



HEALTH

Week of Wisdom, Wellness

by Jared Sichel, Staff Writer
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Participants in an Awareness Through Movement class perform an exercise. Photo by Rosalie O'Connor

Gale Trachtenberg was dealing with some discomfort in her hip and shoulder as she walked into a free group exercise at Century City Physical Therapy.

Afterward? Not so much.

"I was feeling some pain in my lower shoulder blade, and I don't feel that right now," Trachtenberg said after the 90-minute Feldenkrais class, which uses gentle movement and directed attention to improve movement and enhance human functioning. "It was pretty amazing."

Perhaps even more surprising: The class was part of a wide-ranging conference called "Jewish Wisdom and Wellness: A Week of Learning," organized by the Kalsman Institute on Judaism and Health at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and Cedars-Sinai.

The April 23 Feldenkrais class, "Awareness Through Movement," was one of more than 60 classes, workshops and lectures featured during the April 21-27 conference, which drew more than 2,500 people, according to Jonathan Schreiber, Cedars-Sinai's director of community engagement.

The week kicked off with a panel moderated by Rob Eshman, publisher and editor-in-chief of the Jewish Journal, featuring four local rabbis discussing Judaism and health crises; the final event took place on April 27 with a musical evening dedicated to the memory of Debbie Friedman, the much-revered composer and teacher. The closing ceremony, held at Leo Baeck Temple, attracted more than 700 people, according to Kalsman Institute spokeswoman Joanne Tolkoff.

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In between, people could sign up, free of charge, for classes on yoga and stress reduction, *chevra kadisha* training, safe driving habits for teenagers and even meditative tai chi. According to the Web site for the weeklong conference, JewishWisdomAndWellness.org, the tai chi class involved "Taoist-based standing movement-meditations." After warming up, the participants studied how the Shema "can be used to overcome fear and lead to a higher

level of consciousness." Rabbi Andrew Hahn (the "Kirtan Rabbi") used the Taoist standing meditation to help internalize the teachings.

Classes were held in numerous locations across the city, including the San Fernando Valley, and even stretched into Orange County.

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"My body's used to all the hard movements, so this is completely the opposite," Weissman said. "We are so used to one way of movement that we forget about all the other ways."

The weeklong program was the first of its kind held by Kalsman and Cedars-Sinai. According to Schreiber, the grass-roots nature of the conference — congregations, academic institutions and nonprofits were asked to propose programs and then received micro-grants to cover their costs — was a major reason for its success.

"Judaism has something to say about people's health, about wellness, about spirituality," Schreiber said. "It's certainly something that we hope to do in the future."