

# KEREN OR

Keren Or is a publication of Or Shalom Synagogue

## Pesach: Be audacious in reaching farther

Rabbi Hannah Dresner

Dear *Kehilah Kedosha* – Holy Community,

Soon we will celebrate the liberation of our People and their momentous passage to self determination as the *Ivrim* crossed the Red Sea. *Ivrim* – “Hebrews” – derives from the root meaning to pass from one place or state to

another, to cross over, to bridge, and from this etymology we are invited to embrace our Jewish identity as connectors and gap closers. What better way to grow community and to heal the world?

On the Shabbat morning prior to Pesach it's traditional to read a *haftarah* from the book of *Malachi* describing a particular bridging, closing the gap between generations. The prophet *Malachi* says the Messianic Era will be upon us when “the hearts of parents turn toward their children, and the hearts of children towards their parents.” And, indeed, conversation between parents and children will be the religious vehicle of our Seders as we sit around our tables engaged in the mitzvah of re-telling our story, putting the pieces of our story back together by way of wisdom exchanged between the generations of our families and community.

But there is a moment before the crossing that I am acutely aware of today, that moment just before the

leap of *Nachson*, the first of the *Ivrim* to jump into the water. His daring inspired his nation to take the plunge. We are taught that the waters did not part until after *Nachson* and the *Ivrim* demonstrated this courage. Their leap was a leap of faith that by acting they would bridge to their future, bringing their fate in alignment with their imaginings.

Courage is key to the story, as is faith in the benefit of moving forward, even into unknown territory.

We are not in a narrow place here, at Or Shalom, and nothing external pushes us up against the edge of a raging sea. But we are, indeed, visionaries and transformers, leaders

in the creation of spiritual experience, in the arena of social actions, and in the creation of conscious community. As such, we are *Ivrim*, boundary crossers reaching out in connection, bridging to individuals in need, to discourse begging to be had, to margins of our community, to other faith communities, to support the needs and dreams of young and old, and to the richness that new perspectives, hearts, and hands will gift our community.

And it is from the foundation of our strength, and in the spirit of our well-established self-respect, that I urge us to be audacious in reaching farther and with more vigor and visibility in the coming months. Let's



Photo by Anita Laura Fonseca

welcome Vancouver into our *Bayit* and into our ethos. We have so much to share.

Let's reach out in joy. Let's shine our light a bit brighter. Let's build new relationships, attractive and hospitable to new families and individuals even as we support old friends. Let's broaden and deepen our involvement in the great social challenges of our time so that we securely flow between what is most internal to our spirituality to what is most embracing of egalitarianism amongst our members, justice in our city, and peace in our world.

To leap, *Nachson* had to believe in himself in

addition to believing in God. We are secure in our identity, pleased with who we are and what we have. We can afford to jump into the waters of our future, knowing that courage and generous action will bridge us to a bright future of deep spirit and learning, meaningful caring, increased numbers, a gaggle of children, and the emergence of Or Shalom as a model and a hub of relevant activity.

I extend sweet blessings of rebirth and growth in this Spring of our community.

*Chag Sameach,*  
Rabbi Hannah

## Many Or Shalomniks opening their hearts and homes

Lorne Prupas, Seder Matching Coordinator

Or Shalom has shone beautifully, yet again. Many Or Shalomniks opened their hearts and homes to welcome those who love the Passover tradition but had no Seder to attend. Happily, many *shidduchim* (matches) were made.

Quite a range of tables and experiences are in the offing. Some Seders will be more traditional; others, much less so. Some will be conducted largely in Hebrew, others largely in English. Some will delve deeply into the cornucopia of ideas that emerge during an event focused on liberation. Others will acknowledge the importance of the subject under review, but admit, sotto voce, that "those who want can still watch the hockey game after the meal." Some will offer encounters with our four-legged friends as a special Seder bonus. One Seder that may still have a few available seats will be a women-only event.

And let's not forget to mention the various kinds of food that will be served. Matzah, of course, is a given. But do I remember someone mentioning that they would be serving gluten-free matzah? Gefilte fish was on the list for some; but another Seder will be vegan. Others will be the standard dairy/fish/

vegetarian fare of which we have grown so fond at Or Shalom kiddushim. Some will serve chicken soup with knaidlach. Others will get Elite chocolates and kosher le-Pesach wine.

My Uncle Morris always brought cigars, the Manischewitz wine, and boxes of St. Lawrence candies for Passover. I'm confident that what will be served and, perhaps more importantly, what will be experienced, will receive heartfelt thanks.

"*Hineni*," I am here, is what we said during roll call in Hebrew school. I want to honour all of you who stood up and let your presence be known – for stepping forward and requesting a seat at the Seder table of a family unknown to you.

Very importantly, I wish to thank the many hosts who came forward to offer seats at their Seder tables to fulfill the mitzvah of opening the door to the stranger, the unknown, on Passover. After all, were we not all once strangers?

Special thanks to Rory Richards who provided a guide to facilitating Seder matching – a mitzvah she did for several years.







# Please welcome our new and returning members

Lisa Ackerman  
Yoshie Bancroft  
Philip Be'er  
Mitch Dermer  
Ran Eilam

Colleen Finlay  
Anita Fonseca  
David Harnik  
Sharon Harnik  
Dalite Har Toov

Raefel Imerman  
Karen November  
José Riga  
Adam Schneid  
Chaia Schneid



I'm so happy to have found Or Shalom! My name is **Anita Fonseca** and I became a member because I am exploring Jewish conversion.

I was born into a Chilean Christian family, but three generations ago my family was Sephardic. I grew up knowing about my heritage, but not able to raise questions for reasons to this day I do not understand. A long exploratory journey has led me to Or Shalom and I am very grateful for that.

I just moved back to Vancouver in 2015 after living in Harrisonburg, Virginia, for six years with my husband and my dog. There I studied an MA in Religion, and regularly visited the Beth El congregation.

Today I am a full-time ThM student at the Vancouver School of Theology studying Hebrew Bible and Biblical Hebrew, and I work part time at Hineni House, an interreligious intentional community.

Hello! Our names are **Dalite Har Toov**, **Ran Eilam**, **Neve Eilam** (13) and **Gur Eilam** (9). We are new to Canada and Vancouver (arrived in August 2015) and joined Or Shalom in the beginning of the new Hebrew year.

When we got to Vancouver, we were mentored by three good friends: Karen, Ann and Donna, who introduced us to the local community. Ann Daskal connected us to Or Shalom, which by pure coincidence we had passed a few days before and wondered what kind of temple it was.

We discovered a very unique Jewish centre: beautiful, calm and accepting. We enjoyed a warm welcome from the wonderful and caring members and joined the amazing Bnei Mitzvah group. Our Neve is about to celebrate his this June.

We love the fact that Or Shalom is part of Jewish renewal, which preserves and leads a tradition of progressive Judaism with a vision of egalitarian Judaism that promotes the values and virtues of social justice.

We wish everybody a happy Passover, one of personal and social liberty and new springtime beginnings.

## Or Shalom calendar

- April 23 - Pesach services with guest Rabbis Daniel and Hanna Tiferet Siegel
- April 30 - Pesach services, Yizkor, and Yizkor Sharing Conversation following Kiddush
- May 1, 1-3 PM - In the spirit of Gemilut Chesed, Rabbi Hannah will give add to Susan Shamash's Talmud class on Moed Katan, Daf 21, Amud bet: Greeting the Mourner. Everyone is welcome; no previous knowledge required.
- May 6-8 - Or Shalom Retreat at Camp Hope with special guest Reb Irwin Keller

- May 13 - Food for Thought: A New Generation's Shabbat Dinner Series. Or Shalom will host this New Israel Fund Shabbat dinner and discussion for under-40s
- June 11 - Tikkun Leil Shavuot
- June 12 - Shavuot services and Yizkor Sharing Conversation following Kiddush
- Aug. 13 - Tisha B'Av
- Sept. 24 - Selichot evening with special guest Rabbi Neil Blumofe of Austin, Texas, consummate teacher, jazz musician and Rabbi

Hannah Dresner's rabbinic mentor

Look for announcements about a **Musical Kabbalat Shabbat and Potluck** with R' Hannah and the Band in June and upcoming **Beach Kabbalat Shabbat** gatherings and **Gardening Parties** that will take place throughout the spring and summer. Don't miss out! Questions about events or programs? Program coordinator Yael Heffer: [programs@orshalom.ca](mailto:programs@orshalom.ca)

## Gemilut Chesed: Healing power of community

Pat Gill

In her *Dvar Torah* on *Shabbat Parah*, Rabbi Hannah revealed that Harriett Lemer, Ann Daskal, Bat-Ami Segal and Pat Gill were "hatching . . . a new *gemilut chesed* initiative . . . creating a structure that makes asking for help easier, coordination of support stronger, and performance of the *mitzvot* associated with accompanying the sick identifiable and easy to take on."

She spoke of the healing power of community and "ways that we can stand by members of our community who suffer pain, whether physical or psychic, giving deeply of ourselves and of what we have so our embrace is one into which our . . . members can rest when needed."

In the spirit of the Leading Lights of Hanukkah initiative, all of us can become Or Shalom's "lights" as we support our members "in a wrap-around of *gemilut chesed*" when they need temporary help due to illness, surgery, or bereavement.

The proposed structure will comprise three groups of "lights":

- The smallest group who will receive requests for help or news of individuals in need.

- A slightly larger group of "leads" who will be the primary contacts and organizers of volunteers.
- Our caring community members who will volunteer for a variety of tasks that will contribute to the healing of a fellow member.

An invitation to volunteer will go out soon. Start thinking about how you can participate in our *gemilut chesed* community. Are you willing to drive? Run errands? Cook and/or deliver meals? Shop? Visit? Attend a *shiva* minyan?

The Talmud says that *gemilut chasidim* is more important than *tzedakah* because acts of kindness can be bestowed on the rich as well as the poor, the living as well as the dead, and with money as well as assistance.

R' Hannah's wish for Or Shalom encapsulates our goal of a community that will "witness one another, companion one another, make sacrifices for one another, and do what we humanly can to wash away fear."

*Kein y'hi ratzon.*

# First event May 12 for special-needs teens

Janice Liknaitzky with Lu Winters and Jordana Corenblum

I recently met with a couple of colleagues who, like me, have worked closely with special needs teens for years. Our aim was to find a solution to the problem of social isolation many of these kids experience.

Social connections are one of the most basic and primal of human needs – yet too many kids in our community feel lonely and socially isolated. Their days are filled with one activity after the next, none of which suitably helps them create any friendships.

We are creating a group called *Chaverim* (friends) that provides a warm, low-key, predictable environment where kids with different needs can look forward to regularly getting together with others with whom they can feel comfortable. We plan to hold regular, year-round get togethers for a small group of teens to enjoy a social activity, kosher food and celebration of holidays and birthdays. Caring staff experienced in fostering one-on-one interactions will facilitate.

We hope this group will become the much-needed supportive gathering place in our community that special needs kids will call their own. We are looking forward to our first Chaverim event for pizza and a movie on Thursday, May 12, from 5-7:30 pm at Or Shalom. For more information or to register we would love to hear from you via email at [chaverim@orshalom.ca](mailto:chaverim@orshalom.ca)

**CHAVERIM**

**Social event for teens with special needs. Please join us for our FREE KICK OFF event, a relaxed evening of pizza dinner\*, a movie and dessert\*.**

**WHERE**  
Or Shalom  
710 East 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
in Vancouver

**WHEN**  
Thursday May 12<sup>th</sup>  
5:00 - 7:30pm

**WHAT**

- Make Friends
- Have Fun
- Chill

Reach us by email with questions and to register (space is limited). We'd love to hear from you at [chaverim@orshalom.ca](mailto:chaverim@orshalom.ca)

\* All Food Will Be Certified Kosher



Or Shalom Synagogue is a Jewish spiritual community affiliated with the ALEPH Alliance for Jewish Renewal. We are creative, egalitarian, traditional and participatory.

Please join us any Shabbat morning, from 10 a.m. at our synagogue at 10th and Fraser, Vancouver.

For more information about Or Shalom, see our web page [www.orshalom.ca](http://www.orshalom.ca)  
or call the Or Shalom Office 604.872.1614

This edition of Keren Or was produced by Pat Gill and Lorne Mallin

# Everything is in place to welcome refugees

The Or Shalom Syrian Refugee Initiative (OSSRI) is a volunteer-based movement committed to resettling Syrian families in the Vancouver area. We have received enormous support from our community in the form of donated time, expertise, advocacy, goods, and the generous financial contributions of over 180 donors, giving in excess of \$155,000.

In light of the desperate situation in refugee camps and our positive financial position, the OSSRI steering committee decided to sponsor a fourth family, who are connected to another of our families. Two groups will be reunited with their families in Coquitlam and one with its family in Burnaby.

The three Kurdish families, including eight children aged two to 18 years, are living in refugee camps in Turkey and the Erbil area of Northern Iraq. They are experiencing extreme hardship and illness – one child has had open-heart surgery and requires constant care.

We are also sponsoring an Iraqi LGBT couple living in Beirut under immediate threat of persecution. As well, one of the men has a progressive illness that severely compromises his health and mobility.

The resettlement committee comprises four teams, one for each family. They are responsible for all aspects of integration, including setting up the households and introducing the families to life in Canada: public transit, shopping, paying bills, language training, etc. Volunteer committee members will coordinate with relatives to find

## Write your MP for action

We ask all of you to send a letter to your MP to demand increased government action to speed up the processing of sponsored refugees.

accommodation, contact local schools, connect with doctors, accompany families to meetings, and so much more.

Our families' applications have been completed and are in various stages of review by the government. We are ready to receive these refugee families. Everything is in place here.

In February the government reached its commitment to bring 25,000 refugees to Canada. On March 1 they dismissed 650 staff operating in the Middle East, significantly reducing resources for screening and processing privately sponsored applicants and increasing the waiting period by several months. This has been disappointing news.

As part of a larger group of private sponsors ready and waiting for over 100 refugees in the Lower Mainland alone, we are lobbying government agencies to force Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) increase its efforts in the region.

If you have questions, please contact Co-chairs David Berson ([dberson@telus.net](mailto:dberson@telus.net)) or Maurice Bloch ([mauricebloch@shaw.ca](mailto:mauricebloch@shaw.ca)).



# Exploring Judaism connects us in new ways

Mira Oreck

My partner Stepan and I signed up for the Exploring Judaism class in late November. Despite my having grown up in an engaged, committed Jewish family, it was always the kind of class I wanted to take. I didn't have a formal Jewish education and struggled to answer questions for friends, peers, colleagues and, more recently, for my partner.

Stepan grew up in a family that was atheist for as many generations back as he is aware of. He is curious, open and interested in learning.

We wanted a class that was truly about “exploring” Judaism – and some of its bigger questions – rather than a Judaism 101.

Our class at Or Shalom has served that very purpose. Through the leadership of Reb Hannah, a group of approximately 20 people gather once a month in the sanctuary of the shul. It is a low-key and welcoming environment that is both energetically light and intellectually deep.

The highlights of the class so far include the following:

## **Gathering to learn**

There is incredible power in gathering – amongst strangers and, eventually, new friends – to ask big questions together, to explore and connect over shared experiences, and to learn new concepts or old concepts in new ways together.

## **Comfort in space**

As a child I felt incredibly comfortable in the synagogue I grew up in. I knew every nook and cranny of the space. Our class is allowing my partner



*Stepan and Mira.*

and me to get to know Or Shalom. We know which door will be open at which time. We know our way around the kitchen. We are comfortable sitting in the pews. This allows for a much greater comfort attending shul or chagim than it ever would without our class.

## **An appreciation of Jewish Renewal**

Our class is interactive. Reb Hannah always surprises me with the questions she asks and the approach she takes. It keeps me curious, wanting to learn more. Our Exploring Judaism class has affirmed the many reasons I appreciate Jewish Renewal.

Our class is made up of singles and couples – people who are Jewish and those exploring Judaism – of all ages. It has renewed my own appreciation for Jewish practice, connected my partner and me in new ways and, importantly, connected us both to Or Shalom.



# Campaign: Growing and building our community

Mary Adlersberg and Maurice Bloch

Preparing for Or Shalom's Annual Community Campaign has been very exciting because so many wonderful things have happened this past year!

This year we successfully welcomed our wonderful new rabbi, Hannah Dresner, who has both augmented our vision and enhanced our special Or Shalom progressive Jewish experience. The spiritual heart of the community has never been stronger with music, chant, ritual and worship, accompanied by a deep exploration of traditional texts in all their wisdom and beauty.

Our Shabbat services and *tisches* are well attended, as are the many Jewish holidays from the High Holydays, Sukkot and Simchat Torah to Purim and our unforgettable chocolate Pesach.

Generous campaign donations funded the new positions of program coordinator and Bnei Mitzvah teacher to support Rabbi Hannah's enhancement and development of old and new programs alike.

Highlights from last year include:

- The Brazilian Klezmer evening
- The Davening Lab
- Tamar at the Cross-Roads workshops
- The Eight Leading Lights of Hanukkah project
- Spiritual Eldering workshops
- The Tu B'Shvat Kiddush
- The Intergenerational Sukkot
- Family dinners and Kabbalat Shabbats
- Well-subscribed Bnei Mitzvah and Exploring Judaism classes

Our building underwent many improvements. Both the administrative and rabbi's offices were renovated, giving our staff better-organized spaces in which to work and serve our members. We also purchased new appliances (a stove and other



kitchen equipment), improved the ventilation system, painted downstairs, carpeted major areas of the bayit and upgraded a much-needed plumbing infrastructure and underground tiling system.

The last five years of the campaign were financial successes. Equally important were the informative, candid conversations we had with our members. They're vital as they draw our community closer and give direction to the Or Shalom Board.

This year's theme for the conversation is growing and building our community. We are a vibrant community, exploring "the sacred by infusing ancient Jewish wisdom with a modern, egalitarian, progressive consciousness and a social and environmental justice. We are inclusive, participatory and multi-ethnic." And Vancouver needs us to "in-reach but also to outreach."

We ask you to join this year's campaign as we grow spiritually within ourselves, as we grow our community with an "in-reach and outreach focus," and as we continue to build a strong organizational structure and ensure that our old-fashioned building remains in good order.

Your community needs you to make a generous financial gift and share your words of wisdom!

# Organizational Changes at Or Shalom

Or Shalom Board of Directors

The Board has made some important decisions that we wanted to share with you as we move Or Shalom into the future.

For most of this year, the Or Shalom Board has been grappling with the challenges and opportunities of planning for Or Shalom's future. With Rabbi Hannah, we have been exploring what directions she would like to take Or Shalom, based on feedback the Board has gathered from you, our members. From that, the board set out two areas of growth: to increase our intergenerational programs and to increase our efforts to inform the community about Or Shalom, to help bring in the people who would love Or Shalom as much as we all do, but may not

know about us. To accomplish these goals, the board decided to focus more resources on programs, with a full-time program coordinator, and fewer resources on administration, with a part-time office administrator, eliminating the full-time office manager position ably filled by Lily Salja for several years.

We thank Lily for her commitment to Or Shalom and her many contributions to the well-being of the shul that went above and beyond her job description. We hope you will join us in warmly welcoming Lily in community, supporting her, and helping us celebrate her dedication to Or Shalom.

## Tikkun Olam: Change starts with small step

Pat Gill

A small group has been working with Rabbi Hannah to revitalize our *Tikkun Olam* committee and find ways to further Or Shalom's "external" and "internal" commitment to repair the world.

As daunting and grandiose a task as that may seem, group member Avril Orloff sees it as a catalyst for change – change that starts with small steps.

To take one of those steps toward external tikkun olam, Mary Adlersberg and Vicki Robinson joined staff members Yael Heffer and Rabbi Hannah in coordinating the Eight Leading Lights project at Hanukkah. Ties were established and relationships begun with the Battered Women's Support Services, the Native Education College, the Vancouver Fire Department, Mt. Pleasant Neighbourhood House, the Momo Minyan, Camp Miriam, Vancouver Homework Club and the First United Church Community Ministry Society.

The plan is to highlight each organization at different times of the year as their work relates to an

Or Shalom *chag* or event. For example, Purim was a perfect time to honour Vashti's courage by encouraging folks to support the Battered Women's Support Services with either a monetary donation or a donation of goods to their fundraising shop My Sister's Closet. Another "light", the Native Education College, invited OrSh members to its Elders' Day last month in a reciprocal gesture of good will.

There will be future ways for us to connect and increase our mutually beneficial involvement. As we reach out to support these organizations' values and projects, we strengthen each other and make Or Shalom a more visible and vital part of the wider community.

"Internal" tikkun olam – repairing our own community – can take many forms and be even more daunting. One of the group's future initiatives is to tackle difficult conversations that create barriers by creating safe and respectful processes to address our differences.

# Come Grow With Us

The Or Shalom Board shares a vision of our future

Or Shalom is a unique spiritual community in Vancouver, blending deep roots in Jewish tradition with openness to innovation and creativity. We foster participation, engagement and inclusiveness across all segments of our community. We seek to connect our spiritual life with the physical and material world we inhabit, based on a commitment to Tikkun Olam through outreach, activism, Gemilut Chesed and Tzedakah.

As we reflect on the evolution of our community, we have also begun to look into the crystal ball of our future, imagining the paths we might take towards continued growth and development. What roads might we follow over the next 5 to 10, or even 30 years? How will we continue to honour our beloved traditions, while also remaining open to new opportunities for continued spiritual and material growth? In short, how do we renew the renewal movement at Or Shalom? As we learned from our recent discussions with Rabbis Rachel Barenblat and David Markus during the ALEPH Listening Tour, this question is very much on the minds of Jewish Renewal communities around North America, with the movement transitioning into leadership by a new generation and building a solid foundation for a long-term sustainable future.

Over the past several years, our community has gone through a period of reflection and introspection, beginning in 2014 with the community survey and Rabbi transition. We initiated a broad-ranging conversation to begin a process of strategic planning that will guide us into the next phase of our communal evolution. This period of transition and expectation mirrors that of the broader Jewish Renewal movement following the passing of Reb Zalman z"l. Drawing strength from our traditions, and with courage and conviction leading into the future, both Or Shalom and Jewish Renewal are now ready to move forward.

With a new permanent Rabbi in place, it is time for concrete actions that will ensure Or Shalom's future and vitality. Towards this end, the Or Shalom Board of Directors and Rabbi Hannah held two strategic planning workshops to develop a course of action to achieve our communal aspirations in two important areas. We are mobilizing our energy to:

- Actively promote OrShalom to the broader Jewish community of Vancouver, with the aim of raising our profile and attracting new members and
- Build an intergenerational focus within OrShalom
- Grow our donation base and budget to facilitate these next stages of growth

Come Grow With Us – the theme of this year's annual campaign – as we build opportunities for a rich and meaningful Jewish life in Vancouver. The opportunities are many, from monthly Kabbalat Shabbat services to weekend Shabbatonim with guest teachers, from educational programs for adults and young people to renovating our kitchen to support community-wide events.

Come Grow With Us – be generous this year with your campaign donations and with your volunteer time. Join a committee, lead a service, help organize an event, contribute to the annual campaign. Your contributions to Or Shalom are what makes us a participatory community. Please be generous this year to help us extend Or Shalom further, so we can grow together.





Reb Irwin Keller is a writer, singer, performer, blogger and the spiritual leader of Congregation Ner Shalom in California. Read more about him at [irwinkeller.com](http://irwinkeller.com)

Friday: The Yiddish Midrash of Itzik Manger.  
Shabbat Acharei Mot: "What Floats Your Goat?"  
Sunday Workshop: Psalm-Making for Kids.



Watch Irwin's Video  
Invitation at  
[orshalom.ca!](http://orshalom.ca!)

# Or Shalom Annual Family Retreat

Now it's time to register for this year's Or Shalom Retreat at  
Camp Hope – May 6, 7 and 8, 2016!

Prices: Adult: \$294, Family of 4 (2 children under 10) \$616. More options online. Subsidies available.

What is included during this fabulous weekend? Everything!

- Accommodation in the cozy lodge or your own tent
- Rest and relaxation
- Healthy vegetarian meals and snacks

- Adult and children's programming
- Child care

- You just won't find a better deal anywhere!

- Fun and creative children's programming led by our wonderful counsellors and Reb Irwin.

- Easy and moderate hikes

- Participatory Shabbat services, including Kabbalat Shabbat, "Storahelling", and Havdallah.

- Music, sports, board games, and plenty of schmoozing.

- Workshops and teachings with our guest Reb Irwin on Yiddish poetry, Angelology and Psalm making.



<http://www.orshalom.ca/annual-retreat/>