

HEALTH & FITNESS



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Connecting to Judaism through Movement



Yogi to kids: Stop kvetching & start stretching

By THAIS LEON-MILLER
Jewish Press

St. Petersburg resident Haris Lender has taken the popularity of yoga, blended it with her Jewish faith and offered it to a virtually untapped part of the population – children. Lender, whose father Murray Lender turned the family bagel business into a household name, began practicing yoga when she was pregnant with her first child. She credits the bond she formed with other pregnant women in her class with



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Tai chi, qigong blend with faith in teacher's 'Tree of Life' classes



Above, a pre-Selichot program at Temple Beth Torah in Wellington. The participants are "collecting" heavenly energy.

At right, a healing circle Sue Gurland led in Jerusalem last summer.

By THAIS LEON-MILLER
Jewish Press

The link between meditation and spirituality has been examined for years.

Sue Gurland of Boca Raton is one who has seen the correlation and teaches students a way to reach deeper ful-

fillment in faith through movement. Gurland, who has been practicing and teaching tai chi and qigong for the better part of 30 years, has integrated a foundation of Jewish teachings into her classes.

She uses stretches, poses and movement

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What about a Jewish prayer for those with mental illness?

By RISA SUGARMAN
Kveller via JTA news service

Traditionally, we say the *Mi Sheberach* prayer for those who are ill and those recovering from illness or accident.

As the *Mi Sheberach* was recited on a recent Shabbat at my synagogue, I had an epiphany. I wondered aloud to my husband, what about those with mental illness? Do we ever think of adding their names in hopes of recovery and wellness?

Anyone who has ever had any diagnosis of mental illness knows it can be a horrendous and difficult road to travel, and prayers of any kind would be appreciated.



In synagogue, as the names were recited, I wondered to myself if any of those mentioned were struggling with depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, etc.

A mental illness is an illness. Complications from diabetes must be treated appropriately, and prayers can be part of the treatment plan. Similarly, complications from bipolar disorder must be treated appropriately, and prayers can also play a role in the treatment plan.

As logical as this seems to someone like me who lives with depression, unfortunately, society as a whole has not yet reached that level of understanding. I like to think that the Jewish community is more open to

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to guide students toward relaxation, all done within a Jewish context.

"I think all energetic traditions are passing into a universal energy and when we tap into that, we have a sense of being connected to something bigger than ourselves," Gurland says.

She named her program "Moving Through the Tree of Life" as a descriptor of the goal she has for her students. "Human beings, like trees, are metaphorically connected to Heaven and Earth. Our heads reach toward the sky; our feet are grounded in the earth," she explains on her website. "Because we are created *b'tzelem elohim*, in God's image, we can access our Divine connection."



Sue Gurland

She offers various levels of classes, some combining elements of Jewish mysticism and kabbalah into her movements and meditation while another follows the structure of a traditional prayer service but adds elements of movement and chants.

"People are really yearning for spiritual connection. We can pray in other ways than just with our words," says Garland.

Gurland integrates Jewish imagery into the movements.

"I use posters as well as suggestions so when we do certain exercises, [I use] the image of the Jewish star or the Tree of Life. The four letter name of G-d (in Hebrew), if you write vertically instead of horizontally it mimics what the body looks like."

"Someone who is looking for a connection in some way," said Gurland in response to who should take one of her classes. "Someone who is looking for a connection to spirit. Anyone is just curious or interested and they are open to moving and being with like-minded people."

Gurland travels to different cities and synagogues to teach including a Kabbalat Shabbat eve



A workshop at a national convention in Miami last July.



Poster of the Magen David, over the body, shown in the photo on left. The illustration is made up of a downward pointing triangle and an upward pointing triangle which unite the 4 worlds (and 4 levels of soul) in the body.

class she taught last fall year at Congregation Beth Shalom in Clearwater.

This summer she will be traveling to Washington, DC, and the Berkshires in Massachusetts

For more information or to inquire about having her a class for your group or organization, visit Movingthroughthetreeoflife.com.

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PRAYER

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accepting people for who they are because of what our earlier generations endured. But we still could and should do better.

My synagogue greatly supported me over the past two years when I suffered from severe depression. Individual women from the synagogue reached out to me in response to my writing about my experience. I not only made some wonderful new friends, but I also added to my support and logistics team. I gained friends who checked on me, and these friends would also drive me to my ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) treatments. They availed themselves to me, which not only helped me but my family as well.

Now it was not as if an announcement was made in synagogue alerting everyone that I was ill, but these women knew we shared a connection to our synagogue and took it from there. I am very lucky.

Part of the *Mi Sheberach* prayer asks God to restore, heal, strengthen and enliven the individual who is suffering. Someone who is suffering from severe depression definitely needs to be restored, healed, strengthened and enlivened. The individual may not know that she needs this due to her impaired cognition, but her community can surround her with these words in order to

support the restoration of her cognition, the healing of her sadness, and wish her increased strength and a reason to wake up in the morning. This is what we need. This is what I need.

We should not be feared due to our illnesses. Someone with schizophrenia not only deserves this, but as a human being, it is his/her right.

Agreed? Let's take what is scary, "invisible" and not easily understood, and turn it all around.

I challenge synagogues, groups and individuals to include those with mental illness in the list of names when reciting the *Mi Sheberach* prayer.

Make the invitation clear in synagogue announcements and bulletins. Give those and their families who may feel shame and fear the permission to reach out and ask for the prayers they need. Let's provide each and every member of our communities the same opportunity to heal.

(Risa Sugarman has written for the Huffington Post, Psych Central, Keshet and Stigma Fighters; she blogs at sillyillymama.blogspot.com.)

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