



# Or Shalom Synagogue Congregational Profile

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### Congregation Co-Chairs

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### Position Overview

Brief description of the rabbinic position:

Or Shalom's rabbi works in five areas: Avodah - Davening/Prayer/Spiritual Life, Torah - Sacred Learning, Family and Children's Programming, Gemilut Hasadim/Tikkun Olam - Acts of Caring and Transformation, and Administrative.

Please see [this link](#) for the complete job description.

Areas of activity for the rabbi (check all that apply):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lead Friday night services             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lead Saturday morning services  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <u>1</u> time a month                             | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>4</u> times a month                     |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Give a regular D'var Torah at services | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lead festival services          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chant/sing at Shabbat services         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chant/sing at festival services |

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Read/chant Torah at services   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Holiday Services                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Teach in the Children/Family Programs<br>what grade(s) <u>all ages</u> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prepare b'nei/b'not mitzvah<br>_____ with cantillation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Be involved in synagogue administration                                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Visit hospitals, care facilities,                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Develop and teach adult education                                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attend board meetings                                  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attend other meetings as required                                      |  |

### **Congregation Identity**

Number of member units today: 178 (total)

Families 90 Single Members 88 Children (age 0-4) Unk  
Children (age 5-13) Unk

Number of member units 4 years ago: 195 (total)

Families 109 Single Members 86 Children (age 0-4) Unk  
Children (age 5-13) Unk

Future Demographic Projections: Based on our latest community survey Or Shalom will continue adding a few families with pre-B'nei Mitzvah age children, a growing number of Jewish people in interfaith marriages, and adult and senior spiritual seekers.

Date Congregation Founded: 1978

Or Shalom is affiliated with ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal.

Date of affiliation: Or Shalom has been informally affiliated with the Jewish Renewal movement since its founding. Or Shalom formally affiliated with ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal in 2006. Or Shalom was not previously affiliated with a different organization.

### **A brief description and history of Or Shalom:**

Or Shalom (Light of Peace) is a Jewish Renewal community seeking to live an authentic, creative and deeply satisfying spiritual life. We are committed to the integrity of our Jewish tradition and its continual evolution. Women and men share and participate equally in all aspects of our community's religious life. We are dedicated to providing an inclusive community as well as resources for individuals to explore their Judaism. Our uniqueness expresses itself in the melodies, poetry, visual arts, creative liturgy and new ceremonies created by our members.

Or Shalom was founded by Rabbis Daniel and Hanna Tiferet Siegel in 1978. We began as a *havurah* and moved to our *bayit* at 710 East 10th and Fraser in 1992. We are affiliated with ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal and draw on the strengths and beauties of the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, and Hassidic movements. Or Shalom and the Jewish

Renewal movement attribute their origins largely to the insights and teachings of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.

We continually seek ways to relate to the treasures of our past to inform and enrich our contemporary lives. With our roots in traditional Jewish values and practices, we explore new ways to broaden and elevate our spiritual lives. We engage in a quest to explore our spiritual and liturgical practice, incorporating a special love for music that brings joy and vitality to our Hebrew and English davening.

Learning across all levels of knowledge and throughout the spectrum of ages is an intrinsic part of our quest. We encourage every individual to reach toward fulfillment on his or her spiritual journey.

### **Rabbinic History**

Names of our last 3 rabbis, their affiliation and how long and when they served us.

Name	Length of Service & Years	Affiliation
1. Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan	9 ½ years from 2005-2014	ALEPH & OHALAH
2. Rabbi Hillel Goelman	2 years (part-time) from 2003-2005	Private & ALEPH
3. Rabbi David Mivasair	7 years from 1995-2003	Reconstructionist & ALEPH

### **Current Staff**

Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> full-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> part-time
Bookkeeper	<input type="checkbox"/> full-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> part-time
Custodian	<input type="checkbox"/> full-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> part-time
Child minder	<input type="checkbox"/> full-time	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> part-time

### **Policies/Guidelines**

The congregation has a written policy or guidelines on the following (see Appendix A):

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Shabbat and festivals	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bar and Bat Mitzvah
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kashrut	<input type="checkbox"/> Role of the non-Jew in the congregation
<input type="checkbox"/> Religious School	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Patrilineal Descent
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interfaith Marriage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same Sex Marriage
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conversion	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

## Synagogue Facilities

Or Shalom owns our synagogue building. Our *bayit* is a former Highland Presbyterian Church, which we acquired in 1993. The original building has been thoroughly remodeled and is partially wheelchair accessible.

Seating capacity in the sanctuary: 200

A brief description of the rest of the facility: Our *bayit* has a rabbi's study, a library, a shared office for the administrative staff, a social hall/auditorium, a kitchen, and three bathrooms.

What we do when our facility is not large enough for an event: Because Or Shalom's community expands significantly for the High Holidays, we observe Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur at the Jewish Community Centre. We rent another facility for our annual gala fundraiser.

## Religious Services

Men and women participate equally.

Prayer books used:

Daily	Siddur Eit Ratzon
Shabbat	Siddur Eit Ratzon
Festivals	Siddur Eit Ratzon
High Holy Days	Rabbinical Assembly Machzor

Who normally leads services? A combination of the rabbi and lay leaders.

Torah Reading Cycle:   X   triennial

Who normally reads Torah? A combination of the rabbi and lay leyners.

Haftara:   1   time a month

Who normally reads Haftara? Usually lay readers

Friday evening services:        early        late   X   other (service at 7 p.m. followed by potluck dinner)

Average adult attendance at services without a Bar/Bat Mitzvah:

  20   Friday evening        50   Saturday morning        N/A   daily minyan  
  20   Festival/Chag services       600  High Holy Days

Use of instrumentation:

Friday evening     Saturday Morning     Festivals  
 High Holy Days

Other:  Holidays and Festivals other than on Yom Tovim.

### **Religious School**

Total number of students now   0                        five years ago   0  

A brief history of Or Shalom's Hebrew School:

At its peak, the Hebrew School enrolled 90 students. Due to a steadily declining enrollment, the school was reluctantly closed and the focus was placed on other children and youth programs. We are currently re-evaluating our need to provide more educational opportunities for children and youth.

A brief description of Or Shalom's current children's educational programming:

Baby/Toddler Shabbat Social Time. Join babies, toddlers and their parents for a relaxed social gathering Shabbat morning in the social hall play area. 10:30 am. Third Shabbat of the month. No RSVP necessary.

Kids Club for elementary school age children. Fun with holidays, stories, ethics, and Hebrew. Led by Camp Miriam Counsellors under the supervision of the rabbi. \$180 per term. Wednesday afternoons 4-6 pm.

Family Shabbat. Younger kids enjoy a parsha-themed program; older youth and bnei mitzvah rehearse a parsha play; everyone enjoys an all-ages Torah service including the play and a multi-age discussion. 10:15 am -1:00 pm, on Shabbat a month.

Bnei mitzvah program. Seven Sunday afternoons, and seven Shabbat mornings. Part of the preparation for youth planning a bar or bat mitzvah this year. Led by the rabbi and friends.

### **Adult Education**

A brief description of the adult education opportunities Or Shalom offered in the past two years:

- Selichot program on the meaning of Kol Nidre
- Lunchtime class on compassionate speech - 3 classes
- Yoga and Teshuva evening before Rosh Hashanah
- Exploring Judaism - 16 classes
- Adult bnei mitzvah - 10 classes

- Philosophers' cafe: 3 (death and dying, humor, Jews and Booze)
- Children of Abraham - guest speakers on Christianity, group introduction to Quran - 3 meetings
- Varieties of Zionism - 3 guest lecturers
- Guest lecture on creation and science
- Creative writing course - 4 sessions
- Kabbalah class, 4 sessions
- Tikkun Leyl Shavuot

Member led/organized offerings:

Men's Torah Group – meets to discuss Parshat HaShavuah every other Friday morning at 8:00 a.m. at a local cafe. Average attendance: 6

Shabbat afternoon Tisches – meets for 4 to 6 weeks to learn about/discuss a selected topic.

Topics offered this year:

- Tisch on prayer - 8 meetings
- Tisch on Pri Etz Hadar - Mystical TuBeShevat Seder - 3 meetings
- Average attendance: 12

Chanting and Chocolate – meets the last Sunday of every month at 7:30 p.m. Dedicated to offering Hebrew chanting as a form of meditation and ecstatic prayer on the path of the heart. Average attendance: 20

A brief description of the rabbi's role in adult education:

The rabbi leads adult education at beginning and intermediate levels, oversees all levels of educational programming, shares Torah and spiritual writing with the Or Shalom community.

### **Governance Structure**

Board of Directors:

Number of Directors 12                      Number of Officers 4  
 Frequency of Meetings monthly

Rabbi's role: Ex-officio member who attends Board meetings and advises, but has no vote.

Or Shalom's Constitution and Bylaws may be found [here](#) .



## Committees and their responsibilities:

### Standing committees:

#### Bayit

Addresses the physical needs of maintaining the building and the grounds as indicated by the Board and/or staff, functions as an informal group which meets on an ad hoc basis. Maintenance goals are met by either the committee members or by contracting the work.

#### Children, Youth and Family

Newly re-energized after our community survey and meeting. Recommends and may help run family-friendly events. May recommend hiring a programming staff person.

#### Communications

Sets policy and writes the content that provides the information and voice of Or Shalom to our members and the wider community via email, public relations activities, Keren Or, website, Twitter, and Facebook.

#### Finance

Is responsible for the fiscal management of the shul, prepares an annual budget, tracks revenue and expenses, and ensures that members have made their financial contributions. The treasurer reports on these activities to the board each month.

#### Gemilut Chesed

Strives to ensure that all members of the Or Shalom Community are taken care of, whether it be illness, chronic pain, bereavement, or just someone who needs a little help from a friend.

#### Governance

#### Inactive

#### Kiddush

Oversees the kitchen and kiddish lunches, including ensuring that supplies are purchased, kitchen deficiencies are reported, tables and food are set out, and fridge and freezer are periodically cleaned.

#### LGBTQ

#### Inactive

## Membership

Is responsible for welcoming new members and visitors and hosting the New Members' Kiddush.

## Personnel

Ensures appropriate procedures are followed for all recruiting, hiring, job terminations, and exit interviews; ensures annual performance reviews take place for all staff. Guides the development of staff position descriptions to conform to Provincial and Federal employment requirements.

## Ritual

Along with the rabbi, is the centre for discussions and decisions on how religious matters are practiced and observed during services and other shul functions, such as Shabbat practices and Kashrut.

## Strategic Financial Planning

Works with the board to establish long term financial goals to meet the operating and capital needs of the community. At present the main focus is the Community Building Campaign to add funds to the operation of the organization and to sustain dialogue and connection with all households in the community.

## Tikkun Olam

Believes strongly in the mitzvah of healing the world and, through fundraising and direct service, actively supports charitable organizations that care for the environment and the people in it. Taking inspiration and encouragement from the rabbi, it leads by example and reminds all of us of our on-going responsibilities that are inseparable from our contract with Hashem.

## Young Adult

Is a group of "funky, young Jews" (and those who love Jews) who meet to socialize, celebrate, learn and have an all around good time, regardless of membership status at Or Shalom.

## Ad Hoc committees:

### Rabbi Search

Seeks out and vets potential candidates for the permanent rabbi position and makes recommendations to the Board.

## Cemetery

Is seeking to establish an Or Shalom cemetery within the boundaries of Vancouver's historic Mountain View Cemetery, under a "reserve agreement" with the City of Vancouver.

## New Machzor

Is seeking a new machzor that will better fit the needs of the community

## Metropolitan Vancouver Community Profile

Population: General: 2,313,328 (2011 Census) Jewish: 26,437 (2011 Census)

Other congregations in Metro Vancouver:

<u>  X  </u> Progressive	How many <u>  1  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Conservative	How many <u>  3  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Reform	How many <u>  2  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Renewal	How many <u>  1  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Liberal	How many <u>  1  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Orthodox	How many <u>  4  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Sephardic	How many <u>  1  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Traditional	How many <u>  2  </u>
<u>  X  </u> Chabad	How many <u>  5  </u>

Other Jewish agencies and facilities in Metro Vancouver:

Hebrew Free Loan Society [www.hfla.ca](http://www.hfla.ca)

Independent Living for Senior Citizens - Weinberg Residence  
[www.weinbergresidence.com](http://www.weinbergresidence.com)

Louis Brier Jewish Home for the Aged [www.louisbrier.com](http://www.louisbrier.com)

Jewish Cemeteries (Schara Tzedek Chevra Kadisha)

Schara Tzedek [www.scharatzedek.com](http://www.scharatzedek.com)

Beth Israel [www.bethisraelvan.ca](http://www.bethisraelvan.ca)

Beth Tikvah [www.btikvah.ca](http://www.btikvah.ca)

Temple Sholom [www.templesholom.ca](http://www.templesholom.ca)

Jewish Community Centre [www.jccgv.com](http://www.jccgv.com)

## Jewish day schools

Elementary (K-7) – Vancouver Talmud Torah Elementary School, Richmond  
Jewish Day School, Vancouver Hebrew Academy  
High School (8-12) – King David High School, Pacific Torah Institute  
(Yeshivas Tifferes Moshe Aharon), Shalhevet Girls High School

Jewish Family Service Agency [jfsa.ca](http://jfsa.ca)

Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver [www.jewishvancouver.com](http://www.jewishvancouver.com)

## Kosher Food

  5   kosher restaurants      2   kosher meat markets  
  3   kosher bakeries

## Mikva'ot

Schara Tzedek Mikvah  
Lubavitch Mikvah

## Major cultural institutions in Greater Vancouver:

The Orpheum concert hall  
Queen Elizabeth Theatre  
Vancouver Playhouse  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
Malkin Bowl

## Colleges and universities in Greater Vancouver:

University of British Columbia  
Simon Fraser University  
Langara College  
Vancouver Community College  
Emily Carr University of Art  
Vancouver School of Theology  
BC Institute of Technology

## **Mission and Values**

Or Shalom Synagogue is a Jewish spiritual community affiliated with ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal. We are creative, egalitarian, traditional and participatory. Our most recent (2007) Values Statement is attached (see Appendix B).

The three qualities that are most important to Or Shalom in our new rabbi are: Spiritual Leader, Pastor, Teacher.

The three most important areas for rabbinic involvement are: Member engagement, youth and family programming, creativity in davening.

The two least important areas for rabbinic involvement are: Community representative and fundraiser.

The things of which Or Shalom is most proud are: Our egalitarian, participatory, creative davenen, especially our Shabbat morning davenen, the mishebeirachs after aliyot, the parsha plays during family Shabbatot, the b'nei mitzvah celebrations, our tikkun olam projects, our musicality.

Or Shalom's strengths are: Our lay leadership and our values. We believe in spiritual growth, learning, creativity and innovation, inclusivity tradition, gemilut chesed, tikkun olam and tzedakah, synagogue sustainability, and connecting to the larger Jewish world and beyond.

Or Shalom's challenges are: Welcoming new members, retention of members, serving young families and children.

The three most important issues which face Or Shalom in the next five years will be: Retention of members, attracting families, children/youth/adult education

The three goals Or Shalom would like to achieve in the next year are:

- Refresh davenen and leyning by involving more community members
- Office procedures to support members, programming, and finance
- Strategic planning for next 5-10 years

The single most important thing a rabbi needs to know about Or Shalom is:

Or Shalom fills a unique role in Jewish Renewal and in the Vancouver Jewish community by being inclusive, creative, and participatory. These values are core to the community, and there are ample opportunities for the rabbi to augment and energize them in new ways.

## **Finances**

Size of Or Shalom's budget: \$320,000

Minimum dues: Or Shalom's policy is never to exclude someone for financial reasons. For those who are not able to pay full dues, the treasurer negotiates, in confidence, an amount that they feel comfortable paying.

Average dues: Most members pay full dues, which are \$850 for a single adult family and \$1700 for a two adult family.

Or Shalom's Annual Income

Dues:	\$170,000
Endowments:	0
Fund-raising:	\$120,000
Other:	\$ 36,000

A brief description of Or Shalom's financial condition: Or Shalom is in a good financial position. We have no debt (no mortgage on our building) and since we began our annual fundraising campaign four years ago, we have been able to raise a significant amount of money.

What is the expectation (if any) of the rabbi in terms of fundraising? (High Holiday appeal, fundraising committee, etc.) The rabbi participates very little, if at all, in fundraising.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Written Policies/Guidelines

#### Shabbat and Festivals

The heart and soul of Or Shalom is our Shabbat morning davenen. It is the time when we come together as a community and to deepen and strengthen our spiritual lives.

Shabbat services are held weekly at the Or Shalom bayit at 10th and Fraser. We begin at 10 am and conclude around 12:30 pm. Like many synagogues, we read the Torah on a triennial cycle. During 5774 we are reading the first third of the weekly reading. We only occasionally read the Haftorah and rarely daven Musaf. Following services we usually share a Kiddush lunch together.

On most Shabbat mornings 40-60 people come for davenen. Or Shalom members share with the rabbi in leading most parts of the prayer service and divrei torah (the teaching and discussion of the weekly Torah portion) - the line-up of prayer leaders is prepared by volunteer gabbaim. Or Shalom davenen combines traditional Hebrew liturgy and music with new expressions of prayer. Much of our music has been created by our own members or others involved in the Jewish Renewal movement. Some of our members' liturgy and writings can be found [on our website](#). Brief teachings and kavanot (intentions) are woven into the davenen. While we have a deep consistent rhythm from Shabbat to Shabbat, each week's davenen has its own special way of reflecting the mood of the community and the spirit of the person leading.

Because we know we are all in different stages of Jewish spiritual growth, we are committed to making our prayer services as accessible as possible. Even without knowing Hebrew or having much background in traditional Jewish ways of prayer, newcomers can find deep levels of meaning and connectedness. Our singing and open heart space offer access beyond the level of language. Those wishing to learn Hebrew are advised to consider adult classes given frequently through the Jewish Community Centre.

We look to each other for leadership. Those who are familiar with traditional nusach (liturgy) are invited to lead sections of tefilla (prayer). Those without deep background are also invited to assume leadership - learning the prayers and weaving them with your own studies of Reb Nachman, Martin Buber or Thich Nhat Hanh will enrich us all.

Several times a year we have a Shabbat service specially focused on the participation of families and youth. Once a month we hold a Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday nights. Please note that we have some shared practices for the sake of community: i.e. We don't use cameras on Shabbat. Please turn off all beepers. Men cover their heads. Anyone is welcome to wear a tallit. Call out your appreciations - don't clap.

We celebrate the full cycle of the Jewish Year: Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, all the festivals and holidays, including Rosh Hodesh (the beginning of the new Hebrew month). It is our custom to davven together on Shavuot and on the first and last days of Passover and Sukkot. At Passover, we usually have a community seder open to all. Naturally we have a roaring good time on Simchat Torah, wild costumes on Purim, candlelit evenings at Chanuka, bonfires on the beach for Lag B' Omer, study evenings for Tisha B'Av and Leil Shavuot, etc. All of these events take organizing effort - and reflect the interests of the volunteers who make them happen.

## **Kashrut**

Eating together is an enthusiastically pursued mitzvah at Or Shalom. The Or Shalom kitchen and facilities are all dairy/vegetarian, but not strictly Kosher. We prefer products which bear a Kosher seal, but do not require such, provided that nothing served contains meat or shellfish.

A complete [Guide to Kiddush and Kitchen](#) provides answers to your questions about potluck meals, running the dishwasher, hosting a kiddush, sources of kosher foods, snacks for kids, etc.

Adam va-Adamah, the local Jewish environmental group, has prepared a [list of kosher organic products available in Vancouver](#). That list will also lead you to links to several Orthodox kashrut websites.

## **Interfaith Marriage**

Or Shalom's rabbi does not conduct intermarriage ceremonies. Interested persons will be given contact information of rabbis or Jewish lay officiants who do.

## **Conversion**

For those new to Judaism (or returning to it) the Exploring Judaism course may be what they are seeking: a series of classes at Or Shalom Synagogue on Basic Judaism and Basic Hebrew.

Who should attend? Seekers considering affirming Judaism for the first time are welcome, as are Jews returning to Judaism and practicing Jews wanting to increase their basic knowledge. Everyone interested in attending must speak first with the Or Shalom rabbi.

What is our approach? In keeping with the Renewal Movement's philosophy, we both (1) explain Jewish customs in their historical and intellectual context, and (2) emphasize the ways that Judaism speaks to the psychological and spiritual needs of individuals and groups.

What do we study? In *Basic Judaism*, we study a number of key topics in Jewish thought and practice, ranging from Shabbat traditions, prayers, and holidays to new directions in Kashrut to controversial ideas in theology. Discussion, questions, and a diversity of viewpoints will be offered by the instructors and solicited from students in the class. In *Beginning Hebrew*, students



will learn reading and basic vocabulary. *Special topics* will include features from the synagogue's Adult Education calendar.

When will classes be held? 7:30-9:30 p.m., two Tuesday nights per month, September through June. Please contact the rabbi for this year's calendar.

What should students bring? An open heart, and open mind, and -- when it is their turn on the schedule -- a dairy or vegetarian snack.

What should students read? Required readings will be:

*Jewish With Feeling*, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

*Judaism for Dummies*, Rabbi Ted Falcon and David Blatner

*Seasons of Our Joy*, Rabbi Arthur Waskow

*The Path of Blessing*, Rabbi Marcia Prager

*Choosing a Jewish Life*, Anita Diamant

Everyone should own a copy of Or Shalom's prayerbook *Siddur Eit Ratzon* and a *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) in NJPS translation.

How much does the class cost? Free to Or Shalom members; \$500 per non-member individual; \$550 per non-member couple

What role does the class play in preparing for conversion to Judaism? If someone is considering affirming Judaism for the first time, we ask that they participate in

1. "Exploring Judaism" course
2. Or Shalom Friday night, Shabbat morning and holiday services
3. Another Or Shalom program (social or educational) at least once a month
4. One other adult education opportunity of their choice in the Jewish community
5. Consultation and counseling with the Or Shalom rabbi about spiritual issues and questions of importance to them.

Please note that there is no magic formula for calculating when a person is ready to affirm Judaism. This will be determined on a person-by-person basis through consultation with the rabbi.

### **Bar/Bat Mitzvah**

An Or Shalom Bar/Bat Mitzvah is tailored to the abilities of the young person involved and to the sensitivities of the entire family. Our bnai mitzvah generally chant from the Torah and prepare a dvar Torah (a teaching based on their studies, their understanding and their personal experience of their Torah readings). Many lead part of the Shabbat morning service as well. Or Shalom has a number of experienced teachers who can help young people and their families

prepare for this transformative occasion. See our guide to planning an Or Shalom Bar(t) Mitzvah which is the short form of a longer document - the complete manual describing bar and bat mitzvah - learn about ceremony, food, study, and other requirements and practicalities. Since Bar/Bat Mitzvah signals entry into the community, we expect families to have been actively involved with Or Shalom for at least two years prior to the event.

### **Patrilineal Descent (1998)**

Or Shalom recognizes that both the arguments in support of patrilineal and matrilineal descent are strong and compelling. We live in a time of fragmentation and transition within the Jewish world. Long term consequences and outcomes are difficult to foresee. Within this context, the following reflect some of the deliberations explored by the Or Shalom Vaad and Board during 1997 and 1998 (the Report of the Vaad is available on Or Shalom's website at: <http://orshalom.ca/patlin.vaad.html>).

Or Shalom embraces diversity and egalitarianism. We want to honour equally all people of Jewish descent who want to raise their children Jewishly. Jewish tradition continuously evolves. The tradition of matrilineal descent emerged out of a human process; it was not G-d-given. Or Shalom embraces change where it feels this change is just, fair and in keeping with the values of our times. Accepting people of patrilineal descent and including them within the community contributes to the survival of the Jewish people. The non-acceptance of the status of patrilineal descent deepens the hurt and sense of injustice. There is already widespread acceptance of patrilineal descent in the Reform and Reconstructionist movements.

Matrilineal descent has been the essential way of knowing who is a Jew for 2,000 years or more. We want to remain within the historical Jewish mainstream, to uphold the essence of Jewish continuity and tradition. The fundamental definition of who is a Jew is a different kind of issue than changing a particular practice, like men and women davenen together. Being a Jew comes from being part of a people. It is not an individual matter. Individuals cannot simply decide for themselves whether or not they are Jews. To be fully accepted as a member of the group, one accepts the group's definition of what being a member is. Or Shalom's keeping matrilineal descent assures that Or Shalom people will be accepted in other parts of the Jewish community.

Accepting patrilineal descent will seriously affect Or Shalom's standing in the rest of the organized Jewish community in Vancouver and beyond.

People of patrilineal descent can, and many do, choose to acquire full Jewish status by simply going to the mikvah (and, in the case of most men, fulfilling the mitzvah of hatafat dam). The door is open; acknowledging the weight of their Jewish heritage, the required standards for affirmation at Or Shalom for people of Jewish patrilineal descent is minimal. Those who go to the mikvah, and men who fulfil hatafat dam find that by doing so they come to a deeper commitment to and connection with Jewish life for themselves and their families.

This is something we want to encourage.

After reviewing the Vaad's report, and after considerable G-d-wrestling, Or Shalom's Board concluded that we should adopt the following policy decisions:

1. Or Shalom affirms that people of patrilineal Jewish descent have a claim on Jewish identity. That means we at Or Shalom will not question their own sense of belonging and attachment to the Jewish people and Jewish life.

2. For full participation as a Jew at Or Shalom, people of patrilineal Jewish descent will require mikvah\*, and additionally for men, brith mila\*\* or hatafat dam\*\*\*. There will be no further eligibility requirements for individuals of patrilineal Jewish descent with their own sense of belonging and attachment to the Jewish people and Jewish life. The practical implications for those of patrilineal descent would be the following:

a) Or Shalom continues the practice that we have had throughout our history. As a community we are open to all that are interested in sharing with us and we will continue to welcome everyone.

b) While everyone is most welcome to share in our community, it is important that someone who acts and speaks for the community in religious context be someone who is accepted in that role by the whole community.

There are two particular roles where this acceptance is important. One is serving the community as shaliah tsibbur, which means, in effect, being the one chosen from among the community by the community to stand before us and lead us all in davenen. The other role is being called to an aliya (including Bar or Bat Mitzvah). This means saying the brachot for a Torah reading on behalf of the entire community gathered together at that time.

Because these two roles mean speaking and acting for the community as a whole in a religious context, someone who serves in either of these two roles needs to be someone whose Jewish status is recognized and accepted by those whom they are leading. At present, a substantial number of members of Or Shalom are comfortable only with someone about whom there is a broad agreement within our community regarding their status as a Jew - either by having been born to a Jewish mother or by having consolidated their Jewish status through fulfilling the mitzvah of mikvah and, for a man or boy, having fulfilled the mitzvah of brit mila or hatafat dam.

This means that for someone with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother to have their own individual aliya, as a Bar or Bat Mitzvah for example, they would have to first have fulfilled these mitzvot. This way when someone stands before our community as a Jew to

lead us in davenen or Torah reading, there will be no doubt that they will be welcomed and accepted in that role by our whole community.

c) People of patrilineal descent are welcome to join in group aliyot and to offer their wisdom and learning through divrei Torah.

d) The rabbi may exercise discretion in guiding and supporting anyone who is celebrating or observing personal lifecycle passages.

### **Same Sex Marriage (2001)**

In July, 2001 the Or Shalom board endorsed a policy jointly proposed by Rabbi David Mivasair and Rabbi Hillel Goelman regarding the role of the Or Shalom rabbi in officiating at same-sex Jewish weddings. That decision was ratified on September 6, 2001. The full proposal is below.

BH

On Broadening Our Vision of Holy Relationship: A Proposal to the Or Shalom Community  
Submitted by Rabbi David Mivasair and Rabbi Yair Hillel Goelman

#### Background

Since last summer, the Or Shalom community has been discussing, studying, arguing and reflecting on questions about same-sex marriages. The discussion has revealed both the simplicity and the complexity of the question. The simplicity seems to arise from the fact that Or Shalom is an egalitarian community in which gays and lesbians participate equally and fully in all aspects of the community's social and ritual life. Also, Or Shalom is a community which consciously participates in Judaism's continual evolution. We believe that our religious task is not only to receive the Torah revealed through all the generations before us. With humility, we ask the Holy One to grant us the wisdom, understanding and knowledge to be able to discern in our own times *helkeinu be-Toratecha* -- our generation's contribution to the eternal, ongoing revelation of Torah.

Yet, when confronted directly with the relatively new question of Jewish same-sex weddings last summer, not surprisingly we found differences of opinion within the Or Shalom community. Some felt that there was no question that the Or Shalom rabbi should indeed perform Jewish same-sex weddings. Others felt that despite our liberal approach to Jewish practice in other areas, the performance of same-sex marriages might conflict with Or Shalom's commitment to Jewish tradition or cause a negative reaction in some parts of the broader Jewish community. Many felt themselves to be somewhere in the middle: sympathetic and supportive of the principle of Jewish same-sex weddings while expressing the need for more time to look more deeply into the issue from multiple perspectives. These perspectives included a close consideration of traditional Jewish sources as well as of the lived reality of Jewish gays and lesbians and the pain and

isolation that so many of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters have felt by their exclusion from Jewish communal and spiritual life.

Many of us spent a considerable amount of time last fall in an Or Shalom course on Sexuality, Gender and Marriage in the Jewish Tradition examining both classical Jewish sources as well as material prepared by current gay and lesbian Jewish thinkers. In the course we began to understand the ways in which Judaism in different ways and at different times developed ritual, liturgy, myth, law, story and ceremony around our embodied sexualities. We saw that there were no easy answers, but lots of questions and apparent inconsistencies. Most traditional sources see sexual pleasure as a positive expression of both our godliness and our humanity, but also something we should be wary of when it manifests itself as the evil inclination that could lead to sexual greediness, abuse and violence. We learned that the Jewish tradition sees sexual relationships to be appropriate primarily within the context of marriage; and, conversely, that a major purpose of marriage was to provide a framework for positive sexual relationships. Judaism's recognition of the holiness of sexuality is not limited to a procreationist view. Mainstream traditional Judaism encourages sexuality in marriage even for those for whom procreation is physically impossible (such as in the case of pregnant or post-menopausal women).

We also learned by studying both traditional and post-modern sources that many of the prohibitions of homosexual activity were based largely on what we now know to be inaccurate or badly understood aspects of human sexuality and on the fears of heterosexuals. Beyond these sweeping and blanket prohibitions, however, we found in the tradition precious little discussion about homosexual behaviour and no discussion at all about same sex relationships and commitments. We noted that some aspects of homosexual activity, for example lesbianism, were simply beyond the scope of the traditional texts, much as women's sexuality in general was given little attention by the male rabbis who dominated the discourse.

We learned that a commitment to a sacred relationship between a man and woman is called *kiddushin* in Hebrew. In the Jewish tradition, *kiddushin* provides many ways for a couple to enrich their relationship, each imbued with emotional and spiritual meaning. In the mainstream traditional view the man, not the woman, is obligated to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful and multiply. The man is obligated to provide sexual pleasure (*onah*) to the woman, but she has no reciprocal obligation to the man. During and after a woman's period, Judaism provides a very detailed cycle that guides the ways in which the man and the woman approach each other, touch the same objects, touch each other and when and where they may resume their sexual relationship.

And we also learned that just as there is a way to step into *kiddushin* through the wedding ceremony, there is a way to step out of the relationship through Jewish divorce procedures, called *gittin*.

Or Shalom has given us the time, space and energy to look into ourselves, individually and collectively, and to study what our tradition has to contribute to the discussion. We think that the time has come to move ahead and to come to a community understanding that we can all embrace, or at least one that we can all live with. We suggest a proposal which we believe expresses the community's vision, both forwards into the future as well as keeping our eye on the rear-view mirror. We think if our proposal is accepted by the community, it will enable the community to move ahead in an important direction. It will also demand patience from all of us as we enter and create new paradigms of our spiritual and community life while we preserve and protect what is valuable and what has sustained us until now as a people.

We look forward to the community's discussion of this proposal.

#### Our proposal

The policy we are proposing is, in effect, a continuation of the current Or Shalom policy regarding the rabbi officiating at weddings. Our tradition teaches us, *Lo tov heyot ha-adam levado*, meaning, it is not good for a person to be alone. Being in holy relationship with another human being is among the most profound human experiences. The Or Shalom community has always recognized that Judaism teaches us to honour the divine image in each and every one of us. Our community has also always acknowledged that Judaism is a continually evolving religious tradition. We believe that at this time the Or Shalom community would make a great contribution by enabling couples consisting of two Jewish women or two Jewish men whose hearts, souls and lives are joined together to experience all the richness and depth which our sacred tradition has offered to loving, committed Jewish couples of opposite sexes.

Just as the Or Shalom community allows its rabbi discretion in deciding both whether and how to perform a Jewish ceremony between a Jewish man and a Jewish woman, the community will also now allow its rabbi to exercise the same discretion in deciding whether and how to perform a Jewish ceremony between two Jewish men or two Jewish women. The rabbi and the couple together will decide whether they want a Jewish wedding ceremony, a commitment ceremony or another type of ceremony.

## **Appendix B: Or Shalom's Values Statement (2007)**

We believe in *Spiritual Growth*

- Therefore we connect with the Divine through prayer and practice.

We believe in *Learning*

- Therefore we ensure that teaching and learning are part of all that we do.

We believe in *Creativity and Innovation*

- Therefore we keep the spark alive through music and a variety of davennen styles.

We believe in *Inclusivity*

- Therefore we are open to all who come to join us in prayer and learning, regardless of background, ability, knowledge, gender or sexual orientation.

We believe in *Tradition*

- Therefore we honour teachings and wisdom from tradition and are grounded in Halachah.

We believe in *Gemilut Chesed*

- Therefore we extend ourselves to those who need us, and consciously grow in our ability to assist people.

We believe in *Tikkun Olam and Tzedakah*

- Therefore we consciously grow in our ability to care for our environment and the people in it.

We believe in *Synagogue Sustainability*

- Therefore we follow good human resources practices, are responsible financial stewards and maintain our building.

We believe in *Connecting to the larger Jewish world*

- Therefore we participate and partner with community Jewish organizations, belong to Aleph, and support Israel.