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The 6th Annual Nehirim East Retreat
A unique spiritual gathering of GLBT Jews
Isabella Freedman Retreat Ctr., Falls Village, CT. May 15-17, 2009

Falls Village, CT. Nehirim, a national organization that provides spiritual and cultural community for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) Jews and their partners and allies, is hosting its sixth annual weekend retreat in the Northeast, after receiving unprecedented support from the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Boston, the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, and other funders.

Nehirim retreats are unique gatherings that bring together GLBT Jews (as well as non-Jewish partners and straight allies) for a weekend of spirituality, education, and community. Teachers at Nehirim East will include Retreat Director Jay Michaelson (Executive Director, Nehirim; columnist, *Forward* and *Huffington Post*), Professor Rebecca T. Alpert (Temple University, *Like Bread on a Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition*), John Stasio (Easton Mountain, interfaith gay activist), Rabbi Jill Hammer (*Sisters at Sinai*), Rabbi Jacob Staub (Reconstructionist Rabbinical College), and Cantor David Berger (Congregation Beth Simchat Torah), along with numerous musicians, teachers, and celebrants of GLBT Jewish life.

"Members of sexual minorities have unique ways of relating to spirituality due to the ways we experience love, on the one hand, and an often hostile society, on the other," Nehirim's Jay Michaelson said, noting that the experience of gays and lesbians is in many respects similar to that of Jews in non-Jewish societies. "Being queer and Jewish is a gift—nor a predicament."

Held at the Isabella Freedman Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT, the weekend retreat will include opportunities for traditional and innovative Sabbath prayer services as well as meditation, text study, movement, dance, spiritual direction, hiking, performance art, writing, and ritual. The retreat will bring together a diverse community ranging in age from 18-73, and from Orthodox to secular; singles, couples, and families (there is a childrens' program component.); "professional Jews" and unaffiliated ones, rabbis and political activists. Workshop feature topics include queer theology, Hasidic music, social justice activism, secular Torah study, and the Divine Feminine. No knowledge of Hebrew is required.

This year, Nehirim is offering more financial aid than ever before, including many part and full scholarships for attendees. "Especially in this economy, we are committed to making Nehirim accessible to all," said Michaelson.

Nehirim means "lights" in Hebrew, and more specifically the radiant colors of the rainbow and the sky. The word thus represents not only the spectrum of GLBT sexual identities and the popular rainbow symbol, but the spiritual essences of those constituent parts as well. Founded in 2004, Nehirim is an independent non-profit organization that creates authentic spiritual and cultural community for GLBT Jews, and their partners and allies.

Workshop Leaders' Bios

Jay Michaelson is the founder and Executive Director of Nehirim. He is also among the most widely-read Jewish writers of his generation, as a columnist for *The Forward*, a featured contributor to *The Huffington Post*, the Founding Editor of *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*, and a contributor to *Reality Sandwich*, *Maariv Online*, *Slate* and other publications. He is the author of *God in Your Body: Kabbalah, Mindfulness and Embodied Spiritual Practice* (Jewish Lights, 2006) and *Another Word for Sky: Poems*

(Lethe Press, 2007), and the forthcoming *Everything is God: The Radical Path of Nondual Judaism* (Shambhala, 2009). A recent visiting professor at Boston University Law School, Jay holds a J.D. from Yale and teaches widely on issues of religion and sexuality; his work in the area has been featured in The New York Times and on NPR. Recent publications on the subject include *Queering God, Torah, and Israel in The Passionate Torah* (2009), *Chaos, Law and God: The Religious Meaning of Homosexuality* in the Michigan Journal of Gender & Law, and *Boundaries and the Boundless: Homosexuality, Liminality, Judaism in Jews and Sex* (2008).

Rebecca T. Alpert is Associate Professor of Religion and Women's Studies at Temple University. She is the co-author of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, author of *Like Bread on the Seder Plate: Jewish Lesbians and the Transformation of Tradition* and *Whose Torah? A Concise Guide to Progressive Judaism*, and editor of *Voices of the Religious Left: A Contemporary Sourcebook* and *Lesbian Rabbis: The First Generation* as well as numerous articles. She teaches in the areas of religion and contemporary social issues: sexuality, the politics of race and gender, and medical ethics. She is currently at work on a book on Jews in Black Baseball.

Rabbi Jill Hammer is the director and co-founder of Tel Shemesh, a website celebrating and creating Jewish earth-based traditions, and the author of *The Jewish Book of Days: A Companion for All Seasons* (forthcoming September 2006). She is a poet, writer, myth-maker, and midrashist who has been published in many journals and anthologies, and is the author of *Sisters at Sinai: New Tales of Biblical Women*, a collection of modern midrash. Rabbi Hammer teaches in Manhattan and around the country on ancient and contemporary midrash, bibliodrama, ritual-making, and the cycles of Jewish time, and is currently an instructor at the Academy for Jewish Religion. She received a doctorate in social psychology from the University of Connecticut in 1996 and was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 2001.

Rabbi Jacob J. Staub is Professor of Jewish Philosophy and Spirituality at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia, where he served as Academic Vice President for 17 years and where he was ordained. He served as editor of the Reconstructionist magazine. He is the founder and director of the first program in Jewish Spiritual Direction at a rabbinical seminary. He teaches medieval Jewish studies, Jewish meditation, and Jewish spirituality. He is the author of *The Creation of the World According to Gersonides* and the co-author of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*. He came out as a gay man in 2000.

John Stasio is the founder of Easton Mountain, a retreat center and residential community in upstate New York. A former Catholic seminarian, he has worked as a bodywork therapist, retreat facilitator and teacher. He has worked for over fifteen years assisting people in realizing their dreams and connecting with their inner source of wisdom, well-being and joy.

Daniel Max is a Nutrition and Health Counselor, Shiatsu Practitioner, and Yoga Instructor. He began his studies in holistic health in Israel, his home country. Leaving Israel, Daniel traveled through Far East Asia studying various modalities of healing arts such as Chinese medical and Indian Ayurvedic therapies. Daniel is a graduate of Columbia University affiliated Institute Of Integrative Nutrition and of the former Boston Institute of Shiatsu. Daniel is a nationally certified massage therapist as well as certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners.

Cantor David Berger is the first full time cantor of CBST. He received cantorial investiture at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music in May of 2007. Already an integral part of the musical life of CBST, Cantor Berger served as cantorial intern for two years (2005-2007), working in close partnership with Music Director Joyce Rosenzweig. Today he serves as CBST's cantor, working to inspire both listeners and worshippers with music that speaks to their hearts and to reach out to the wider GLBT Jewish community.

Chani Getter is a Motivational Speaker as well as a Certified Holistic Life Coach. As a single parent she leads informational and support groups in parenting, single-motherhood, domestic violence, cross cultural integration, issues of sexuality and identity. Chani has spoken on numerous panels to tell her story of growing up Ultra-Chasidic and her eventual acceptance of her identity.

Calendar Editors

- WHAT: The 6th Annual Nehirim East Coast Retreat: A unique spiritual gathering of GLBTQ Jews
- WHEN: May 15-17, 2009
- WHERE: Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, Falls Village, CT
- COST: Ranges from \$200-\$400. Student scholarships and financial assistance are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Register online at www.nehirim.org/east
- INFO: www.nehirim.org/east • info@nehirim.org
- PRESS: For additional press materials, photos, and to arrange interviews, please contact Sasha T. Goldberg, assistant director, at stg@nehirim.org

