

Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's year-long "Wisdom Around the World" series is free and open to the community. (Photo by Solomon Swerling)



Worldly and Wise

Baltimore Hebrew Congregation seizes the 'virtual moment' with 'Wisdom Around the World.'

By Caryn R. Sagal

Adult education has gone virtual — and *global* — at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pikesville synagogue recently launched "Wisdom Around the World," a year-long learning series accessible by computer or mobile device.

Airing on Thursdays — live at 1:30 p.m., with rebroadcasts at 7:30 in the evening — the series features presentations from Israel, Europe and the Americas. Clergy and experts in various fields of study lead discussions about everything from Judaism and Torah to history and arts and culture.

Jmore recently spoke with BHC's Rabbi Elissa Sachs-Kohen and congregant Sharon Mond, project coordinator of "Wisdom Around the World," about the series, which is free and open to the community.

Jmore: What was the inspiration for this series?



Rabbi Sachs-Kohen: The genesis of the program was the idea that we could make lemonade out of the lemons this pandemic

has handed us. Most of these teachers are people we would not otherwise have the resources to bring to Baltimore for a single learning session. It would be too expensive and the logistics would prohibit it.

In this virtual moment, though, we are able to gather 'wisdom around the world' and bring it right into people's homes. The range of topics, teachers and places is truly remarkable, and we're only halfway finished with the list.

What are the topics and who are the teachers?

Rabbi Sachs-Kohen: We've been reaching out as far — literally around the world — as we can in our networks to find interesting teachers who otherwise wouldn't be accessible to our community. So far, we've learned about graffiti in southern Tel Aviv, the prophet Elijah, and how Jews and Christians view scripture differently.

Looking forward, we're especially excited about Rabbi Ariel Kleiner from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Rabbi Susan Silverman, sister of comedian Sarah Silverman, from Jerusalem. We're also excited about topics

like "Being a Reiki Master in Israel" and "Jews in the Civil Rights Movement."

What technology platforms are used?



Sharon Mond: The 1:30 sessions are offered on Zoom and streamed on Facebook Live. Participants can ask questions directly

to the speaker or submit them through the chat feature. The rebroadcasts and archived programs are available on our website by clicking on 'Streamspot.'

Is registration required?

Sharon Mond: There's no registration. The Zoom login links are included in our weekly email to congregants and also available on the website. Additionally, anyone who follows us on Facebook will get a notice when we are streaming.

What's the typical attendance?

Sharon Mond: The live sessions usually draw around 30 viewers, largely adults over 60. This size audience allows for more interactive discussions. The rebroadcasts have drawn a few hundred attendees, adults of all ages.

Rabbi Sachs-Kohen: We intentionally scheduled the rebroadcasts to air at a time when younger adults might be able to break away from their other responsibilities — child care or work — to take in some wisdom.

Anything else you'd like people to know?

Sharon Mond: This program is an opportunity to gain knowledge from and interact directly with educators who we would not have access to without this virtual format. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. Viewers have really enjoyed and learned from the speakers to date.

Rabbi Sachs-Kohen: In such a turbulent year, it has been a blessing to find bright spots and opportunities. 'Wisdom Around the World' has been one of those. Learning from a tremendously diverse panel of teachers about a wide range of subjects and disciplines is not always possible IRL [in real life]. 📍

For a schedule of upcoming sessions, visit baltimorehebrew.org/wisdom.

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