

HEALTH & FITNESS



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Connecting to Judaism through Movement

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 fulfillment 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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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 Gurland.

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.

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.



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.