

Exploring Spirituality **Rabbi Michael Lotker**

As most of you know, I am a physicist and spent my first career working in the world of science and engineering – specifically on the development of renewable energy. I say that I am a physicist since I still hold with the teachings of science in explaining the observable world around us and since I don't believe that I have been officially defrocked or expelled from the world of physics. So you may not be surprised to learn that the world of spirituality and mysticism does not come naturally or easily to me. In fact many people ask me how I can be religious and scientific at the same time as if the two were mutually exclusive (that they are not, I discussed in some length in my November message called "Why Is the Teapot Boiling & the Meaning of Life" – you can find it on my page at www.templenerami.org if you'd like to refresh your memory).

One of my teachers described mysticism as the abiding suspicion that there is more to the reality around us than meets the eye. In Judaism, mysticism falls under the general name of Kabbalah which has been part of our tradition for thousands of years and which has enjoyed a recent popular explosion of interest. I too have been increasingly interested in the subject as I grow older and realize that the answers to the really important questions and challenges of life cannot only be found in the sciences. I am therefore sponsoring a program at the Temple on January 24th from 4:00 – 8:00PM and embarking on a two year course of study.

TEMPLE PROGRAM: On Sunday, January 24th from 4-8PM, the Temple will be hosting a unique program called "Music, Spirituality and Your Brain." The program features Yuval Ron, an Oscar Award Winning and Grammy Nominated Musician, Composer, Lecturer and Peace Activist and Mark Robert Waldman, an Associate Fellow, Center for Spirituality and the Mind of the University of Pennsylvania. I know both these amazing men and have heard Yuval play. I promise this will be an event you will enjoy and at which you will grow. Lots of details are included in the program flyer which is included in this month's Megillah. Instructions for ordering tickets are on the flyer – act soon – this will sell out quickly.

STUDY PROGRAM: In January, I will begin an 18 month program for rabbis with the highly regarded Institute for Jewish Spirituality which will include four retreats of five days each in Simi Valley and Connecticut. The retreats combine prayer, meditation, text study, yoga, group discussion, spiritual exercises and guidance with faculty members. The program continues between retreats through a guided program on study in pairs (*hevruta*), contemplative practice and e-conversation with colleagues and faculty. My program will include 34 other rabbis as students including some of my classmates from Jerusalem and other old friends.

My goal in both these programs is to develop the skills and insights so that we can better appreciate the blessings that surround us and better cope with the difficulties of life. I look forward to sharing what I learn with you all and learning from each of your own spiritual journeys.

On a more immediate and personal note, Sonia joins me in wishing each and everyone a happy and healthy new year.