

Offerings from Pardes Hannah: The Jewish Renewal Community
Lucinda Kurtz

Pardes Hannah, the Jewish Renewal Community of Ann Arbor, is offering a wide range of learning, chanting, ritual, and davening opportunities this year, not only by our rabbi, Elliot Ginsburg, but also by the many active members who are deeply engaged in learning and training through the ALEPH (Alliance for Jewish Renewal) educational programs on the national level. As Associate Professor of Jewish Thought and Mysticism at the University of Michigan and teacher in the Aleph Ordination Program, Reb Elliot has inspired many members of the Pardes Hannah community to explore the spiritual roots of Judaism in a variety of ways. Over the years, this has led to study groups around a variety of topics such as the one just starting this year on the Zohar, the foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought.

Jewish Renewal emphasizes the creation of an ongoing fundamental connection with God and explores a variety of ways to create an accessible spiritual experience in its approach to revitalizing Judaism. Members of Pardes Hannah bring into the Ann Arbor community a variety of offerings that help deepen the individual's spiritual experience. These include exploring contemplative practices, davenology, spiritual direction, chant and embodied prayer, rosh chodesh rituals, meditation, and Sage-ing tools that help reconceptualize the aging journey. Through each offering, there is a common commitment to develop a spirituality through which Judaism can transform itself in the service of tikkun olam—the healing and balancing of this planet.

As a result, there is a wide range of offerings from active members. For example, Linda Leah Greene is a graduate of Kol Zimrah, Rabbi Shefa Gold's Chant Leadership Training and has been leading monthly Chant Circles since 2012. She is an *Aleph: Jewish Renewal* Certified Mashpiah

(Spiritual Counselor). As a graduate of Rabbi Nadya Gross's Wisdom School she uses the riches of the Kabbalistic Tree of life in her work. She teaches and leads Jewish Meditation at Temple Beth Emeth. Linda Leah periodically leads Chant Shabbat Services for Pardes Hannah and Kabbalat Shabbat Services at Temple Beth Emeth. She has a private spiritual and energy healing practice.

Gabrielle Pescador is a rabbinic student in the Aleph Ordination Program for Jewish Renewal. She leads meditation services at Pardes Hannah as well as offering on-line Rosh Chodesh morning services once a month. Before entering rabbinic studies, she spent several years working on community projects that integrate art, education and social justice, including making documentary films on incarcerated youth and LGBTQ concerns and creating public art events focused on victims of harsh US immigration policies. Gabrielle is a certified instructor of Chi Kung and a serious practitioner of Tai Chi and vibrational approaches to the healing arts.

Lucinda Kurtz, M.A., a Brennan Healing Science Practitioner, is a former professor of Women's Studies and has been teaching Kabbalah classes in Ann Arbor and nationally. She graduated from Rabbi Nadya's Gross's Wisdom School with a commitment to continue the feminine transmission of Kabbalah in her monthly Rosh Chodesh Circles, Kabbalah classes, Omer journeys, and bi-annual retreats. She believes Kabbalah and spiritual practice can be paths to self-awareness and transformation and integrates this understanding into her active energy healing practice. She and her husband, Dr. Oran Hesterman, have been certified "Vatikim," "Sage-ing Mentors" through The Sage-ing Legacy Program. They teach the groundbreaking spiritual eldering work initiated by the founder of Jewish Renewal, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in Ann Arbor, at national Jewish Renewal gatherings, and in on-line classes.

Another way Pardes Hannah invites active participation is by asking

members to select a theme to guide the community through the High Holidays. Community members reflect on this theme, and at various points during the services, share some way its key concepts have resonated in their lives. It is one of the ways that the community members support each other as they look at the year past, while opening up new personal and communal “heart-space” for the year that is emerging. Reb Elliot’s commitment to combine intellectual engagement with a devotional stance helps set the tone for deeply engaging conversations and reflections that spark the heart and mind of the community.

This year the theme is “Being Present.” Reb Elliot elaborates on the theme in this way: “Being present can refer to Awakening, when we see or hear more clearly or vividly, when we see with new eyes. Another sense of being present, *nokhah*, is when we respond to the existential question, the first question posed in Genesis, “**Ayeka,**” **Where are you?** It is the ability to acknowledge where we truly stand right now and respond from that place. **Hineni, here I am, I not hiding.**

Another layer of being present is to “say” *Lefanekha*: to be aware of what/whom is right “**before you**.” It is born from stopping the incessant rush forward to slowly encounter and deeply acknowledge the natural world. Finally, Being Present broaches the key question, **being present to what or whom?** Being present-to is a kind of **Bearing Witness**, as we ask: What is the need of the hour. And, how do we use these moments of “being present” for good and not for harm, for *tikkun ha-lev ve-tikkun ha-olam*, for healing hearts and healing the world.”

More information about High Holiday services, Shabbat services, Kabbalat Shabbat times, monthly Rosh Chodesh Circles, Chant Circles, Study Groups, Meditation Services, Kabbalah classes and other offerings can be found on the Pardes Hannah website: www.pardeshannah.org or by calling Renee Robbins at 734-761-5324