



## TWO JEWS, THREE OPINIONS: THEOLOGIES OF THE PRAYERBOOK

The *Siddur* (Hebrew prayerbook) contains a beautiful record of some of Judaism's most interesting religious controversies. Are Jewish ethics universal? Can we describe God in word-images? How shall we connect with God? In characteristic Jewish fashion, the *Siddur* doesn't resolve the questions, or even take a side in the debate. It simply includes multiple opinions.

Is the message of Judaism universal or particular? Does our Torah contain a message for the entire world, or does it speak only to members of our culture? For two different answers, turn to the *Aleinu* prayer that ends every formal service. One answer is found in the first paragraph of the prayer: Judaism is particularistic – just for those who actively accept the commitment. And literally, the prayer thanks God for the opportunity to be different from non-believing nations. But a second, completely opposite answer is found in the second paragraph of the prayer: God's message is universal – and eventually everyone will realize that all religions reach for the same divine ideals. Literally, the prayer quotes the prophet Zechariah, "On that day, there will be [only] one God,

and God's [true] name will be 'One.' If God is imageless, can we speak of God using anthropomorphic lan-



guage? Will it mislead people into imagining God as some kind of giant super-human hero? Or does everyone understand that the metaphors describe what people experience when they are in the Divine Presence? For two different approaches to this issue, look at the last two lines of the *Mourner's Kaddish* prayer. The last line unabashedly describes God in Hebrew as a super-skilled diplomat: "May the One who makes peace in the heavens make peace upon us." But the next to last line of the *Kad-*

*dish* offers a different perspective. Though it pretends to be a literal Aramaic translation of the Hebrew, it prays not for the activation of the Great Diplomat but for a human experience: "May the great heavenly peace be upon us."

Should we cultivate spiritual experience using reason or emotion? Should we be guided by informed study of our tradition, or by raw yearning for a powerful connection with God? For a compromise, look at the *Ahavah Rabah* prayer that immediately precedes the *Shema* in the morning service. The prayer begins with a vote for emotional faith-connection: "[God,]

You have loved us with extra mercy...our ancestors trusted in you." And the prayer continues with a vote for the intellectual journey, "In your mercy, teach us to understand, and to grasp intellectually..."

Here is an invitation: With a passionate desire to connect, open your Siddur, ask your questions, and find them debated inside – in both abstract and poetic language, with answers addressed not only to Jews, but to all humanity!

-- Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan

### Or Shalom's 17th Annual Retreat

May 18-21, will be led by two of Renewal's foremost teachers: Rabbi Marcia Prager and Hazzan Jack Kessler. Stay tuned for more details.

## Save the dates!

# KEREN OR ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **Tu B'Shevat - New Year of the Trees**

Family Tu B'Shevat Seder with Reb Laura and Charles at Or Shalom, Feb. 4, 10 a.m.-Noon

Tu B'Shevat Seder at the Louis Brier, Feb. 4, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

## **Purim**

Toddler/Pre-Schooler Costume Party with Program Director David Fainsilber, February 25, 10 a.m.-11 a.m.

Or Shalom Purim Celebration, March 3. 6 p.m., Children's program for all ages; 7 p.m. Megillah reading and live music.

## **Upcoming Family Shabbat**

February 3, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Arrive by 10:30 a.m. to participate in parashah play; 11:10 a.m. for story and song. Childminding available!

## **Kabbalat Shabbat**

February 23 & March 30 (Last Friday of the month) 7 p.m., followed by veggie-dairy-fish potluck dinner.

## **Adult Education**

Kabbalah at Noon with Gloria Levi and Reb Laura resumes Thursdays at noon, Feb. 15 -22, and study of Rabbi Arthur Green's Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow continues.

## **Mexican Fiesta for "Twirties" (20-30 somethings)**

February 17, 7:30 p.m.

Mexican food and tequila (kinda like the shofar blast "Tekiya") at 2038 William Street.

You bring one or two raw ingredients suitable for a real Mexican Fiesta. We mix them together and see what we get.

## **Kiddush Lunches**

Celebrating a simcha? Share the joy: host a kid-

dush lunch or co-host a community potluck, February 3, 10, 17; March 3, 10, 24, 31.

## **The Or Shalom Phone Tree**

Time for the annual Phone Tree update! The Phone Tree is for emergency situations only, usually funeral notification. On our system, Telus voicemail subscribers receive a voicemail message through our automated system; others receive a personal phone call.

Funeral information also goes out on the email list. If you would like to be notified by phone and are not currently on the Phone Tree, or not sure if you are on the Phone Tree, or have changed your phone service from Telus to another provider, please email Myrna Rabinowitz with the following info: your name; your phone number; whether or not you are a TELUS voicemail subscriber.

## **Next steps: A new future vision for Or Shalom**

The Visioning Committee and the Board invite you to look towards the future of Or Shalom! During February, we will conduct an online survey of all members for opinions about important topics and issues. The results of the survey will be discussed at a facilitated community meeting in April (22 or 29). The visioning committee will then draft a vision statement for Board approval. Please expect an email in early February that will contain a link to the online survey - it will take about 20 minutes of your time to complete!

## **Board Notes**

Governance was a theme of the Board's annual retreat. The Board discussed its role and its relationship with community, committees, and staff. Committee chairs joined us for part of that discussion. The Board is committed to

providing an organizational system that would best facilitate everyone's work.

The Board has approved a project from the Aesthetics Committee to upgrade the sanctuary windows. This work will be started when the weather improves.

The Fundraising Campaign is soon coming to a close and we urge all to complete their donations and if you have not yet made a contribution please consider doing so.

## **Keren Or May Need YOU**

We need someone with desktop publishing skills to produce Keren Or! For information please contact Lorne Greenberg.

## **New CD by Myrna Rabinowitz**

Myrna released her first solo album, "Hashiveinu, Songs of Blessing and Prayer" in December. The album is a collection of original soulful Jewish music of prayers for Shabbat and blessings for life cycle events. To get your copy, contact Myrna. 10% of all Or Shalom sales will be donated to Or Shalom.

## **Gala reminder**

The Or Shalom "Sing-A-Long Fiddler on the Roof" Gala will be held February 11.

Enjoy a gala reception, food, drinks, live music and of course, the film! Order tickets by calling Or Shalom (604-872-1614) or visiting the web site <[www.orshalom.ca](http://www.orshalom.ca)>. If you are unable to attend please consider a donation to Or Shalom. The Board will be phoning all members, High Holiday contributors and Gala supporters in an effort to make the gala a fantastic event!



## **New Office Administrator: Louise Miller**

The Board is pleased to announce that Louise Miller is Or Shalom's new office administrator. Louise is from Montreal, where her two adult sons (one of whom is married with two children), live. She has recently returned from Shanghai where she taught ESL for three years. She speaks 'e dian dian pu tong hua' (a little bit of Mandarin)! Before her China experience, she was Coordinator at the Peretz Centre in Vancouver for 8 years. She also taught at the Hebrew Foundation School in Dollard des Ormeaux (a suburb of Montreal) for many years. Louise is an avid hiker and runner and is hoping to find company to climb the Grouse Grind.