



Is There a New Jewish Spirituality?

Postmodern Jewish identities in a time of crisis and renewal

A conversation with Dr. Caryn Aviv, Dr. Jonathan Brent, Rabbi David Ingber, Jay Michaelson, and Rabbi Michael Paley
October 29, 2009, 7pm
YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Center for Jewish History
15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011

In the last half-century, non-traditional Jews have increasingly looked to mystical and spiritual sources as part of their own post-modern spiritual paths. Neo-Hasidism, Jewish Renewal, and the Chavurah Movement are three examples of North American Jewish movements which mix Hasidic and Kabbalistic sources, contemplative traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and contemporary progressive social and political mores, much as a dj might mix traditional Jewish melodies within a technologically-enabled postmodern composition. For thirty years, the members of these movements have created new forms of Jewish (and post-Jewish) identity as well as new ritual and liturgical forms.

Now, a new generation of Jewish leaders, thinkers, and theologians has arisen for whom these innovations and hybrids are part of the existing Jewish landscape. Together with secular and social forms such as the "New Jewish Culture," a phenomenon of independent, post-denominational, and post-conventional Jewish culture, the generation of the iPod has begun to develop new responses to the crises of modernity and post-modernity. Neo-Hasidic hip-hop, independent prayer groups, the Jewish food movement, eco-kashrut, GLBT/queer Jewish organizations, and "integral Judaism" are some examples of this newest wave of Jewish spiritual reinvention.

To celebrate the publication of *Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism*, the first book-length work of theology by a member of this new generation, we will explore the salient forms of the new Jewish spirituality and relate it to past efforts by Ashkenazic Jews to negotiate modern crises of identity and culture. The panel will explore the differing ways in which Hasidism has been understood and used as a foil to, or resource for, later spiritual and intellectual trends. Beginning with *Everything is God*, the panel will discuss the "unity of sense and soul" (critical distance and subjective spiritual engagement, traditional sources and contemporary ethical and scientific values, etc.) proposed by the book. And the panel will discuss personal narratives, both of panelists and of past Jewish figures to shed light on modern and postmodern Jews' "spiritual journeys."

The panel will be followed by a "Spiritual Woodstock" fair of contemporary organizations working and creating new spiritual and religious forms within the New Jewish Culture. This fair, together with musical performances and readings, will provide a unique opportunity to encounter this new flowering of Jewish spiritual creativity firsthand, meeting directly with some of its leading institutions, including the Brooklyn Jewish Meditation Center, Eden Village Camp, Hazon, Jewschool, Kehilat Hadar, Kohenet, Kol Zimrah, Mechon Hadar, Mimaamakim, Moishe House Hoboken, Moving Traditions, Nehirim, Romemu, Shemspeed, Tzeirim, and Zeek. The panel and fair together represent an unprecedented opportunity to explore emerging forms of Jewish spirituality and their significance for the American Jewish future.

Panelists:



Dr. Jonathan Brent is the Executive Director of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Prior to joining YIVO, Brent was editorial director at Yale University Press for eighteen years. Brent is the author of *Inside the Stalin Archives* and *Stalin's Last Crime* among other books, and is currently at work on a biography of Isaac Babel. Among Dr. Brent's scholarly interests are the manifold ways in which Eastern European Jews responded to the challenges of modernity and secularism.



Rabbi Michael Paley is the scholar in residence and director of the Jewish Resource Center of the UJA-Federation of New York. He is an adjunct professor at the Columbia School of Journalism. Prior to his arrival at UJA, he was a professor of Jewish Studies and dean at Bard College and the vice president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation. For many years, Rabbi Paley served as the university chaplain at Columbia University. Rabbi Paley was the founder and first director of the Edgar M. Bronfman Youth Fellowships in Israel.



Jay Michaelson is the author of *Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism*. A recent visiting professor at Boston University Law School, Jay is the executive director of Nehirim: GLBT Culture & Spirituality, and a columnist for the Forward, Huffington Post, Zeek, and Tikkun. Previous books include *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness, and Embodied Spiritual Practice* and *Another Word for Sky: Poems*. Michaelson has taught Jewish mysticism at Yale University and City College of New York, and is completing his Ph.D. in Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Dr. Caryn Aviv is the Posen Lecturer in Secular Jewish Culture in the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver, where she directs the Certificate Program in Jewish Communal Service and teaches courses about contemporary Jewish communities. Caryn is the co-author of *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York University Press 2005), and *Queer Jews* (Routledge 2002). She is also the director of research for Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity.



Rabbi David Ingber is the founder and spiritual director of Romemu: Judaism for Mind, Body, and Spirit. Rabbi Ingber has learned at yeshivot from the ultra-orthodox Yeshivat Chaim Berlin to Yeshivat Chovovei Torah, and spent ten years studying yoga, shiatsu, pilates, kung fu, and Tai Chi. David received his rabbinic ordination from Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in 2004 and served as the Rabbi in Residence at Elat Chayyim Retreat Center for two years.