

# KEREN OR

Or Shalom Synagogue  
January/February 2008



## TORAH, DISABILITY, AND COMMUNITY

According to Torah, a holy community treats individuals with physical and mental disabilities with awareness and sensitivity. Through this awareness, the community expresses its spiritual and social vitality.

The Torah places its teaching about disability at its very centre. Five books make up the Torah. The middle book is Vayikra-Leviticus. Vayikra discusses 13 topics. The middle topic is everyday holiness. As part of this holiness discussion, Vayikra 19:14 says, “Do not place a stumbling block (*michshol*) before a blind person. You must be in awe of your God. I am YHWH.”

Everything in Torah can be read both literally and metaphorically, and this verse is no exception. Literally, Torah tells us to ensure the safety of a person whose eyes do not work well. We must make our community’s physical pathways accessible to people with physical disabilities. Metaphorically, Torah speaks of people who cannot “see,” i.e., people who cannot understand. Torah thus tells us that we must also be aware of the needs of people with cognitive and emotional challenges.

The Hebrew word *michshol* is usually translated as “stumbling block.” We are to take care not to make things difficult for people with day-to-day challenges. The word *michshol* is related to the Hebrew root *caf, shin, lamed* – shame. Thus we should also take care not to shame anyone for their disability. How important is this? Torah says it is a basic practice of respect for God.

The book of Vayikra does not just tell us how not to behave around one another. It also tells us how we should behave. Vayikra describes public rituals for the integration of challenged individuals into the community. An individual brings a sacrifice, which the *cohen* (priest) offers amid clay and fabric symbols of life. Together the *cohen* and the individual stand before the community in solidarity. How important is this ritual? Vayikra 14:32 teaches that this is “Torah” and a means of restoring vitality to all of Israel, so that God may dwell among the people.

Talmud reminds us that respect for all creatures is a matter of respect for God. The sages even instruct us to say a blessing when we meet a person who is differently-abled. The words of the blessing praise God for variety in creation. Thus the sages invite us to reframe disability as difference.

More recently, twentieth-century halachic authority Rabbi Moshe Feinstein z”l reminds us that respect for inclusivity is a communal responsibility. Because all small communities have limited financial and human resources. He suggests that they should seek guidance and support from national and international organizations.

In Vancouver, small communities receive guidance from Jewish Family Services, which has just received a grant from United Way in order to launch new initiatives. Several Or Shalom members are involved in those initiatives, in which people who live with challenges help set the agenda. Yasher koach for your work moving us all forward!

Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan

## OR SHALOM GALA 2008

### ‘Let the Sun Shine In’

\*Or Shalom presents a sing-a-long ‘HAIR’. The Gala committee is just starting to roll on this event, with the date likely to be in March. We are looking for people to join the planning team. You can be creative or just willing to have fun! Please call Or Shalom (604-872-1614) and leave a message for Lenore if you would like to help with planning, publicity, tickets, décor, phone calls, refreshments, etc. This will be a great way to bring in the month of Adar and to support our wondrous community. Stay tuned for more details, and plan to dig out your Aquarian/Peacenick threads and join the fun.

Your Gala Committee,  
Lenore Rosen, Sue Comay, Maurice Bloch and Hana Wosk

### Tu B'Shevat

\*Stay tuned for the Tu B'shvat Family Shabbat Celebration on Jan 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

\*Join us for a Tu B'Shevat Seder at The Louis Brier Home on Jan 20th 2:30pm.

### Shabbat Celebration February 2, 2008

\*Please join us on Shabbat Feb. 2 when we honour Harriett Lemer and Catherine Youngren for the volunteer work that they have done for our community. On May 27, 2007 Harriet facilitated our Community Visioning Day and On Saturday evening Dec. 1 and Sunday Dec. 2, 2007 she lead the Or Shalom Board in a very fruitful and successful Visioning Retreat which will culminate in an action plan beginning in the spring of 2008. Catherine designed the new windows overlooking our side yards and facilitated the completion of the project.

The kiddush will be in honour of Or Shalom, our new vision, our new windows and our wonderful community.

### Adult Education

- Jan 9<sup>th</sup> Ma'ariv 7:15pm and Torah study & discussion on Parshat ‘Bo’ led by John Fuerst.
- February 9, during Shabbat services, Reb Laura will present a dvar Torah about the history and meaning of "The Shema and Its Blessings".
- May 3 Reb Laura will speak about the history and meaning of the Amidah.

## Board Visioning Retreat

\* In early December the Board met with facilitator Harriett Lemer to discuss the results of the visioning survey and the community visioning meeting. We defined our mission statement as being: *Or Shalom Synagogue is a Jewish spiritual community affiliated with the ALEPH Alliance for Jewish Renewal. We are creative, egalitarian, traditional and participatory.* We spoke about spiritual growth, learning, creativity and innovation, inclusivity, tradition, Gemilut Chesed, Tzedaka, Tikkun Olam, synagogue sustainability and connection to the larger Jewish World. The Board is now working to clarify what Or Shalom might look like in ten years and to determine what is achievable in three years.

## Bayit

\*We are in the process of evaluating the feasibility of a renovation/expansion to the current building. Many concerns including but not limited to the kitchen, the social hall, the lack of classroom and office space, and environmental factors have been brought forward and are being considered.

## Officers of The Board

\*The following persons have been elected as officers of the Board of Or Shalom:  
Myrna Rabinovitch and Maurice Bloch, co-chairs  
Susan Shamash, Treasurer  
Adele Ritch, Recording Secretary  
Lorne Greenberg

## *For further information:*

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## The Windows Project Complete

The windows project was spearheaded by a group of B'nei Mitzvah students in 2004. They wanted to do a project for the synagogue and decided to beautify the Sanctuary with windows that would allow in the natural light from the outside while blocking our view of the neighboring house as we gazed towards the Ark.

The B'nei Mitzvah families raised funds towards this goal and even designed some colored windows. As the window designs increased in number, an art committee was struck to facilitate this project. The project proved to be more complex than the committee had originally thought, with issues about color, size, types of glass, design and cost. No one on the committee had the experience or the time to research it all.

A designer was sought out to assist with the project. Catherine Youngren appeared on the scene highly recommended. She gracefully and enthusiastically gave of herself, donating her time to accommodate our limited budget. Despite numerous other commitments, she worked patiently with Or Shalom, reminding us that such a project requires both the right companies to do the work and special film to colour the windows. The windows are functional and allow natural light to flow into the building. At the same time, they are aesthetically pleasing and their design beautifies our davvening space.

The windows remind us of the verse in Genesis when Noah is commanded to build the ark with a "tzohar" inside. The rabbis are divided over what is exactly meant by a "tzohar". Some say it was a special gemstone radiating light within the ark; others say it was a special window that allowed in the divine light. Our new windows in the shul are both a source and channel for light; they are our own special "tzohar".

Sheryl Sorokin

## Go Green / Think Green

Last month, under the leadership of Noam Dolgin, a group of caring, concerned members of the community met to discuss the greening of Or Shalom. It seems that although many of us have taken personal steps to minimize our footprint, there is much that remains to be done both in our homes and at the bayit. Noam began with a Hassidic tale that points out the folly of drilling a hole in a rowboat. We are all sitting in that

rowboat wanting to help but not sure how to plug the leak. The task seems enormous, but of course that does not absolve us from making a start.

Noam helped us to break things into bite size pieces that can be done, some by each of us individually and some as a communal way of expressing our Jewish ethics. I wrote down 20 concrete ideas that apply just to the building. Beyond that, I have pages of notes on more abstract questions that wiser heads will have to resolve. The environmental committee (a sub-committee of the Tikkun Olam Committee) wishes to thank all of you for supporting the Chico-bag endeavour. We also invite you to join us as we take the next steps towards the greening of Or Shalom. If you would like to be a part of the solution, please contact Jordana Corenblum through the office.

Helen Wilkes

## **Donations**

Please consider making a donation to Or Shalom to either the Community Fund or to one of our designated funds for a Simcha, a Yahrzeit or for any other reason.

- \*The **Tzedakah Fund** contributes to charitable organizations.
- \*The **Children and Youth Fund** promotes meaningful activities for young members.
- \*The **Rabbi's Fund** is reserved for members in need.
- \*The **Shiva and Gemilut Chesed Fund** supports the Gemilut Chesed committee and provides shiva meals.
- \*The **Book & Torah Fund** purchases books and maintains the Torah scrolls.
- \*The **Lisa Nemetz School Educational Fund** upgrades the skills of students requiring extra tutoring.
- \*The **Len Ryant Children's Fund** enriches children's experience during Shabbat and other times at Or Shalom.
- \*The **Music Fund** supports the development of Jewish music.
- \*The **Retreat Fund** supports the annual retreat.
- \*The **Yesod (Scholarship) Fund** supports Jewish scholars of excellence and prayer leaders in furthering their education.
- \*The **B'nei Mitzvah Fund**, consisting of donations by B'nei Mitzvah families, contributes to specified needs of Or Shalom.
- \*The **Torah Scholarship (Mila Yomit) Fund** supports the in-depth study and analysis of the Torah.
- \*The **Curriculum Development Fund** supports the development of curriculum for children and families.

## Domestic Violence in Ethiopia and South Africa

Over 75 million dollars is spent worldwide each year in an effort to combat domestic violence - yet it is still on the increase. Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the world. A recent study by the World Health Organization revealed a shocking statistic: the violence is “justified” by the women themselves. As many as 80% of Ethiopian women regard domestic violence as justified if a woman disobeys her partner, is unfaithful, or fails to complete household chores.

The film ‘Behind Closed Doors’ tracks the collaborative efforts of Vancouver’s Law Courts Education Society and the work they have done in Ethiopia and South Africa in combating the deeply entrenched attitude to violence against women. The battle is being fought on two fronts, to change not just the law but cultural attitudes.

The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association and the South Africa Prosecuting Authority, Sexual Offence Unit have started the daunting task of undoing decades of acceptance over this practice. We learn about their bold initiatives to help Africans challenge their accepted social views, and to establish a framework for the legal system to respond to these violent crimes. Guidance in establishing that criminal justice system is coming from a small non profit organization in Vancouver, with the Support of Victim Services BC.

Evelyn Neaman

### The Jews of Ethiopia

Falashas (exiles), are the Jews of Ethiopia who refer to themselves as *Beta Israel* (House of Israel). They practice a form of Judaism based on our Scriptures and certain apocryphal books; they also adhere to certain traditions that correspond to some found in the Midrash and Talmud. They claim descent from those who migrated from Jerusalem with Menelik I (son of Solomon and Sheba), but scholars believe they adopted Judaism from Jews who migrated from Arabia or from Egypt. In modern times there were pogroms against the Falashas, and some, known as the Falash Mura, converted to Christianity, often without actually becoming practicing Christians. In 1975 the Israeli rabbinate recognized the Falashas legally as Jews.

During the Ethiopian civil war, about 10,000 Falashas from the Gondar region of Ethiopia were airlifted with Operation Moses (Sept., 1984-Mar., 1985) to Israel. A second airlift (Operation Solomon) of more than 14,000 occurred in May, 1991. Ethiopia subsequently agreed to permit Israel to evacuate those still remaining, and by 1999 the last remaining practicing Jews were flown to Israel, bringing the total there to over 70,000. About 26,000 members of the Falash Mura seeking to emigrate to Israel remained. Questions concerning the faith and sincerity of these families by Israeli officials resulted in the slow processing of their immigration requests.

The list of 26,000 compiled by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jews (NACOEJ) was pared down by the Israeli Government in 2003. Today there are about 1,500 remaining to be brought to Israel at the rate of 60 per week. Services operated by the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee in Addis and Gondar will then end. NACOEJ will continue to deliver its services in Gondar to those who remain.



Falash Mura Women Davenning in Gondar  
Lorne Greenberg

### Reflections on Ethiopia

We drink *tej* in Lalibela, Fermented from honey.  
Good for the stomach.  
Definitely good for the spirit and humour.  
A women, accompanied by a man on a stringed instrument, sings mockingly about each guest.  
The Amharic language is kind on the ear,

Artistic as written.  
The music flows in comfortable rhythms and melodies.  
Both language and music are sophisticated, complex.  
Ethiopian history is long, convoluted with inconsistencies .... that don't seem to matter.

Huts of mud and straw, covered with thatch, for sleeping.  
Newspaper wallpaper surrounds all the possessions.  
Stick shelters for cooking, baking injera.  
Days seem predictable. Sun up at six.

Peter Ballin