

# Vitalizing Community Outreach: The Croll Center for Jewish Learning and Culture

*“Al tifrosh min ha-tzibbur – do not separate yourself from the community.”*  
*Pirkei Avot 2:5*

**R**abbi Hillel’s advocacy of communal engagement expresses the ethos of the Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Center for Jewish Learning and Culture at HUC-JIR/New York, which was established in 2004 by a generous gift of \$2.25 million from the Irma L. and Abram S. Croll Charitable Trust and its trustees. By inviting the larger public to participate in its extensive educational programs, including Judaic studies courses, guest lectures, concerts, museum exhibitions, film screenings, student recitals, dance performances, and continuing education and preparatory classes, the Croll Center pays tribute to the Crolls’ values and their devotion to Jewish education and the arts.

The New York Kollel, the Center for Adult Jewish Studies, which is sustained by the Croll Center, offers adult learners of all backgrounds the opportunity to study Jewish texts, history, Hebrew language, philosophy, and literature in semester-long courses and seminars taught by a pluralistic faculty comprised of leading Jewish scholars. “Our mission is to provide the large number of Jews seeking to explore their religious and spiritual identities with a place for serious inquiry and discourse,” explains Rabbi Ruth Gais, Director of the New York Kollel and Community Outreach. “In addition to our classes, we offer free lectures ranging from new discoveries in biblical archaeology to human rights symposia, including a recent panel on ‘The Jewish Response to Human Trafficking.’ None of this would be possible without the support of the Croll Center, a place where learning for its own sake, *Torah lishmah*, the highest form of Jewish learning, can occur.”

Furthermore, the Croll Center offers a gateway for prospective applicants to HUC-JIR’s graduate and professional programs. *Mechinah* (preparatory) classes offer students a thorough grounding in the fundamentals of Judaism. Required courses in core texts, liturgy, philosophy/theology, Bible, Rabbinics (Talmud/midrash), and history, and a wide array of electives lead to certification and a strong foundation for advanced Judaic studies at HUC-JIR.



**Rabbinical student Larry Sernovitz views the HUC-JIR Museum exhibition, “Living in the Moment: Contemporary Artists Celebrate Jewish Time.”**

Recognizing that the visual arts are an important forum for the exploration of Jewish heritage, values, and history, the Croll Center also supports the HUC-JIR Museum’s exhibitions and related public programs. Recent and forthcoming exhibitions include Carol Hamoy’s meditation environment, inspired by Kabbalah and Judaism’s healing traditions; Paul Goldman’s photographic documentation of the birthing of the State of Israel; the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary artists’ creativity; innovative works of Jewish ritual art; Debra Band’s illuminated manuscript of the Song of Songs; and the graphic novel as an outlet for Jewish literary and artistic expression. These cultural resources are integrated into the courses taught by HUC-JIR faculty, enrich the learning experiences of HUC-JIR’s student community, and provide a welcoming destination for visitors of all faiths and docent-led group tours of all ages who seek to learn more about Judaism.

The Croll Center was created through the vision of Dr. Paul M. Steinberg, z”l, Dean of the New York campus and Vice President for over fifty years, whose warm friendship touched the lives of

countless people, including that of Irma L. Croll. He invited Mrs. Croll, an active member of Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York and its Women’s Auxiliary, to visit the College-Institute, meet with students and faculty, and learn more about HUC-JIR’s mission and goals. Mrs. Croll became a very generous supporter of HUC-JIR through the Croll Charitable Trust, which provided student scholarships and established the Dr. Paul M. and Trudy Steinberg Distinguished Professorship in Human Relations and Counseling.

By fulfilling Irma L. and Abram S. Croll’s legacy, the Croll Center’s programs and activities provide a dynamic bridge between the seminary and the outside world. The public has the opportunity to learn in the warm, invigorating, and intellectually challenging atmosphere of the nation’s oldest institution of higher Jewish education. As a catalyst for Jewish learning and culture, the Croll Center reinforces HUC-JIR’s mission to be a light unto the Jewish world and all humankind.

For upcoming educational and arts programs sponsored by the Croll Center, please visit HUC-JIR’s website at [www.huc.edu/centers](http://www.huc.edu/centers)



**The New York Kollel offers advanced Hebrew language study with Michal Nachmany (right), Lecturer on Hebrew.**