other not with defensiveness, but with curiosity.

This is precisely the insight at the heart of **Resetting the Table**, an organization devoted to building meaningful dialogue across divides. Their work shows us that when people investigate their differences openly, they often emerge with more trust, more connection, more collaboration—even if their positions remain different. The simple act of listening deeply, with true curiosity and speaking authentically, can repair relationships that once felt broken and open the gates to meaningful communication.

On Yom Kippur, we confess not only the sins we have committed with our hands and hearts, but the sins of our speech. *“For the sin we have committed before You with the words of our mouths...”* We know the damage words can do. But today I want to remind us: words can also heal. Words can bridge. Words can create light.

So I want to offer us a challenge for the year ahead: when you encounter someone whose beliefs differ from yours—whether around the family table, in the community, or in society—choose curiosity over certainty. Ask: *What can I learn from this person? What story lies beneath their conviction?* Remember that each voice, no matter how different, is part of the chorus of creation.

The work is not easy. It requires humility, patience, and courage. But it is work that must be done for our sake, for our children’s sake and for the sake of generations to come. Every time we stay in the conversation, we imitate God, who spoke the world into being. Every time we speak thoughtfully and listen with curiosity, we participate in the sacred dialogue that has sustained our people for millennia.

On this Yom Kippur, may we rededicate ourselves to repairing our relationships through the courage to speak, the humility to listen, and the wisdom to remain in conversation.

G’mar Chatimah Tovah—may we all be sealed for a year of healing, hope, and authentic connection.

Upcoming CAS October Events





CAS Receives Hadar Grant to Launch a Hadar Community Group

We are thrilled to announce that **Congregation Ahavath Sholom** has been awarded a grant from Hadar (NYC) to form a Hadar Community Group right here in our community.

Hadar Community Groups are grassroots, peer-led gatherings that bring people together around the core Jewish values of **Torah (learning)**, **Avodah (prayer and song)**, and **Hesed (acts of kindness)**. Across the country, these groups are creating spaces for meaningful connection, spiritual growth, and vibrant Jewish living.

Here at Ahavath Sholom, this grant gives us the opportunity to build something truly special. Our group brings together **8 or more community members to meet at least 8 times a year**. Our **CAS Hadar Community Group will be led by Rabbi Rudin and Susan Hicks**, with a focus on creating a **Caring Community**. Through song, volunteer opportunities, cooking, and text study, we will build a structure for CAS members to support one another both in times of joy and in times of need.

If you would like to be part of the CAS Hadar Community Group, please contact **Susan Hicks** at tsbhicks@gmail.com. Together, we can create spaces of support, hope, and connection while joining a national grassroots movement working toward a **vision of an engaged, flourishing Jewish world**.

Rabbi Rudin's Installation

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Friday, October 31, 2025 at 5:00 PM

Dinner To Follow Kabbalat Shabbat

Saturday, November 1, 2025 at 10:00 AM

Kiddush Lunch To Follow Services

Congregation Ahavath Sholom

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Community Gathering in Commemoration of October 7th



Thursday, October 9 at 7:30 p.m. at Kneset Israel in Pittsfield

Join the Berkshire Jewish community, our local rabbis, and our special guest, Israeli singer-songwriter Micha Biton, for an evening of stories and images from those directly impacted by the October 7, 2023 terror attack. Rabbi Rudin will be helping to lead this event.

[Register and more information here](https://www.jewishberkshires.org/jewish-federation-of-the-berkshires-calendar/community-gathering-in-commemoration-of-october-7th)

or copy and paste <https://www.jewishberkshires.org/jewish-federation-of-the-berkshires-calendar/community-gathering-in-commemoration-of-october-7th> into your browser.

Our new shed

Many thanks to CAS member Jane Stepman for donating this shed to the synagogue.



October Creative Arts Workshops

The next Memoir Writing Workshop is scheduled for Monday, October 20th at noon via Zoom. Shared readings and short writing exercises. Each of these sessions is stand-alone. Please RSVP to Barbara Janoff at bjanoff1@gmail.com. Suggested donation to CAS is \$10 to support our Creative Arts Programs.

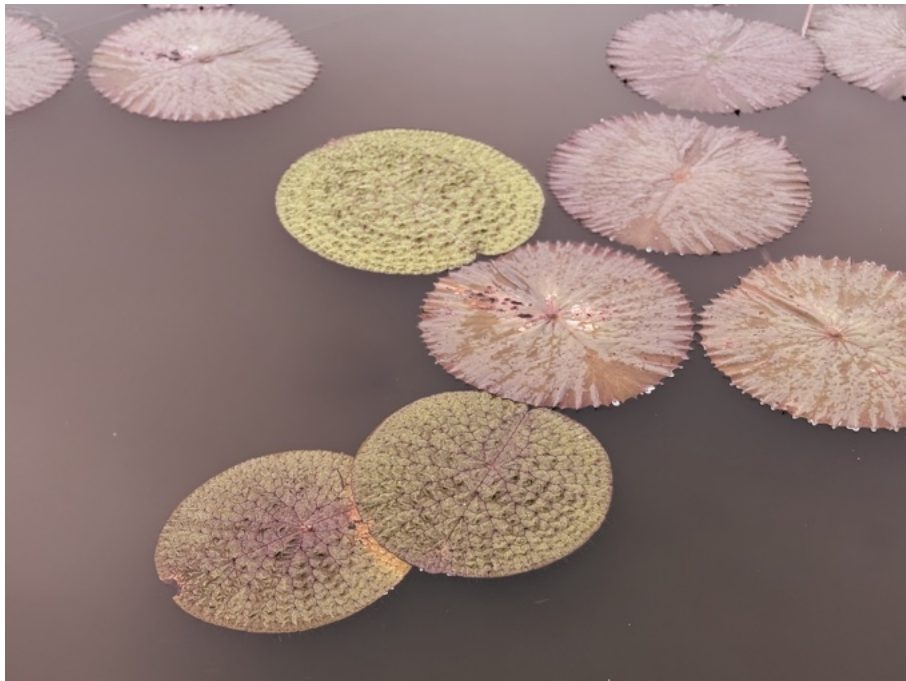
Barbara Janoff Ph.D. is retired from the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York in Manhattan, where she taught writing and literature. Her poetry and essays have appeared in a number of journals, including Communication Arts, Women's Work: The Journal of the Columbia College Women's Center and the Berkshire Review.



Photograph by Joshua Hoehne on Unsplash

The next Photography Workshop will take place on Monday, October 13, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom. Participants in the workshop can submit any images they would like discussed, regardless of subject matter or content, using phone or camera. They can also share their screen with the group. These workshops are stand-alone sessions, open to all. Please RSVP to arthurhillman54@gmail.com. Suggested donation to CAS is \$10 to support our Creative Arts Programs.

Photographer and printmaker Arthur Hillman has been exhibiting his prints for more than 60 years. He has delivered a variety of lectures and presentations on photography and printmaking, juried many exhibits, and was a founding member of the Berkshire Photography Group. He is Professor Emeritus, Photography, Printmaking and Design, Bard College at Simon's Rock.



Photograph by Barbara Janoff from the CAS Photography Workshop

Yahrzeits

Much of our experience of divine goodness, grace and love has come to us through those whose lives have touched our own.

	Hebrew date	Secular Date	This Year
Sara Brook	Tishrei 10 5773	Yom Kippur 2012	10/2
Anna Schwartz	Tishrei 10 5723	10/8/1962	10/2
Renee H. Yarmoff	Tishrei 17 5781	10/5/2020	10/9
Seymour Isserson	Tishrei 18 5747	10/21/1986	10/10
Mark Cohen	Tishrei 20 5778	10/10/2017	10/12
Nettie Eisenstein	Tishrei 20 5769	10/19/2008	10/12
James Mitsuda	Tishrei 22 5769	10/21/2008	10/14
Harry Aaron Orenstein	Tishrei 25 5757	10/8/1996	10/17
LeRoy Brecher	Cheshvan 1 5750	10/30/1989	10/23
Solomon Clarin	Cheshvan 3 5743	10/20/1982	10/25

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In honor of the Installation of Rabbi Jennifer Rudin

Linda Geffin
Susan and Tom Hicks
Debbie Slater
Alison Adams-Weinberg & Steve Weinberg

In honor of the marriage of Rabbi Rudin & Dr. Jeffrey Bornstein

Elaine Friedman
Susan & Tom Hicks
Arthur & Louise Hillman

In honor of Steve Weinberg – for a speedy recovery

Elaine Friedman

In honor of Helen Radin

Naomi Alson

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Laura Chekow

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Debbie Slater

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