

KEREN OR

ב"ה

THE NEWSLETTER OF OR SHALOM קרן אור

Or Shalom Jewish Spiritual Community, Vancouver, B.C. orshalom.ca Av/Elul 5761-Tishrei 5762 August/September 2001

**Av/Elul 5761– Tishrei 5762
August/September 2001**

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MENDING THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES

By Rabbi David Mivasair

Shalom uvracha to one and all. During the past few weeks, nearly everyone Michal and I encounter asks us what it's like to be back home again. Instead of "back home," some say "back in Vancouver" knowing that Yerushalayim is home as well. The question is easy but the answer never simple.

Of course, we love being with our community, with friends whose lives have been part of ours now for six years, with the neshamas who share our davening, our Torah, our vision.

When I came back, I was amazed at the spaciousness of Vancouver, just how much room there is around the houses, the wide straight streets all laid out in neat parallels and perpendiculars. The space is nice but, I must admit, it felt a little cold after living in close quarters on narrow lanes that wind around the hillsides of Yerushalayim following the ancient contours of that holy land.

The apparent surface calm of Vancouver is entirely different from Israel. Here, it seems that everyone gets along so well. Here, people seek serenity, equanimity, detachment. In Israel, the national motto might as well be "Never a dull moment." Life is intense, vivid, compelling. Cab drivers stop traffic to yell at you that the baby's belly is showing, she must be cold. Total strangers get into arguments with you at bus stops — because you care deeply about the same things. Passions swirl on the surface. You don't have to guess what someone is feeling. Even those with whom you most vociferously disagree are ready literally to defend you to the death — and even buy you a coffee or hold your groceries while you argue. Relationship is

THE REB SITE

an assumption, a given, even with total strangers.

Here, I often feel that we don't have enough trust in relationships to say what is real to us. I have a sense that people withdraw rather than risk an open disagreement that would disrupt the surface calm.

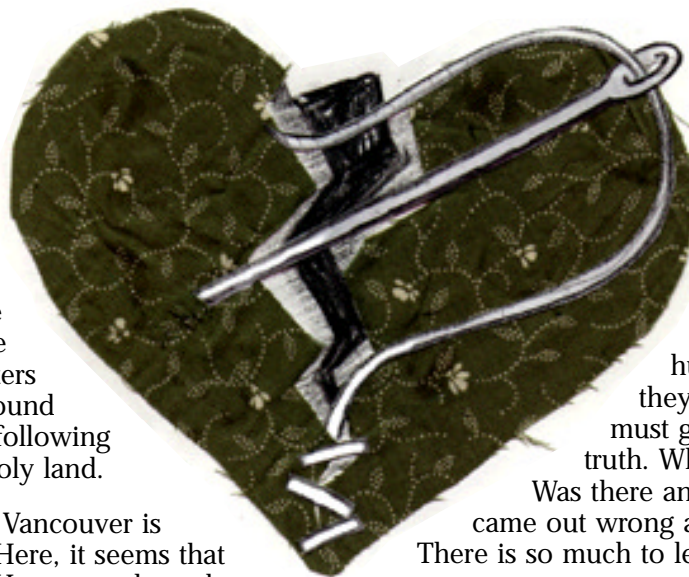
During the past year in our own Or Shalom community, there have been issues that have led to broken relationships. People have hurt each other. Others have withdrawn to avoid

being hurt. Everyone knows that a spiritual community needs to face the truth, to mend the tears in the fabric of our lives. There is no better time than the month of Elul to begin to look deeply at our own need for repair and renewal.

Each one who is feeling hurt, each one who knows they were involved in hurt, must go deep inside to seek the truth. What really has happened?

Was there an impulse for good that came out wrong and caused the harm?

There is so much to learn.



Lisa Mallin

Each one needs to seek the hope, the humility, the *hesed* and the *gevurah*, the love and the courage, to approach a sister or a brother with whom the hurt happened and to open their own heart to the best in the other and the best in the self. Sometimes a warm word or two is all it takes to melt a frozen friendship. The traditional teachings about teshuva really work — honest self-assessment, honouring the God-spark in the other, confession, seeking forgiveness. In a spiritual community such as ours, we cannot avoid each other. It's the only way to return again and live in the home of our souls.

GIVE OF YOURSELF TO HELP THE COMMUNITY AT YAMIM NORA'IM

By Rabbi David Mivasair

One of the beauties of Or Shalom is our way of encouraging everyone to share and give of themselves. We hope to honour everyone's own ways of giving their time and talents to help shape the community.

As we approach the Yamim Nora'im (High Holidays), there are dozens of ways that members always get involved: Greeting people as they come in, offering teachings, sharing poems or readings, leading davening or special kavanot, Torah reading, reminding everyone about tzedaka, helping design the Tashlich service, the Yizkor service or other parts of the davening, playing a musical prelude before Kol Nidre, setting up candles, providing apples and honey on Erev Rosh Hashanah, helping secure lodging for the rabbis' families near the JCC for the holidays, planning and putting on the Break Fast, creating the sacred space in the JCC, arranging child care, organizing or leading children's programs, and more.

You might have a way of contributing that we never even thought of before. Whatever you'd like to do, you will make a difference and will be appreciated. Please contact Reb Hillel at the Or Shalom office.

COME TO PLANNING MEETING AUG. 2

By Rabbi Hillel Goelman

With the Folk Festival behind us, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are fast approaching. Reb David and I have agreed to have a discussion and planning meeting on Thursday night, Aug. 2, at 7:30 at Or Shalom.

Everyone is invited. We will talk about our visions for the davening on all different levels: physical, social, intellectual, spiritual. There is room for lots of involvement and input and the holy days davening has always been enhanced by the many different contributions people have made to the whole davening experience. This may be in leading some of the davening or reading Torah or in other ways of participating.

Looking forward to seeing you there. If you can't make it, please be sure to e-mail me your questions, concerns and suggestions at hillel.goelman@ubc.ca



SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SELIHOT

Saturday, Sept. 8

9:30 p.m., Potluck dessert and social hour
10, Class and discussion on teshuva
11, Selihot davening

All Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Services will be held at the Jewish Community Centre, Wosk Auditorium, 950 W. 41st Avenue.

EREV ROSH HASHANAH

Monday, Sept. 17

5:15 p.m., Candlelighting, Davening

ROSH HASHANAH, Day 1

Tuesday, Sept. 18

9 a.m., Shaḥarit davening
10:30, Children's service

ROSH HASHANAH, Day 2

Wednesday, Sept. 19

9 a.m., Shaḥarit davening
10:30, Children's service
5 p.m., Tashlich in Queen Elizabeth Park

Saturday, Sept. 22

10 a.m., Shabbat Shuvah at Or Shalom

Tuesday, Sept. 25

9 p.m., Women's mikva

EREV YOM KIPPUR

Wednesday, Sept. 26

9 a.m., Men's Mikva
6:30 p.m., Musical prelude
6:45, Candlelighting
7, Kol Nidre

YOM KIPPUR

Thursday, Sept. 27

9 a.m., Shaḥarit
10:30, Children's service
12 noon, Yizkor/Musaf
3:45 p.m., Meditation
4:45, Minḥa
6:45, Ne'ilah
7:45, Havdalah and Break Fast

RETURN TO THE HOME OF YOUR SOUL: TESHUVA WORKSHOPS IN ELUL

Again this year, the Or Shalom community will have the opportunity to encourage and support each other to search our own souls in preparation for the work of Teshuva as we approach Rosh Hashanah. The month of Elul, which precedes Rosh Hashanah, is the perfect time to reach toward living more fully in the Light as the new year dawns. The name of the month of Elul is spelled with the initial Hebrew letters of the phrase *Ani Le-dodi Vè-dodi Li* — I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is Mine — alluding to the great potential we have at this time to open ourselves up, to reach beyond our usual level of being and to deepen our relationship with the Holy One.

During Elul this year, Reb David will lead three special evening sessions devoted to *heshbon ha-nefesh* the process of self-reflection and self-evaluation to help us each move into the New Year with clear focus for our teshuva work. Each evening session will make use of chant, storytelling, teachings from Masters of Teshuva, some discussion and plenty of time for quiet personal contemplation. The sessions will be on Wednesdays, Aug. 22, Aug. 29 and Sept. 5 from 8-9:30 p.m. at Or Shalom.

YOGA AND JUDAISM: PARALLELS AND PRACTICES

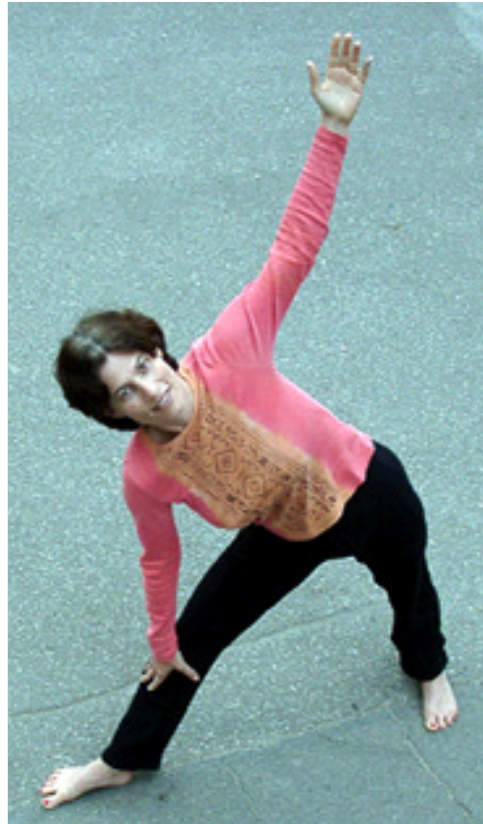
“Unite and Return” is an evening yoga workshop on Thursday, Sept. 13, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at Or Shalom to help prepare ourselves for the new year. The evening will be led by Evelyn Neaman of the Tikkun Yoga Centre.

“The month of Elul is the time for introspection and

teshuva and what better way to do this than to unite the body, mind and soul through breath work, yoga postures, chanting and meditation,” says Evelyn.

This workshop is open to anyone wanting to explore the parallels and practices of yoga (to unite) and teshuva (to return). All are welcome. Pre-registration is required and payment is a donation to Or Shalom.

For more information or to register call Evelyn at 738-9295.



Evelyn Neaman will lead a “Unite and Return” yoga workshop on Sept. 13.

WATERS OF EDEN: MIKVA OFFERS CLARITY

Or Shalomniks are invited to enter the waters of the mikva as a way to reach for a higher level of spiritual clarity and purification before Yom Kippur. The waters of the mikva offer a return to the essential self. In the mikva the ego is released and the neshama renewed. Jewish women in Or Shalom over Bat Mitzvah age are invited to join Michal Mivasair at the mikva at 9 on the night of Wednesday, Sept. 26. Men are welcomed to go with Reb David at 9 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 27. A donation of \$10 to support the mikva is requested. Call Or Shalom for details. If you've never experienced the mikva, call Or Shalom to learn how to prepare.

SINGLES LUNCH SEPT. 19

Jewish Singles will have a chance to celebrate the New Year together at the JCC on Wednesday, Sept. 19, from 2 to 4 p.m. Please

bring your favourite kosher recipe to the Vegetarian Potluck Lunch in a new disposable container. Cost is \$5; \$3 for children under 12. Please reserve by Sept. 24 by calling Sue at 736-8221; send cheques payable to Jewish Singles to 509-4101 Yew, Vancouver V6L 3B7.

REB DAVID TO SHARE EXPERIENCES OF HIS SABBATICAL IN ISRAEL

The Or Shalom community is invited to three evenings in August when Reb David will share experiences and impressions of living in Israel from last August through May this year. Personal stories and slide photos — some heartwarming, some heartbreaking — will open up glimpses into the

wealth of realities in the Land of Israel that fascinate so many of us who have been there. Each evening will include time for questions and discussion. Please bring refreshments to share. The dates will be Tuesday, Aug. 7; Wednesday, Aug. 15, and Thursday, Aug. 23, from 7:30 until 9:30 p.m.

ON BROADENING OUR VISION OF HOLY RELATIONSHIP

Nearing the culmination of a year-long process, Reb David and Reb Hillel have written a joint proposal to the Or Shalom community that would allow the Or Shalom rabbi to officiate at ceremonies that bless same-sex Jewish relationships.

The board endorsed the proposal at its July 10 meeting and intends to make a final decision regarding the proposed policy at its Sept. 6 meeting. The board invites all interested members of the community to attend the Sept. 6 meeting and to direct any comments or suggestions before that date to the board.

The proposal is too lengthy to be reproduced in Keren Or. The full text, along with additional comments by Reb Hillel, is available on the Or Shalom website, at the bayit or by calling Richard in the office. Anyone wishing to further explore and learn about Jewish responses to the issues involved can find a wealth of material at the aleph.org website, which is linked to our own orshalom.ca site. Another good resource for information on the issue is Arthur Waskow's website: www.shalom-centre.org, then click through to "building community." In addition, a copy of the package of materials put together by Reb Hillel for the series of classes he taught on "Sexuality, Gender and Marriage in the Jewish Tradition" is available at the bayit.

Comments and suggestions to the board regarding the proposal may be mailed to the Or Shalom address or e-mailed to board member Mary Anne Sturley at shifrah_adar@hotmail.com. The e-mail list is not the appropriate place to debate this policy and the board asks anyone wishing to comment on the proposal to

direct the comments to the board through Mary Anne's e-mail and to attend the Sept. 6 meeting. Anyone wishing to discuss the proposed policy or any related issues with Reb David or Reb Hillel is invited to phone the Or Shalom office. Board members, of course, are always available to discuss the proposal.

REFLECTION, PERSONAL GROWTH AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Sometimes we are thrown into situations not by choice, which force us to adapt, learn and problem solve in order to continue to live within a community.

The same-sex marriage performed by Reb David last summer was such an event for me (and for our community). I realized in a profound moment (they happen so rarely) that over the past year I have grown tremendously in my understanding, knowledge and acceptance of gay issues. I think I have made a huge leap. I don't know all the answers and still am wrestling with many halachic issues.

BUT, I am deeply grateful to Reb David for setting the process in motion with or without his intention or knowledge. If he had not performed this marriage, I would not have had the opening to stretch my self. I know I would not have chosen to do so on my own. I have noticed over the past years as Reb David has been our spiritual director that he has on many occasions created openings for my personal spirituality. I work and stretch myself because I know that I need to understand and learn more. Thank you, Reb David.

Respectfully,
Sheryl Sorokin



Lisa Mallin jams on her viola as drummers and dancers enjoy the last night of the Kallah July 7 in De Kalb, Ill.

KALLAH WAS BEAUTIFUL

My daughter Lisa and I attended the ALEPH Kallah in July and it was a beautiful week. The biannual gathering of the Jewish Renewal movement drew about 700 people to the campus of Northern Illinois University in De Kalb, about 120 km from Chicago. Lisa and I both worked half-time, her as a Kids Kallah counsellor and me as the Kallah photographer. Lisa created gorgeous work in her Judaic art class and I sang to my soul in a Mizrahi/Sephardic music class with cantors Richard Kaplan and Robert Esformes. Other Or Shalomniks there included Alan Morinis, Myrna Rabinowitz, her daughter Aliza Rothman from Seattle, Roy Wood and Nathen Gabriel. Also there were Naomi Oren and husband Motti, before they went on to Elat Chayyim in New York, where Naomi received smicha as a rabbi July 23. My Kallah photo album is at www.photoloft.com/view/allalbums.asp?s=fshp&u=642943 Next, in the Kallah album area, click on View All Photos and provide the password: sparks. — *Lorne Mallin*

HOW BEST TO NURTURE THEIR NESHAMAS?

By Rabbi David Mivasair

Kids and teens are important to us. In our membership survey two years ago, programs for children and teens were named as needing more attention by more people than any other area.

Since that time, we've developed Family Education, the Shabbat morning kids' program and started a Youth Program. Each has had successes and limitations. This year I will continue to give more attention to children, school and youth at Or Shalom together with interested parents and other community members. We need to put our hearts and heads together to find the right program structures to nurture our kids' neshamas.

Here is a brief review of Or Shalom's programs for children and youth. Please be in touch with me if you have suggestions or would like to get involved.

Post Bar/Bat Mitzvah class — Every year, Or Shalom kids becoming Bnei Mitzvah develop a great interest in learning and growing Jewishly. It would be wonderful to build on this with continued learning for kids in Grades 8 and 9. I've met with several of last year's Bnei Mitzvah and their parents to explore this.

Kids have a positive interest but say they are too over-scheduled already. I'll continue to consult with them and their parents to try to find a program structure that would work for them.

Youth program — After much planning and effort, especially by parent Linda Peritz, a group led by Noam Dolgin got off to a great start last year. When Noam decided to accept a very attractive position with a Jewish youth environmental project in the U.S., our youth program came to an abrupt end. We need to explore whether to start it up again.

Family education — For two years about a dozen Grade 1-3 kids and their parents have enjoyed creative, child-centred Jewish learning on Sunday mornings. Rafael Richman has led a fantastic program with great support from parent Anne Gorsuch. Now both Rafael and Anne want to give their attention to other pursuits. We need to evaluate if and how we can sustain this program into the future.

Kids' Shabbat program — Anne and her husband Hal Siden, parents of Hannah and Ellie, led five beautiful Shabbat mornings last year for young children and their parents. It was their second year as parent

volunteers and they now wish to hand it over to someone else. Anne is willing to lead a service once a month as part of a program that someone else would organize and run the rest of the time. We've received funding from the Jewish Community Foundation (thanks to great work by Dodie Katzenstein) to staff this program.

With the right leader, this program has great potential for our kids.

Little kids' Kabbalat Shabbat -- I did this for five years once a month. Right now, I have no plans to do it. I am open to discussing it.



THE QUILT GIFT

The Bnei Mitzvah group from last year has made a quilt for Or Shalom that now hangs on the north wall of the sanctuary. Each person made a square that symbolizes something about their Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The quilters are (clockwise from top right): Ida Terpening, Ilana Thau, Isaac Rosenberg, Sam Rosenberg, Karen Segal, Lisa Stevenson, Zoe Jordan, Rami Katz. Centre: Karen Buhler (the organizer and finisher).

PLANNING A BAT OR BAR MITZVAH?

Any family considering a Bar or Bat Mitzvah during the next year, please contact Reb David to discuss dates and to be included in the Or Shalom Bnei Mitzvah program.

A LETTER OF MANY-HANDED THOUGHTS

By Rabbi Dina-Hasida Mercy

On one hand, I truly believe that it is a God-given gift to certain people that every once in a while, one gets to "channel" for the divine. "Channeled" is how I think about the translation I wrote about 10 years ago of the middle paragraph of the Shma. While the human part of me wishes "if only I had more free time, I would translate more liturgy," my work, which I try to always make God's work, takes me in other directions.

When I hear and see my translation being used without acknowledgement of myself as the vessel, I experience conflicting emotions: honoured that its message is still meaningful; hurt that no credit is given to the channeler. Since the copyright eventually runs out on mortal creations, I wonder if I am just supposed to be glad that it is part of the cosmos. On the other hand, I am still here with my very human struggles.

To another, but related topic: Sometimes the relationship between the *baal/lat tefillah* (prayer leader) and the Kahal (congregation) troubles me in Or Shalom's davenen. The topic was discussed by *hazal* (rabbinic sources) and Or Shalom does come out as more liberal than the tradition: Or"Sh does allow people who are neither male nor bearded to lead tefillah! On the other hand, there is wisdom for us that I'd like to point out. One is that the prayer leader actually leads the davenen. Her or his voice should not be overpowered by the congregation. The congregation is not supposed to "go ahead" of the *baal/lat tefillah*.

The function of the *baal/lat tefillah* is to be an inverted funnel for the spiritual energy of the community's prayer. Thus it bothers me when I hear/see twittering, smug smiles, etc. because the prayer leader has faltered in some fashion. When I am the faltering one, I now deal with the twittering by focusing on kavanah and by making my davenen as clean and sincere as I can. This means shutting out some of what I perceive as the smug or disapproving energy of a congregation which has many competent musicians. Just because I can get past it at this point, doesn't make it less rude and less counterproductive to the davenen.

Yes, I know that the community can be very patient and respectful. One of Or"Sh's strengths is its continued rotation of lay leadership in prayer. It makes Or"Sh really different from the other congregations in the most positive way. I'm sure that others will take me to task for my perceptions but many Keren Or deadlines have come and gone since I first started wanting to write this letter. With all the disrespect which has been going on in Or Shalom cyberspace at press time, I thought that the time is right.

POETRY

To the Or Shalom community:

I just want to thank everybody for the outpourings of support about my father's death and my recent heart surgery. I have been faced with the challenges of life recently and your demonstrations of care have made all the difference. I feel blessed to have found you. Here is a poem I wrote for my father.

SEEDS

the bowls of seed
you left

your dreams of gardens
to plant
and forests
to wander

while your struggling heart
no longer moved your legs

yet you gathered your longings
in little dishes and mugs

the dwarf trees below the window
curve and arch in their pots

I hope your hands are full of fresh seedlings
and the spirit of giants are with you
as you wander through redwoods and rainforests

*Pauline Rankin
aka Leah*

NEW MEMBER

MIRIAM EGUCHI — Miriam was born and grew up in Toronto but spent the past 31 years in Japan until moving to North Vancouver in March this year. She found out about Jewish Renewal a few years ago through a Jewish feminist e-mail list and dreamed of someday belonging to such a community. Last December during a preliminary visit to Vancouver she found Or Shalom on the Internet and attended a service, not knowing anyone. As she listened to the singing, she knew she would be joining this community. In addition to exploring Jewish spirituality, her interests include hiking, hiking, hiking, singing, dancing, energy work, and philosophy/psychology/religion-related stuff. She lives up in the North Van highlands and welcomes everyone to visit, breathe the great air and go hiking with her.

New members or those wanting to find out more about Or Shalom are encouraged to contact Martha Barker, 986-6309, or Carol Pearlstone, 669-5173.

CREATING A VEGETABLE GARDEN FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

By Al Pasternak

In response to the Forum on Jewish Poverty held this past January, I decided to turn my back yard into a vegetable garden, although the most I knew about gardening was what was happening in my neighbour's yard. The goal was to provide some fresh vegetables for the Jewish Food Bank and/or the Community Kitchen.

With my landlord's permission, we broke ground in early May. My neighbour Rupert Wilcock helped with the initial garden design, provided many hours of setup labour, drove his pickup truck to get nine loads of compost from the City of Vancouver; shared in renting a rototiller and gave many packages of seeds and seedlings. Jeremiah Sousa [Batista] helped create a map of the garden, stake the beds for planting and many unloadings of the compost.

After a slow start in the spring, we were blessed with much sunshine in late June until mid-July, which resulted in significant growth activity in our garden. The cucumbers are spreading out and the zucchini is starting to blossom. The bush peas planted June 27 are beginning to sprout through the soil. The beans and corn are surviving the slugs and much of the lawn grass that continues to grow alongside them. The potatoes are bushing wonderfully. The lettuce needs to be thinned (only in the evening) and some is ready to eat now.

There are few words to describe the beauty of working with the earth (even in the city), of planting a seed and watching it grow into a plant you will then pick, eat for yourself and feed to others. The story of creation as seen in a red radish.

Come by and take a look at the garden. We're at 599 West 22nd (at Ash). My phone is 873-4334.

We have the support of many people who appreciate the idea of creating a garden for the needs of the Jewish community. Judy Oberlander talked about the garden at a Jewish Federation Board meeting. An envelope was passed around and almost \$240 was collected. We in turn donated \$25 to the Food and Nutrition Working Group. Thank you to all who contributed. Financial donations were not asked for nor expected. We plan to use half of this money to buy or rent tools that we cannot borrow and half for supplies, such as seeds for the

winter garden and next spring. Thank you Judy.

The garden is low-tech and very few things have been purchased. In my neighbourhood I have found unused compost bins, grass clippings (no herbicides or pesticides used) and laurel leaves for mulching, and wire for a trellis. I have always asked before taking any items. In e-mails I have requested items that we need in the garden and the community has responded with garden and soaker hoses and hand tools. Thanks to Fran Ritch, Barbara Poltak and others.



The thriving garden in Al Pasternak's back yard.

Vancouver residents — those now-unapproved 110-litre garbage containers (on wheels) make great rain barrels and worm composting bins. Recycle yours here.

Windy Hollow Eco-Systems (786-5957) is a Vancouver organic landscape management company that will provide us with a large quantity of grass clippings for a small delivery fee. Yours are always welcome and in the fall we will want your raked leaves to create a composted raised bed during the winter.

Would you be willing to give up a 4x4-foot section of your front or back yard to grow some vegetables this winter or next spring for yourself and the Jewish community? I can now safely say I have the knowledge to pass this gardening skill on to others. Gardens can be as productive when they are small, too. Some vegetables will grow in the shade, so a sunny location is helpful but not important. Other factors:

- No digging required. All materials are placed on top of the grass lawn with newspapers as a base. There is no shortage of organic materials that can be made into a living, growing soil.
- Low workload. The smaller it is the easier to take care of. No weeds will grow from underneath the newspapers. Any weeds will be on the surface and easy to pick before they get established.
- Generate high yields by planting bush and pole beans, carrots, lettuce, onions, peppers, etc. Plant the entire bed or one crop per square foot, and rotate crops every season.

I am willing to assist anyone with the initial setup of the garden space. The growing and watering is up to you.

This article was written from 95-percent recycled e-mail.

By Nisha Platzer

PARASHAT EMOR: MAY 12, 2001

This Torah portion talks about how when the Kohanim (priests) were making offerings to God, they and the offerings had to be absolutely perfect, physically that is. It says that priests with physical defects or handicaps could not perform the offering. And that animals mustn't have a single blemish or scurvy or boil scar. Now, isn't it supposed to be that God makes creatures of all shapes and sizes and accepts and loves all of them? So why are these ones not accepted? Have we not all been taught that differences bring the world together?

I've been involved with an organization that explains about those kinds of things. It's called Children's International Summer Villages. I went on a trip to Israel when I was 11. Kids from all over the world were there with us in a camp. We learned about each other's cultures, religions and differences. I built such strong friendships that I even got to see some of the kids I met again. These are memories that will last for my whole life.

But there are some rational possibilities of why the Torah says that only priests without handicaps can conduct sacrifices. In ancient times, many people associated physical defects with moral defects. So perhaps they thought that a handicap made you less of a person.

It could also be for safety reasons: If the person was visually impaired, it would be easy to get confused and make a mistake or injure himself. Or if one leg was shorter than the other they could stumble or trip. In any case, the Torah comes from thousands of years ago and things were different then.

In the Torah, it also states that when an animal is born, it stays seven days with its mother and from the eighth day on it's acceptable as an offering (assuming it is physically perfect). Then it says that no animal from the herd or flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young. Is this supposed to make it less cruel? I am vegetarian and I believe that all creatures deserve the right to live. I really have no problem with people eating animals; I just decided myself not to do so. But really, what is the explanation for this? Why don't they want the animals to suffer? I mean, doesn't taking a life cause the ultimate suffering?

Life to ancient people was a mystery. This was the most precious thing they could give as an offering. Animals were their wealth. A bigger animal meant more wealth.

And it was a big sacrifice for them because they would take the biggest and best animal from their flock or herd since they wanted to give the greatest offering they could.

Smaller animals were also accepted as sacrifices from less fortunate people. If you couldn't afford to give a big animal, you just brought the best you could afford from the acceptable list. Mainly pigeons and other birds were offered in these cases. So you didn't have to be rich to give an offering and be closer to God.

In the section that I chanted, it says that a priest's daughter may not eat of the sacred donations if she marries a layman (someone who's not a priest). It then says that if she is widowed, or divorced and without a child and is back in her father's house, as in her youth, she may eat the food. Isn't that saying, in a sense, that it's an advantage to be widowed or divorced and without offspring?

In ancient times, widowed or divorced women HAD to go back with their parents because, of course, they couldn't get a job. But it's a little bit like she's going back to being a child.

What happens a lot, even today, is that if something bad happens, a tragedy of some sort, some people choose to ignore it. But it affects who you are tremendously.

The Kohen's daughter is not the same little girl anymore. She's a different person than before she moved out of her father's house. She shouldn't be punished for falling in love and marrying outside the priesthood, and especially for having a child; because then the child would feel absolutely awful, at least when he or she grows old enough to understand all this.

Also, it's excluding the child from experiencing a part of his or her heritage. It obviously isn't the child's fault that he or she was born, so why are we punishing the offspring as well as the mother?

There was other food for them to eat. It's not like they would have starved. It's just that this lady had already been through trauma, (losing or divorcing her husband), and so wouldn't it just make it worse to leave her out of an honour her and her family have always been allowed to eat?

To me it's just a bit elitist on the priests' part. It is a good thing (in some ways more than others) that things are different today, and they are QUITE different.



By Sam Rosenberg

PARASHAT BAMIDBAR: MAY 26, 2001

When this week's parsha, Bamidbar, opens, it is one year and one month since the exodus from Egypt. God tells Moses to take a census of the Israelite community, counting all males over 20 who can bear arms. This was too big a job for just Moses so God said the leaders of the 12 tribes would help him.

Moses and Aaron and the heads of the houses counted all the people from each house and it all added up to over 600,000 males. Moses was also given instructions on the order in which they should march and how they were to camp around the tabernacle.

The tabernacle, or tent of meeting, was sort of like a portable synagogue where sacrifices were done. It was very important, which is why it was situated at the centre of the camp. The Israelites marched in a way that would give the most protection to the tabernacle.

God said, "Do not on any account enrol the tribe of Levi or take a census of them with the Israelites." God gave orders to the Levites through Moses. The Levites were in charge of the tabernacle and all its furnishings, carrying it, tending it and camping around it. Only the Levites could take it down before the Israelites started marching and only they could pitch it when they stopped. Anyone who was not a Levite who did any of these things would be put to death. The non-Levites had to camp around the tent of meeting at a distance.

Parashat Bamidbar ends with this description of the responsibilities of the Levites. This parsha leaves us with a very important question: Why count the Israelites? What was the purpose of the census?

A famous medieval rabbi named the "Rashbam" said: "They are preparing to enter the land of Israel and require an army to go forth into battle." With all due respect, I disagree with the Rashbam, because the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years before entering the promised land and this is only the second year. They weren't going to Israel yet.

I do think the census was for military purposes, though. The Israelites were not exactly alone in the desert and they were attacked many times. As a part of the census, the Israelites were grouped into houses, counted and organized against attack. They were given orders how to march and camp around the tabernacle

so it was protected at all times. The strongest houses were positioned at the front and back because these were the points most vulnerable to attack.

A modern commentator named Dr. Nehama Leibowitz thinks that many current ideologies see an individual as one in many. No one person matters very much because "if one human being is destroyed there is always another one to take his place." Leibowitz explains that the "census was personal and individual.

Impressing on us the value and critical worth of each and every soul, which is a unique creation of God and a world of its own."

I think that from Dr. Leibowitz's point of view, the census was a sort of moral booster and pep talk for the people of the desert. In Egypt, if one slave was destroyed, there always was another one to take his place. This census told the Israelites that they were worth something, even worth being counted.

When God commanded Moses to take a census, the exact words were *seu et یش* which we translate as "take a census." It literally means "lift up" or "mark the head." The census was taken in a manner that would give honour to the people in it. According to Nachmanides, Moses said, "Invite each person to pass before me. Take down each person's name and let each one feel honoured to be part of the census."

The census in the desert was all about honouring people. Each person passed before the leader of their community and felt honoured to be recognized. Today's census is not about honoring people at all. It is done by mail and you don't even get to see the people taking the census. This is a much more efficient way of taking a census, but the counted people aren't being treated like unique individuals.

To me, having a Bar Mitzvah is more like being part of the ancient census in the desert. I am being counted as an adult in the Jewish community. The census in the desert recognized everyone as individuals. I feel honoured to have a Bar Mitzvah and be recognized as an individual in this community. I think that nowadays a Bar Mitzvah does not symbolize becoming a man; it symbolizes the start of growing up.

Now that I am part of the religious Jewish community, I am able to be called up for an aliyah, I am counted as part of a minyan, and I am expected to fast on Yom Kippur and other fast days. I am happy to be counted as a member of the Or Shalom community.



By Rachel Snarch

PARASHAT NASO: JUNE 2, 2001

The setting of my Torah portion, which is called Naso, takes place when the Israelites have just escaped slavery in Egypt and have begun their 40-year wandering journey through the Sinai Desert. While the Israelites were wandering, they established a number of laws, several of which are discussed in my Torah portion, so that they would be prepared to govern themselves when they reached Israel.

My parsha also discusses the laws concerning adultery. In particular, it deals with husbands suspicious of their wives having committed adultery. It discusses the way a wife could prove that the adultery did not take place. However, I noticed that there is no mention of what the husband could do to prove to his wife that he did not commit adultery.



The topic that I found most interesting in my parsha was the discussion of the practices of the nazirites. A nazirite is a man or woman, who devotes him or herself to God and abstains from a variety of activities, including the cutting of their hair, drinking wine, eating grapes, raisins, vinegar, grape husks or grape kernels and avoiding contact with a dead body. Anyone could freely choose to become a nazirite but had to be committed to these abstentions for a minimum of 30 days. Some dedicated their whole lives.

The nazirite's dedication to God is really a form of meditation. The focus is to concentrate only on God and not to let the mind wander. The question that I have asked myself is why one would choose to become a nazirite?

Maybe, it is to feel a stronger connection and dedication to God and, therefore, not pay as much attention to oneself. We are so accustomed to thinking about ourselves that it doesn't seem natural to think about something that does not have to do with what we did or need that day or something that is bothering us. It is difficult to focus on matters that do not involve us personally. In being a nazirite, one is really trying to live a very basic existence. Nothing is to be done in excess. You are to hold yourself back from many different types of pleasures.

Many commentators have conflicting opinions on the issue of becoming a nazirite. According to the book "A Torah Commentary for Our Times," some rabbis argue that in becoming a nazirite, and in learning and teaching the ways of abstention, you become closer to God.

Others feel that God created us to enjoy life and that this enjoyment is a way of praising God. They think that a life of abstention is sinful and that being a nazirite can be compared to "taking a sword into your own hand and stabbing it into your heart."

I personally can see why someone would want to become a nazirite. Restraining oneself from one's own desires would make one feel more spiritual and focused in their dedication to God. It seems to me that

a nazirite in this devotion would become more appreciative in receiving less. If there are too many gifts, appreciation can be lost. Maybe there is a feeling of needing time to thank God for each specific offering.

Basically, a nazirite is not a taker but a giver to God, taking only a few of God's offerings.

Most people today are not nazirites. It would be much more difficult to pursue this task today than it was long ago. I say this because we have so many more material possessions now. These material possessions can often make us lose our concentration.

Also today, given cell phones and computers, it is difficult to be alone and to make time to have a connection with God. There is too much stimuli everywhere we turn. Some people cover themselves with their tallit in synagogue so that they can make a kind of tent in which they can pray alone. Interestingly enough, my tallit is made from fleece, the same material the desert nomads used to make their tents.

Most of the time we don't get a chance to actually sit down and take a breath of fresh air because life can get very hectic. The space where I feel I can take many breaths and feel spiritual is on Hornby Island. It's a place where I find it easy to gather my thoughts.

In a small way, a very small way, having a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is somewhat similar to being a nazirite. I have found that I have had to do some abstaining myself from certain social activities, as well as baseball this spring, one of my passions, in order to put the required amount of energy and focus into my Bat Mitzvah studies. However, I must say that in return, like the nazirites, I have felt more spiritual than I ever have. In attending synagogue more frequently this year, I have felt more of a connection to God.

I think that we can all learn that you do not have to become a nazirite to give more and take less.

By Hannah Maté

PARASHAT SHELAH: JUNE 16, 2001

In my parsha, G-d tells Moses sends spies to explore Canaan, the Promised Land. The Jews had been wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt. Moses asks the spies to bring back fruit of the land, see how fortified the cities were, how big or small and strong or weak the people living in the land were, and see how rich or poor the soil was. The purpose of this journey was to check out if it was possible to conquer the country.

When the 12 spies returned, 10 said that the people living there were descendants of the giants and they themselves looked like grasshoppers in the big people's eyes. The other two said, "The people looked powerful, but we can overcome them together." The Israelites did not listen. They started panicking and crying, "We wish we had stayed in Egypt," and they started pelting rocks at the two spies who thought it was OK to go into Israel.

G-d became very angry and wanted to kill all the Jews, but Moses argued with him. "If you kill them, what will the Egyptians think — you led the Jews out of Egypt and now you want to destroy them all? They won't think you're a very powerful G-d!" "You're right," agreed G-d "I won't kill them but I will punish them. The 20-year-olds and older will not be able to enter the land of Israel and they will have to wander in the desert for many more years."

In the Torah, G-d is presented in many different ways. In some parts of the Torah, unlike me, G-d is stubborn. In other parts, we see G-d angry and frustrated. In this particular parsha G-d is very angry and impulsive.

In many ways in Torah I think G-d resembles a human being. This image of G-d is not like the image of G-d I have. When I think of G-d, I think of a warm or safe essence that's inside me.

First, I'd like to talk about gut feelings and what they mean to me — something deep down inside that tells me what's right and what's not. I've had some experiences lately where my gut feeling was trying to contact me but my mind took over, and a lot of the time your mind can be more powerful than anything else. Now I bet you're wondering how gut feelings have anything to do with my Bat Mitzvah or my parsha. Well, I'm about to tell you.

I see G-d as the gut feeling for the Jewish people. G-d is always instructing Moses to tell the Jewish people something that's true, and that is the right thing to do. Now if G-d is the gut feeling, then what is Moses?

I see Moses as the nerves between G-d and the Jewish people. For example: If you fall down and hurt your knee, how is your brain going to know there is pain without nerves? How are the Jewish people going to know what to do without Moses there as a messenger service?

I think the 10 spies who say it is not possible to enter Israel resemble the mind. They are like the little devil on your shoulder telling you the wrong thing to do. I've found that if you listen to your mind instead of your gut feelings, there will be certain consequences. For the Jews, the consequence was that they couldn't enter the land of Israel, because they were not responsible enough to go in.

When I first read this story I thought the 10 spies were telling lies about the "giants" they saw. I realize now that this isn't a question of dishonesty, but of exaggerated fear. If you have fear, then the mind will make what you're already scared of even scarier. Since the spies are the mind, and they had fear, the people they saw in the new land seemed to get bigger from exaggeration. When I was a little girl and I was lying in bed at night I would worry that a man would climb up through my window and carry me off in a sack with a bunch of other children. No one could convince me. No matter how much I tried to make myself believe there was no man coming, my mind and imagination were telling me otherwise.

The real main points of my parsha are: That it's really important to pay attention to your inner self and find out the truth wherever it may come from. Another point I think that's important is that the mind can help you or make things difficult for you, depending on whether or not it's paying attention to the truth. The last point I'd like to make is that growing up may not be easy to do but it's a part of life. I've felt that so far on my journey to being a young woman, I've learned a lot about life, not just about the fun of it but also the seriousness of it. I'm growing older and I'm maturing at the same time. Even though sometimes I don't want to grow up, there's nothing I can do but grow.



SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT OUR WONDERFUL SCHOOL

By Bat-Ami Segal, Hebrew School Co-ordinator

Do you remember your first experience of discovering you can read Hebrew, putting the Hebrew letters together to form words such as "Torah"? What joy — nothing can be compared to this moment of discovery! We at the Or Shalom Hebrew School thrive on giving your children this experience. The value of Jewish education, started at an early age, cannot be emphasized enough.

Jewish education at our school is egalitarian and inclusive and emphasizes learning of Jewish values and traditions. This is taught in a friendly, hands-on environment. For the younger grades we provide arts and crafts, drama, music and other fun-oriented programs. Our programs are geared to provide a strong basis of feeling good about Judaism and to encourage students to go on to future studies. For the older grades we enhance these principles with projects, research, field trips, doing mitzvot in the Jewish community, working on meaningful tzedaka projects, leading and participating in Shabbat services in the shul, reading and discussing the weekly torah portions, and much, much more.

However, the school needs more enrolment in all grades. We are asking the Or Shalom community to spread the word about the wonderful opportunities our school offers for Jewish learning. There is so much competition these days, between basketball practice, piano lessons and home schooling, so we really need your help. Tell your friends, relatives and even newcomers to the community about the Or Shalom school.

We will begin sessions in September. Classes meet Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 4 to 6 p.m. at the shul.

For more information, contact me at 875-6560, or e-mail bfsegal@sprint.ca

YEARNING FOR LEARNING? OPPORTUNITIES AT OR SHALOM IN 5762

The Talmud teaches that if we are ever forced into making a choice between God or the Torah we should choose the Torah: Learning Torah will lead us back to God.

Reb David and Or Shalom education chair Barry Goodman have begun sketching out plans for learn-

ing opportunities at Or Shalom in the new year. Everyone is invited to contact either of them with suggestions and requests for either teaching or learning. Our plans are fluid and we want to respond to the interests of the community.

At this time the plans are that Reb David will offer:

- 1.** An on-going "Immersion and Conversion" type of broad-scope evening class beginning in October for both newcomers and old-timers to learn how to enrich their own spiritual lives with Jewish teachings and practices.
- 2.** Traditional and innovative text-based teachings on occasional Shabbat afternoons when there is no Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
- 3.** Two weekend-long Shabbatonim, one on the Book of Job in the fall and the other on the Song of Songs in the spring.

In addition, some special events are in the works. Reb David has begun discussing plans with Mimi Feigelson, a very beloved teacher from Jerusalem, the possibility of her coming to Or Shalom for a Shabbaton sometime during the year.

Barry is looking into Or Shalom sponsoring a "Read Hebrew" weekend crash course in the fall to enable everyone to unravel the mysteries of the aleph-bet. Our master teacher of Hebrew, Rahel Halabe, could guide a group at Or Shalom step-by-step up through real working knowledge of Hebrew if there is enough interest. Please contact Barry at 876-1492 if you'd like to have a class with Rahel.

In addition, we expect that Reb Hillel and other members of the community will want to offer teachings during the year. To express an interest in any of the above or suggest ideas of your own, please contact either Barry or David.

ONGOING STUDY GROUP ON 'THE PALM TREE OF DEBORAH'

The famous Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordavero wrote the small book called "The Palm Tree of Deborah" in the holy city of Tsfat in the 16th century. Since then, in every generation, this classic has been revered for the way it helps us make sense of the path of our lives by drawing together a kabbalistic understanding of the universe, a clear picture of the qualities we ascribe to God and helpful guidance on how we can bring these same qualities into our own lives.

This spring, a study group began meeting with Alan Morinis to learn this text. This group will begin

again in the fall and new members are welcome.

Alan will hold a special session to help new members of the group catch up on what has been covered so far. The group will meet every second Monday beginning Oct. 15 at the home of Lorne Mallin, 4411 West 5th Ave. (at Trimble). There is a fee of \$10 per class, payable for the session (10 classes; new members, 11 classes).

For more information, contact Alan at alanmorinis@home.com

OR SHALOM DAVENING TAPES AVAILABLE

Newly recorded tapes and CDs of the Or Shalom Shabbat morning davening are available from the office. The heart and soul of the Or Shalom community comes through our Shabbat morning davening. Anyone who would like to become more familiar with the melodies of the davening and their settings can learn from these tapes and CDs. The reward will be a more comfortable and satisfying davening experience at Or Shalom and elsewhere. Reb David and Harley Rothstein made the tapes last summer with invaluable encouragement and technical support from Tom Northcott. Each tape or CD costs \$5.

AUGUST MINI-ULPAN AT THE JCC

The Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver is offering two immersion courses in Modern Hebrew, building on the success of the inaugural Summer Mini-Ulpan launched at Or Shalom last year. Rahel Halabe and Soshana Hofman will teach the week-long JCC classes through talking, listening, videos, games, songs, reading, writing and optional field trips.

The classes are Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Level Aleph (beginners plus) runs Aug. 20-24 and Level Beit (low intermediate) goes Aug. 27-31. The cost is \$350, with a \$25 discount for JCC members. Book and material costs are \$35. Easy online registration at www.jccgv.com

For additional information, please contact Annica Carlsson Hyman at the JCC, 257-5111 ext. 208. For evaluation of your Hebrew level, contact Rahel Halabe at 879-2677 or rahel@telus.net

NEWS AND SCHMOOZE

JACOB MADDISON Please join us in celebrating Jacob's Bar Mitzvah on Saturday, Aug. 4. Kiddush lunch following the service.

— *Rochelle Appleby and George Maddison*

RECENT DONATIONS

Bnei Mitzvah Endowment Fund

- In honour of Albert and Rose's Bnei Mitzvah

Book Fund

- In honour of Rachel Snarch's Bat Mitzvah

Building Fund

- In appreciation of Sheryl Sorokin

Community Fund

- In honour of Sally Thorne's 50th birthday
- In memory of Sue Bloch's father, Dr. Gerry Comay
 - In appreciation of Hillel Goelman
 - In honour of Kymn Goodman's wedding
- On the occasion of Michelle Cuttler's Bat Mitzvah
- In honour of the birth of Binyamin David Renert

East Side Fund

- In honour of Sally Thorne's 50th birthday
- In memory of Kymn Goodman's father
- In honour of Kymn Grostern & Barry Goodman's wedding
- In honour of Fran Ritch with a humongous thank you
 - In memory of Michael Corber's mother, Riva Margolick
- In memory of Susan Bloch's father, Dr. Gerry Comay
 - In memory of Kymn Goodman's father, Hyman Grostern
 - In memory of Elsie Robinson, z"l
 - Refu'a sh'lema – Dodie Katzenstein
 - Refu'a sh'lema – Pauline Rankin
 - Refu'a sh'lema – Fran Horwitz

Len Ryant Or Shalom Children's Fund

- In memory of Kymn Goodman's father, Hyman Grostern

Rabbi's Fund

- In honour of Sally Thorne's 50th birthday
- In honour of Al Pasternak

Tzedaka Fund

In memory of Ireta Fisher's mother, Hannah Weprin

Acknowledge a birthday, graduation, any auspicious occasion. Celebrate a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, anniversary, marriage, birth, etc. Honour a Yahrzeit by donating to any of the following Or Shalom funds:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| * Bnei Mitzvah Endowment Fund | * Rabbi's Fund |
| * Book Fund | * Len Ryant Or Shalom Children's Fund |
| * Building Fund | * Lisa Nemetz Or Shalom School Education Fund |
| * Community Fund | * Torah Fund |
| * Education Fund | * Tzedaka Fund |
| * East Side Fund | |

While donors' names will not be published, the name of the person being honoured will be acknowledged.

JOEL BLUMAN Please join us in celebrating Joel Bluman's Bar Mitzvah on Saturday, Sept. 8. Looking forward to seeing you.

— Nancy Newman and Bob Bluman

'LEAH AND PAUL, FOR EXAMPLE' This Vancouver Fringe Festival production stars Anna Chatterton and Chad Hershler (an Or Shalomnik!). The play walks the fine line between reality and illusion in the world two lovers create. Sliding between the farcically absurd and the uncomfortably real, two actors map out, shape and create the story of Leah and Paul, two lovers caught in their own fiction. It is based on the short story of the same name by Monique Proulx with translation by Matt Cohen, adapted for the stage by Anna Chatterton and Chad Hershler. The play will be performed at Performance Works, Granville Island, at the following times: Friday, Sept. 7, 10:15 p.m.; Saturday, Sept. 8, 2 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 11, 7 p.m.; Thursday, Sept. 13, 2 p.m.; Saturday, Sept. 15, 12 midnight; Sunday, Sept. 16, 4 p.m. Tickets: \$11 in advance (257-0366), \$9 at the door.

I DID IT MYSELF! (WITH DANI) Dani Mate is introducing a co-operative event service for people who want to cater all or part of their own events. She would be happy to assist you with all of your needs. Many people want to reduce the cost of catering a simcha by cooking all or part of the food themselves. Dani can direct you to exciting and interesting sources for food, rental dishes, venues and even servers. What you are unable to do yourself Dani can either source out from a supplier or cook. She will help fill the gaps where you are unable to. She will do as much or as little as you want, tailored to fit your budget. Call Dani at 876-0992.

ALTERNATIVE E-MAIL LIST If you're not on the Or Shalom e-mail list and would like to receive occasional e-mail notices about events at Or Shalom and thought pieces, I will send them to you one-way, no cross-talk. Let me know you're interested at mivasair@aol.com

— Reb David

SEND IN YOUR DIVREI TORAH

Bnei Mitzvah and their parents are encouraged to e-mail a Dvar Torah, after it has been delivered, to lmallin@telus.net for inclusion in Keren Or. Please include a colour photo. Info: 604-222-3379.



Hanna Tiferet Siegel, Myrna Rabinowitz, Harley Rothstein.

SHIR HADASH ALBUMS NOW ON CD

The Shir Hadash albums are my favourite Jewish spiritual music. They're also great for reaching out to people curious about Or Shalom and I've given away many copies of the tapes. I usually played them in the car but last year I installed a CD player and have missed hearing them. Now, the albums are available as CDs, with their beautiful spirituality enhanced by improved sound quality. "Or Shalom - Songs of the Heart" and "And You Shall Teach Your Children" were recorded by Myrna Rabinowitz, Harley Rothstein and Hanna Tiferet Siegel in 1987 and 1990 and include many songs still sung at Or Shalom — Eitz Chayim Hi, Nishmat, Va'ani Tefilat, Sim Shalom, May the Words of My Mouth, Modim, Oseh Shalom, Or Hadash, Luley Hemanti, Ani L'dodi and more. The CDs are \$18 from Myrna at 873-8936 or mrabinow@telus.net

— Lorne Mallin

KEREN OR קרן אור

(Beam of Light)

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