



Dear friends,

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It has been a rich year in the life of Pardes Hannah: We have offered our unique array of monthly davvenen and meditations, our Rosh Hodesh celebrations guided expertly by Lucinda Kurtz, Linda Dominik and Megan Sims, our lively and searching study sessions, this year on the theme of Resilience. We have marked special events such as our Yom Kippur meditation “Entering the Holy of Holies,” and come together to celebrate Hanukkah amid latkes, frivolity and song, held a Seder Tu Bishvat—deliciously celebrating our connection to the Earth, our ongoing gratitude for the gift of Life. For trees. For fruit and nuts. And poetry. Knowing (as Reb Arthur Waskow teaches) that we breathe in what the trees breathe out. And the Trees breathe in what we breathe out. One great web of being.

We have drawn inspiration from our most active members, from those who drop in on occasion, and increasingly, from the leadership of Rabbi Aura, adding new tones (both literally and figuratively) to our community of Seekers.

We have renewed our commitment to soulful prayer and chanting, to connecting deeply in conversation with each other, to embracing Torah as a Tree of Life. We have opened to the divine mystery that permeates Being and yet transcends our small worlds, *sovev umemaleh kol almin*. We have drawn strength from our mystical, neo-Hasidic Renewal-y roots; sensing the holiness of the Everyday; while knowing that not only we humans but the living Earth are in the words of Kabbalist Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi, *tzelem elohim*, faces of the divine. As Reb Zalman teaches, for a minute each day, see yourself as a cell of the Living Earth. (Do this!!) In these heartbreaking political times, we commit to deeply feeling both the joy and the suffering of life, to live **eyes open, heart open**—open to the radical amazement of what is. Seeking to heal and repair, and to hold space open for better days, for Tikkun.

As the Days of Awe approach, it is hard for this septuagenarian to believe that this year is the 32nd year of Pardes Hannah—in gematriya, the year of LeV (32), the beating, open heart (in Hebrew, you guessed it, Lev). (“Ah, but I was so much older then, I’m much younger than that now”—Dylan. Well, mebbe?) More on our LeV Anniversary below...

I am writing these words in the back end of Ellul, as the moon is waning and Leil Selichot approaching. This is a time to look back at our lives on the scale of a year, asking what is a-borning for us, what to nurture, and what, a-dying. what we might let go. I suggest we move from peremptory self-judging (though accountability is absolutely needed) to the cultivation of

curiosity, why/how these patterns? Knowing that we are both worthy and a work-in-progress. (Sometimes even in-temporary regress, for as the kabbalists taught, “the seed needs to decompose in order for the plant to grow.” *Yeridah tzorekh aliyah*, a descent for the sake an ascent. (Menachem Azaria de Fano)

In this season, we ask: What are the structures, and the daily, weekly, and annual spiritual practices—the vitamins—that will enable us to live deeply, from the inside-out? What has worked? What has gotten stuck? And: how might we appreciate what we do have, while finding ways of living in deeper alignment with our core values and our “deployment”—what we are here on earth to be and do. I challenge us to embrace one new Jewish practice this year, something that might hallow your days: be it weekly Torah study, learning new niggunim or learning to chant Torah; some tzedakah practice, working at a Food Pantry or in Refugee Resettlement, expanding *hakhnasat orhim* (inviting folks over for a meal or conversation). Or reciting blessings before and after eating, or cultivating a middah (a spiritual ethical quality) such as Patience (*savlanut*), or generous listening—practicing at listening to another (for half an hour, say) **without judgement** (*dan le-khaf z'khut*). Or simply starting out each morning with a prayer of gratitude for the gift of life (the Modeh Ani). Saying again and again, thank you. Or letting go or excess rancor at bedtime (a forgiveness practice encoded in the Bedtime Shema) What practice or longing comes to mind for you? The ideas can be incubating, inchoate. Happy to explore the possibilities with you!

As we engage our social-political worlds (from here in the US to Israel-Palestine and beyond) we know there is work to do, for there has been so much blood spilled and hearts shattered in recent months. The work is not only for now but will extend over the decades, beyond many of our lifetimes. How do we make things better? Coalescing with others to make a more equitable and loving world, a world that continues to breathe and thrives. How might our Jewish sources and wisdom inform (and inspire) that ongoing work? As the Kotzker Rebbe said, we must begin with ourselves, but not aim at ourselves. More than ever we need the warmth of each other...to buoy each other, to share the grief and the joy, to better surf the *ratzo va-shov*—the ebb and flow of life—to harbor resilience and compassion, and to punctuate it all with touches (nay, gusts) of humor—both the cosmic and the naughty!

[נוכח פני ה'](#) (Lam. 2:9) I often say my kavvanah (intention) is to **be present** before the One. Saying *Hineni*, Here am I, not hiding. (Something I am prone to do.) Saying: use me, Hashem, how might I better serve?

**In conclusion**, a khap, a vort, a quick Hasidic “word” (As in the old Yiddish joke, before I give a *vort*, let me say a few words.). Nahman of Breslov, the great Hasidic teacher, pondered the verse from Song of Songs 5:2, קוֹלִי דוֹפֵק דוֹפֵק, Hark! My beloved is knocking [dofeq], noting that the word *dofeq* can mean not only knocking, but **pulsing**. “Listen! (he said) The divine beloved is pulsing (dofeq) within me.” God coursing through our embodied being, each moment anew. Let’s try this now as a practice, something I learned from Reb Zalman, of blessed memory. I invite you to place your fingers on a pulse point (I like the carotid artery, but the wrist also works.) Feel that pulse coursing through you, the Beloved knocking. Stay with it for a few beats.

Now, if you are with a loved one or a friend or someone who is game, and it feels comfortable, let the other guide your hand towards their pulse point, while you guide your friend's hand to yours. Breathe quietly, feeling both your pulse and theirs. (I can almost *hear* the pulsing with my fingers...) Know this pulsing is also there, right now, in our friends, our neighbors, our adversaries, in our dogs and cats, in a myriad life forms, for the earth is breathing, ebbing and flowing, in a great wheel of Turning. As the year turns, may we all be blessed with good health, with purpose-driven lives, with connections that are real and loving, with surprises that amaze, ordinary moments that seem holy, with the joy of our joy and even, perhaps, the “joy—the simcha” of our sorrows, knowing how much we can feel, hold, and love.

*שנה טובה ומתוקה*--*Leshanah tovah tikatevu*, may new life be inscribed in our hearts,  
In gratitude, Reb Elliot