



Jewish Reconstructionist Federation – <http://www.jrf.org>

2008 Omer Study - Week Four – Advocacy How and When Do We Take a Stand Within Our Communities

CONTENTS

- 2 Making Our Synagogues Vessels of Tikkun Olam**
Rabbi Mordecai Liebling

- 12 Making Decisions on Controversial Issues**
Rabbi Rebecca Alpert

- 15 Adat Shalom – Tikkun Olam Guidelines**

- 18 Advocacy at Adat Shalom**

- 20 Mishkan Shalom - Statement of Principles**

- 24 Tzedek v'Shalom - Process for Congregational Advocacy**

- 25 Other Tikkun Olam Resources**

Making our Synagogues Vessels of Tikkun Olam

Rabbi Mordecai Leibling

<http://www.jrf.org/showres&rid=201>

"The Jewish protagonists of social idealism should realize that the Jewish religion came into being as a result of the first attempt to conceive of God as the defender of the weak against the strong and that it can therefore continue to serve as the inspiration in the present struggle."

- Mordecai Kaplan¹

In the Exodus story, the quintessential liberation story and the Jewish foundational myth, when Moshe is at the burning bush and receives his mission to lead the people to freedom, he asks God, "Who shall I say sent me?" God's response: "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh- shall be what I shall be, Tell them that Ehyeh sent you" (Exodus 3:14).

Arthur Green, in his new book, *Ehyeh*,² teaches that for the kabbalists, Ehyeh is the deepest and most hidden name of God. God is the possibility of all that can be. Green writes:

In the moment when Moshe needed to give the slaves an answer that would offer them endless resources of hope and courage, God said tell them Ehyeh sent you. The timeless God allowed the great name YHVH to be conjugated, as though to say, *Ehyeh*, I am tomorrow.³

The Challenge of Justice

The centrality of working for social justice was part of Mordecai Kaplan's vision for Reconstructionism. Kaplan believed that reconstructed religion had among its goals the need to mobilize human beings, through their own power, to combat social evil.

For those committed to social justice, this is a time of crisis for the planet, for the United States, and for Israel. The large majority of scientists agree that global warming is approaching a crisis stage; the United States has the largest disparity between rich and poor in its history; Israel is struggling with poverty, with nearly 20 percent of the population facing insecurity about obtaining food, and the occupation results in everyone's freedom being restricted.

Failing to Mobilize

Having been the executive director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation for twelve years, I know as well as anyone that not only have we not succeeded at mobilizing our members to work for social justice, we have not made it one of our highest priorities. We are not alone - the level of social action in Jewish congregations in all denominations is low. I attended a meeting of the rabbinic advisory council of the Jewish Fund for justice a few years ago, and the leaders of all three liberal movements were bemoaning the lack of social action work at the congregational level.

Our synagogue communities are not fulfilling Kaplan's original vision. We need to strategize about how to lead our communities into a full embrace of the mitzvah "tzedek, tzedek tirdof" - "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:20).

To help us strategize, I want to describe some of the terrain in which we are operating.

Competing Claims on Attention

We cannot underestimate how two issues have affected the institutional Jewish community's attention to issues of poverty and justice. First, the 1990 national Jewish population study shocked people with its statistics on assimilation and intermarriage, and from that point on an enormous percentage of communal resources turned inward to combat these trends. As a community, we have become more myopic and increasingly focused only on our needs.

The second issue is, of course, the situation in Israel. Israel not only takes up a lot of attention, again focusing time and resources on our own affairs, it divides the community. Many of the people most drawn to social justice issues are precisely those who oppose the policies of the Israeli government, and they feel less drawn to be in a Jewish setting, given how most public Jewish voices support the policies of the Israeli government. Though this may not be true of most Reconstructionist congregations, it does affect those considering the very idea of joining a congregation.

Constraints on Discussion

More importantly, in the current climate, Jewish institutional leaders do not want to challenge the United States administration on policy issues because they do not want to risk their influence in matters concerning Israel. This landscape means that synagogue social action committees do not have a larger Jewish context within which to operate. Not only do they have to overcome the inertia within the congregation, but they often also find the larger community to be an impediment to their work.

In addition, the increasing number of very wealthy Jews in positions of power has changed the position and focus of some groups. One example is the struggle over domestic policy issues in the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the umbrella organization of Jewish community-relations councils and national Jewish "defense" agencies. The JCPA historically took classic "liberal" positions, but in the last few years it has been pressured to make changes in the direction of more conservative positions, most notably regarding issues of low-income housing. Around the country, the number of independent JCRCs is dropping, as Federations absorb them, further weakening the profile of the Jewish community in social justice issues.⁴

Reviving Interest

The apathy in our community about issues of poverty and justice reflects the apathy nationally. Until recently, there has been a low level of political activism across the country.

Partially in response to the pervasive low level of synagogue social action, the non-denominational organization Amos was conceived to help train and motivate congregations; sadly, it lasted only a couple of years. However, it did produce at least one enduring piece of work. Amos commissioned Stephen M. Cohen, a leading expert on Jewish sociology, and Leonard Fein, author and activist, to do the largest and most extensive study ever undertaken of the attitudes of American Jews to social justice.⁵

The study was completed in 2002. Some of the key findings are useful and very heartening for us. According to the study, about 90 percent of American Jews agree with the following statements:

- "Jews have a responsibility to work on behalf of the poor, the oppressed and minority groups."
- "When Jewish organizations engage in social justice work, it makes me feel proud to be a Jew"
- "Jewish involvement in social justice causes is one good way to strengthen ties with other groups in society."

Three out of four said that "a commitment to social justice is at the heart of my understanding of Judaism."

Commitment Remains Central

Asked to rank "what quality you consider most important to your Jewish identity," 47 percent picked commitment to social equality, 24 percent religious observance and 13 percent support for Israel. By four to one, those surveyed agreed that synagogues should sponsor more social justice programs. Paradoxically, about half said that their synagogue had the correct number of programs. (Interestingly people do not like the phrase "social justice"; only 24 percent found it appealing.)

When I first read this study, I frankly found it quite astounding and puzzling. A commitment to social equality is far and away the most important aspect of Jewish identity for a representative sample of the Jewish community. The large majority of American Jews deeply understand that Judaism at its core is about justice. If this is true, why is the level of synagogue activity so low?

One reason offered is that only 15 percent prefer to promote social justice as part of a Jewish group, while more than 70 percent, while not opposed, are indifferent. This is a very important finding. For us to mobilize our congregations, we need to be able to address this ambivalence.

Cohen and Fein make an interesting point about the tension between universalism and particularism that Jews have been living with for the last 150 or so years. The tension is often framed as "How can Jews become an integral part of the larger society, while still maintaining a particular tie to other Jews?"

Universalism and Particularism

How does this play out in synagogue social action?

The universalist might ask: If I want to be universalist, undertaking work for the betterment of society - why should I do it in a particularist, meaning Jewish, context? If I want to play out my particularism - my identification with Jews - why should I at that moment turn it toward universalist ends? When I am with Jews, I want to "do Jewish," and when I am acting to change the secular world, I am being universalist. Another way of looking at this: It is precisely those Jews who are most drawn to the universalist values of Judaism who may be most disturbed by what they perceive as parochial or "ethnic" issues.

The challenge is to make the universalism/particularism paradox a tension that leads to energy and action, not ambivalence and paralysis. As many traditions teach, paradox can be a source of wisdom if we live with it and embrace it.

Murray Bowen, the founder of family therapy systems theory, stated that the fundamental tension in all systems is between the force to differentiate and the force to merge. He based this on observations by scientists in the fields of biology, physics, chemistry and astronomy. In psychological terms, this is the central human tension of how to be both an individual and part of a larger unit - be it a marriage, a family or a community. As Lawrence Leshan wrote:

On the one hand, we all have the drive to be more unique and individual, to heighten one's own experience and being. On the other hand is the drive to be part of something larger, a full-fledged member of the tribe. ⁶

Competing Cultures

Recently, some anthropologists and systems theorists have postulated that the flow of human history from its origins involves the alternation between cultures focused on "I" (individualism, embodied in elites) and those focused on "We" (communal, embodied in attention to the collective).

In a model developed by Ken Wilbur and Don Beck,¹ the culture of modernity (the culture of the West for most of the 19th and 20th centuries and still the dominant culture), is an "I" culture; they dub it the "I improve" culture and it sets these goals:

- Strive for autonomy and constant change;
- Seek out the good life and strive for abundance;
- Progress through the best solution;
- Enhance living for many through technology; and
- Play to win and enjoy competition.

There are positive sides to this "I" culture. It is productive, goal-oriented, energized, and focused on results and outcomes, and it creates a strong middle class. The negative side is that it is materialistic, self-absorbed, short sighted, and focused on high⁷ need achievement, and it encourages people always to want more.

Seeds of Change

Every culture produces the seeds of change for its transition. In the 1960s, in the West, more people began to discover that material wealth does not bring happiness or peace. There were renewed needs for community, sharing, and a richer inner life; there was a sensitivity to the have/have-not gaps. This is the period in which the Reconstructionist movement began to grow, when the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College was established and our congregations began to increase. This communitarian "We" culture is relativistic and sociocentric; it is the culture of "we become," and its goals are:

- To liberate humans from greed and dogma;
- To explore the inner beings of self and others;
- To promote a sense of community and unity;
- To share society's resources among all;
- To reach decisions through consensus; and
- To refresh spirituality and bring harmony.

There are positive sides to this "We" culture. It is consensual and inclusive, empathetic, sensitive to broader human conditions, and concerned about others. But there are also negative sides to this "We" culture. It can impose blinding group-think approaches. People are treated as members of groups, not as individuals. And it is characterized by identity politics, too much emphasis on feeling, a vulnerability to narcissism, and a naiveté about power.

While this culture is clearly not dominant in governments or the economy, it is powerful in intellectual, artistic, and popular culture-postmodernism, relativism, multiculturalism, and the move to spirituality. This culture values consensus, seeks spirituality, is egalitarian and humanitarian and tolerant; its leadership style is the "sensitive facilitator." Its organizational style is social networks - and it sounds a lot like the culture of Reconstructionism.

A New Culture Emerging

The hope for the transformation of culture is activated when people feel overwhelmed by economic and emotional costs of caring, when they are confronted with chaos and disorder from lack of structure and clear hierarchies of value, when they feel a need for tangible results and functionality, and when knowing becomes more important than feeling.

This reminds me of congregations I consult with that were formed by groups of like-minded people, are somewhat structure-less and, when they hit sixty or seventy families, realize that feel-good, informal structures with loose-knit rules simply do not work any more - that they now have to develop a structure, set clear values, and have some formal hierarchy.

Wilbur and Beck maintain that a new culture is beginning to form. Their key point is that this new culture realizes that all of the previous levels of civilization coexist at the same time, and that objective economic and social conditions will produce cultures at different stages and with different needs living alongside each other, without the need to force one culture to accept solutions for another.

Beck worked extensively in South Africa with the African National Congress (ANC) and the government during the transition from apartheid. He learned that the steps of evolutionary change could not be skipped. Imposing the values of the "We" contemporary culture of the West on a society that needs to develop economically and politically does not work; it requires a more goal production-oriented culture. This is yet another way of stating the lesson: We can't impose our culture on others.

Evolution and Progress

Here is Kaplan writing about evolution and progress in *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*:

Although progress is not always in a straight line, the course of human history shows that the human race is moving in the direction of enhanced personality and enhanced sociality. Where people once identified society with a small family; tribe, or clan, we are beginning to think in terms of a world society. At one time every detailed act of the individual in the pursuit of work or leisure was hedged about by the traditional taboos of the tribe, and had to conform to ancestral habits. People today are demanding and obtaining more and more of autonomous direction in the development and expression of their personalities. Personality and sociality are not static goals. They can never be reached and passed. But their pursuits give meaning and value to human life, and renders it inherently worthwhile.⁸

Kaplan is defining progress as the simultaneous development of a greater identification with an increasingly larger group - and the growth of greater individual freedom and creativity. This is very much in keeping with the paradigm that Wilbur and Beck are now developing about how civilizations have evolved. For Kaplan, as it is for Wilbur and Beck, progressive evolution is the ability to reconcile the "I-We" split on a larger and more sophisticated level. (Keep in mind that the "I" can also be my nation or nationalism juxtaposed to the "We" of the international community.)

For Kaplan, God is the spirit that makes for resolving the paradox of personal self-realization and social communion; God is the resolution of the universal-particular, merge - individuate tension.

Spiritual Development vs. War

Lawrence Leshan has written that one of the two ways to satisfy the two conflicting drives simultaneously and without contradiction is through spiritual development or mysticism. Unfortunately, the other way is through war. (This is part of his fascinating thesis about why societies have not been able to prevent war.⁹) A spiritual understanding allows us to view ourselves as separate individuals and as part of the total cosmos, with nothing ultimately separate from anything else.

How does this relate to social action, tikkun olam, and the repair of the world? In part, I want to explore how our belief in and relationship to God fit in. Spirituality can be seen as feeling connected to or even merged with all of creation. It is the quintessence of universalism. Religion is the translating of that feeling into a system of beliefs, ethics, rituals and hierarchy, thereby making it particularistic.

The Place of God

The classic Reconstructionist formulation of God is "the power that makes for salvation" - for making the world better, which is our understanding of "salvation." In that formulation, the power that is God is multidimensional, universal. God is the urge within us to bring about a more just world, God is the energy we use to fulfill the urge; God is in the vision we have of a better future. We fulfill our godliness through the process we use to bring about a better world. God, then, is not only in the means and ends, but also in the very fabric of wanting to repair the world. The role of God in the classic Reconstructionist formulation is inspirational and sustaining, and I would guess that the large majority of Reconstructionist congregants (whether or not they are involved in tikkun olam) would not, without reflection, describe this as their experience.

Many believe that God is that energy that helps bring about tikkun olam, but they do not know how to have faith in it upon which they can draw. We do not know if ultimately peace and justice will prevail; we do not know if the good guys are going to win or lose, we do not believe in an end-of-days messianic miracle - so what does it mean to have faith?

It is faith in the possibility that society will improve. Remember Kaplan's definition of progress □ the individual experience of self-actualization will grow deeper and be increasingly available to larger numbers of people, while at the same time individuals will identify ever more deeply with an overgrowing number of people.

Evidence of Progress

By those criteria, we are making progress. just think how much more individual freedom is available to women around the world, or about how much disaster relief is provided to people around the globe, how much more the world is becoming a global village. On a personal note, I have a child with Down syndrome; the possibilities that he has today have, in all likelihood, never been available before to people with mental retardation.

Having faith can give us the strength and vision to act more powerfully, as the God that we have faith in acts through us. It is not the faith of waiting for something to happen; it is not the faith of passivity; it is the faith that inspires us to act. Interestingly, the Jewish Fund for Justice, a secular group, in its analysis of the low level of social action activity in synagogues, cites the crisis of faith of many American Jews. JFJ acknowledges that God is neither a motivating force in the lives of most Jews nor a factor in helping determine values and priorities; this is an area ready for change.¹⁰

Cultivating an understanding of God that results in this kind of faith would provide buoyancy for our synagogues as vessels of tikkun olam. I have no easy answers about how to bring this about. Opening the conversation is very important. Conversations about our understanding of God can be very intimate; many, if not most, people feel vulnerable and even timid about expressing their beliefs, and many are even unsure what their beliefs really are.

Hard Questions

Consider the importance of such questions as: What are your beliefs about God and tikkun olam? What do you have faith in? Does this faith support your tikkun olam work? If not, could you draw upon it? And consider how difficult it often is to have such conversations.

It is by acting on the Jewish teachings of working for justice through a Jewish identity that we express our universal and particular needs and values simultaneously, and we need to be explicit about this.

As a result of our unique diaspora history, Jews have a long legacy of seeking to balance the universal and the particular, of being a Jew and a citizen of a large culture. Living in two civilizations in the era of the Global Village, we have a rich history upon which to draw.

Congregational Life

Going back to our organizing challenge, the survey with which I began shows that our congregants believe that social justice is a fundamental aspect of Judaism. How does this translate to congregational life?

Above, I outlined a formidable set of impediments to congregations becoming more activist. It is important to know the terrain in which we are operating. It is all too easy to blame ourselves, to think we are not doing a good enough job, and to feel disheartened - and then our energy drops. This is where faith comes in. There are, in fact, reasons for optimism. In the nation as a whole, there is an upsurge in political activity. We have the new phenomenon of Web-based organizing, with organizations such as MoveOn.org and Take Back America. Community organizing is increasing with groups like Jobs for Justice, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, ACORN and the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation).

Most congregations relegate social action work to a committee, and its effectiveness frequently depends on the abilities of the chair. All of the responsibility for fulfilling one of the key tenets and identity pieces in Judaism often falls here. Sometimes the rabbi is supportive and sometimes not. A healthy system integrates the major responsibilities. It also allocates resources: How much staff time is devoted to supporting this work; how much money is allocated for programming; how much time on the board agenda is there discuss these issues?

Integrating, Not Segregating

Integrating tikkun olam values into the internal decision-making life of the congregation is one valid choice either for the tikkun olam committee or a special task force. The Washington-area Jews for justice group has compiled a very detailed audit for its congregations to help them understand the choices they have made. Let me suggest the kinds of issues a synagogue can examine:

- Do you pay your support and maintenance staffs a living wage? What benefits do staff members get?
- Are there pension plans for support staff, and what kind of health insurance is offered?
- Where do you bank? Could your banking be transferred to a community development financial institution?
- With whom do you contract for landscaping or other services, and what are their employment policies?
- What is the environmental impact of your facility?
- What kind of paper goods do you buy? Do you buy fair-trade coffee?
- Do you make your facility available to other groups?

I am sure that the above list can be expanded. By raising these issues, congregants become educated and the issues then have an impact on their lives. The congregation models taking responsibility for its actions, the way an individual needs to take responsibility.

Practical Applications

In talking about where the synagogue chooses to bank and how it uses its assets, individuals will begin to examine their practice. In talking about a living wage, people will think about how much they pay people who do domestic work for them. Perhaps they will think about how much they tip service workers, realizing that many of them do not earn a living wage. While this does not address public policy issues in the larger picture, by raising them as policy issues within the congregation, it raises the larger questions. Tikkun olam begins at home.

Every synagogue committee can integrate tikkun olam concerns into education, ritual life, the building and grounds, personnel, and especially the fundraising committee. This whole systems approach then apportions responsibility and provides a supportive context in which the tikkun olam committee can do external work. Several years ago, when the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation began a series of workshops on growth and outreach, the message was that the whole congregation is part of outreach and each committee had to make it part of their work. The same is true of tikkun olam.

Taking responsibility for one's actions is the heart of any spiritual path, and taking responsibility for one's role in society is the heart of good citizenship. A congregation that does both serves as a model for its members. This is living successfully in two civilizations.

Facing the Problems

To begin taking responsibility, one needs to know that a problem exists. There are significant numbers of poor and working-class Jews. The most recent census shows that one in five Jews in New York City lives below the poverty line. Yet the majority of Jews are middle and upper-middle class. The median Jewish income is 50 percent above the median income of others in the United States. The American middle class as a whole is insulated from confronting poverty. As our incomes have gone up, we have

grown more distant from the problems of poverty. We do not understand how poverty affects choices that we make in our lives about where to live, work, and send our children to school.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Jacob Riis shocked America with his photos about the invisible poor, and contributed greatly to progressive public policy. Half a century later, Michael Harrington wrote *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*,¹¹ which helped bring about Great Society legislation such as Medicare and food stamps.

The invisible poor are now more invisible than ever. African-Americans are still disproportionately poor - and housing patterns in urban areas are more segregated than they were thirty years ago. The United States today has the highest proportion of immigrants in the total population since the early 20th century. This time, immigrants are far more likely not to be Caucasian, which compounds the problem.

Short and Long Term Needs

Many synagogue social action committees make the poor visible by focusing on direct service projects such as food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. These focus on short term needs; but many people drawn to activism want to work on advocacy for policy issues, addressing the long-term problems and causes. Even people involved in direct service can grow tired. This is not to say there is no place for direct service, only that advocacy and direct action need to be in balance.

In the Torah, the obligation to take care of the poor is unwavering; it is our responsibility. Taking care means both direct service and structural or policy change. The Torah tells us not only to give money, food and clothing - direct service - but to have a sabbatical year, when debts are forgiven; a jubilee year, when property is redistributed and everyone starts out again; and to pay a living wage. There are many policy changes far short of redistribution that would make significant differences.

One of the most effective motivational tools is hearing people's stories. I recently spoke at the national Hillel Tzedek conference. One college student talked about how she was not an activist until she spoke to the maid in her dorm and only then realized what it meant not to be paid a living wage.

Service Work and Advocacy

Congregations can make the poor visible; direct service is a part of it. Some congregations are part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, neighborhood networks of churches and synagogues that house homeless people for week at a time. This is a national effort.

Participating in the organization Mazon: The Jewish Response to Hunger, is another means of making congregants aware of poverty in America.

The basic principle is that whenever there is a *simha*, three percent of the cost of the food is donated to Mazon. Currently the largest agency in the United States combating hunger, Mazon directs its funds to both direct relief and advocacy.

There is a tension in many congregations between direct service work and advocacy. Advocacy can seem potentially divisive, and too large an issue if conceived of nationally. Focusing on local (city or state) policy can ameliorate much of this. On a political level, it frequently is less "hot button" than national issues. Good educational work can be done on issues without necessarily taking positions. Even raising the policy questions can be important.

I want to highlight a new effort of the Jewish Fund for Justice (I referred to its analysis earlier). It has developed an excellent program to revitalize synagogue social action based on working in coalitions with other faith groups. It is described in a pamphlet, "Faith Based Community Organizing: A Unique Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Synagogue Life."

Respect for Differences

Congregations can encompass more than one position on an issue. Multiple positions can be advocated within the a unity of the congregation. This is most easily done in the context of educating people about the issues. It can also be done in the realm of advocacy. Different committees or working groups of a congregation can take different positions. The congregation as a whole needs to be fair about resource allocation and time. The congregation as an institution does not have to take a position on an issue and it can allow committees to engage in advocacy work. This will require careful negotiation, trust and civil behavior. This can only work in an atmosphere of respect, with everyone accepting that reasonable, moral and ethical people may have different opinions. The roots of Judaism are in the commitment to create the conditions where each living being has the opportunity to manifest godliness in daily life. The tradition teaches that justice is a necessary condition and that we are man dated to pursue it. The roots grow out of a faith in God that by definition guarantees that the possibility of attaining justice always exists. It is our task to cultivate that faith.

1. Mordecai Kaplan, "Marxism and the Jewish Religion," *Reconstructionist* (Vol. I, March, 1935), 15.
2. Arthur Green, *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2003).
3. *Ibid.*, 1.
4. Some of these ideas were developed in conversation with Arthur Waskow.
5. Steven M. Cohen and Leonard Fein, *American Jews and Their Social Justice involvement: Evidence from a National survey*" sponsored by Amos: *The National Jewish Partnership for Social justice*, 2002, published.
6. Lawrence Leshan, "Why We Love War," *the Reader* (Vol. 15, Jan.-Feb. 2003), adapted from *The Psychology of War: Comprehending its Mystique and Madness* (Helloess, 2002).
7. Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber, "The Guru and the Pundit," and Don Beck, , *The Never Ending Upward Quest: An Interview with Don Beck,* " *What Is Enlightenment* (Issue #22, Fall/Winter 2002).
8. Mordecai Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), 122/ 123.
9. Leshan, *op. cit.*
10. "Faith Based Community Organizing: A Unique Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Synagogue Life" (New York: Jewish Fund for justice, 2003).
11. Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

Making Decisions on Controversial Issues

Rabbi Rebecca Alpert

<http://jrf.org/showres&rid=202>

Every congregation (or havurah) faces disagreements, in which particular individuals or sub-groups feel compelled to challenge the status quo. While these disputes are often resolved amicably, they can also result in individuals feeling a need to leave the group, or in some instances, a group of individuals feeling a need to start a new group based on the point of conflict. None of these results is necessarily bad or wrong. But there are times when such disagreements create a negative atmosphere and hurt feelings that never heal. It is those situations that might be avoided through more understanding of the process of controversy and the values underlying disagreements about issues.

While disagreements are often ostensibly about specific political issues (like gay marriage or peace in the Middle East), they are also about making decisions around what we ultimately value. For some, those values are clear and unchanging (community over individual autonomy, justice over compassion), for others the value that takes precedence will vary based on the situation. But we aren't always aware of why we take a particular stance on an issue, and that awareness is a crucial part of being able to make good decisions. For a congregation to function well, it should be able to articulate why it has chosen a particular position over another, and members should be able to have a respectful dialogue about their differences based on values.

One issue in decision making about controversial issues is that values related to the congregation's internal dynamics may conflict with values members hold about issues in society in general. Inclusion, pluralism, sh'lom bayit, democracy and honesty are values about internal dynamics. The group must be clear about whether these values are going to be the ones that count above other values about social issues. Is it more important for the group to get along peacefully than to insist that the group take a position on an issue? Is it more important that no one be excluded from the congregation than that the group expresses itself on a controversial subject? If sh'lom bayit is the ultimate value, then the group must articulate that to members, so that they will understand that taking positions on Jewish or local or global issues will raise problems if there is disagreement about them.

Reconstructionist groups, who pride themselves on the values of inclusion and pluralism are susceptible to situations where controversy can be troubling. By definition, inclusion and pluralism make dissent problematic, because they guide us to want to make sure that everyone is comfortable in our communities. Surely, pluralism and inclusion are important values to us, but they may conflict with other things valued by our communities. We assume for example that people who don't believe in equality for women would not feel comfortable in a Reconstructionist setting. But if inclusion and pluralism were our only values, we would have to find ways to make room for such individuals if they wanted to join. What this tells us is that pluralism is one thing we value among many, and other values may outweigh it in some instances.

Other values may also come into conflict. Sub-groups in the congregation may find themselves at odds over whether the limited resources of the congregation should be used to support a soup kitchen (emphasizing the value of compassion) or go to a demonstration against welfare reform (emphasizing the value of justice). In other cases, people may believe they share the same value (Jewish survival), but think they can foster it through demanding that their rabbi does intermarriages, or demanding that he or she refrain from doing so.

One important factor congregations shouldn't neglect in this process is understanding the power dynamics in their congregation. Is the congregation a democracy? How much power do the Board or

influential committees have? What is the position of the rabbi? Does he or she have final authority (even if the group claims otherwise?) How about the President or other chairs? Do they gain power by virtue of their position (ascribed power)? What role do powerful individuals play? Can they sway people by virtue of charisma? The group needs to look at how decisions are made. It is often the case that the opinions of some hold sway, even if their opinions don't match the stated values of the congregation. This is something that groups must always be conscious of to make sure decisions are well made.

I am suggesting that Reconstructionist groups need to devote some time and energy to thinking through what communal values are, and to creating a process to resolve conflicting values when these situations arise. These complicated clashes of values and perceptions are best addressed when they are consciously articulated in an exercise of values clarification. I recommend the method created by Thomas McElhinney for this process, but any open conversation would be useful if its goal is to articulate the values and assumptions underlying people's different opinions, giving people an opportunity to air their differences. What follows is an adaptation of McElhinney's method that is designed for use by congregations:

A Three Step Method for Ethical Decision Making

Step One: Formulate a Premise

What does one group feel ought (or ought not) to be done in the situation? State your intuitive reaction as follows: "We ought (ought not) _____." (For example, we ought to perform same-sex marriages, participate in a protest about the situation in the Middle East, start a soup kitchen project.) The statement that you make becomes a hypothesis to be tested by argument.

Step Two: Conduct the Ethical Argument

- a. List all reasons that support your premise. Make as strong a case as possible. Note any objections in a separate place, but save them for Step Three. Build only one case now.
- b. Provide justifications for each of the reasons that you have given. These are the "reasons for your reasons" and form the heart of the ethical argument.
- c. Separate the moral reasons from other supports for your premise. Whether something is legal or costly or politically wise may or may not count along with the question of whether or not it will meet some ethical norm or have good or bad consequences. The more moral thing may not be the least expensive or the safest for the congregation.

Step Three: Review and Act

- a. Posit one or more other premises that could apply to the situation and list reasons and justifications for each. These will be alternate courses of action to the original premise. While most of the reasons will simply be negative forms of the reasons given in Step Two, this is the place that objections can be listed. By looking at the counter arguments you may discover new dimensions of the question.
- b. Compare the premises and then:
 1. sustain your original position and take appropriate action
 2. abandon your premise for a counter-premise and begin decision process again (to be certain);
 3. modify your premise and do a new review

Summary:

Present a position and test it. It is likely that two (or more!) premises will have a moral strength, and it may be difficult to choose, but at least you know what you feel is best and how strongly you feel about it. You will also be able to explain to others why you would choose a certain action. And you will be able to anticipate their arguments when they disagree.¹

It is likely that a congregation will rely on this process when there is a conflict, but it is also useful for a congregation to go through some process to articulate the values of the group when no problem exists. Does the group place more importance on its own survival or on taking controversial positions based on values, or does that depend on the situation? It is a useful exercise to rank values in theory, and then subject them to hypothetical situations. Sometimes the values we think we hold dear fade in significance when faced with a real life situation. But some groups may be able to articulate a hierarchy of values that will not change based on a situation. Sh'lom bayit may be the most important principle a congregation holds, but justice or democracy might be also. It will be important to know that before a conflict arises.

¹ This procedure is adapted from S. Lammers and R. Alpert, ed. Teaching Medical Ethics to Theological Students (RRC Press, 1983) 33.

Adat Shalom - Tikkun Olam Guidelines

<http://www.adatshalom.net/tikunola.html>

T i k k u n O l a m G u i d e l i n e s

<p>Adapted From the Statement of Principles</p>	<p>Our tradition bids us to align our values and beliefs with the ways we conduct our daily lives. Central to Judaism’s codes of ethical conduct is the notion of <i>redifat tzedek</i>, pursuing justice in every aspect of our lives and our communities. Jewish ethics that help to create a more just <u>and compassionate</u> world can be divided into three traditional areas: <i>tzedakah</i>, in its narrow sense of supporting good in the world through financial contributions; <i>gemilut chasadim</i>, performing acts of loving- kindness for others; and <i>tikkun olam</i>, repairing the world through social action.</p>
<p>Adapted from the 1995 Tikkun Olam Guidelines (paragraph #1)</p>	<p><i>Tikkun</i> means "repairing;" <i>olam</i> means “world, cosmos, eternity.” The <i>Mishnah</i> bids us to help others beyond what’s required, “for the sake of tikkun olam.” In the <i>Aleinu</i> prayer we express our hope for a repaired world through Divine dominion. <u>Isaac Luria, the 16th century kabbalist, expanded our understanding of tikkun olam: with each <i>mitzvah</i> (commandment / good deed), we return a spark of God to its source, thus repairing the cosmos. Today, the words tikkun olam are often used as shorthand for “efforts to better the world,” such as reading to an at-risk child, serving meals at a homeless shelter, or speaking out on an important matter of public policy.</u></p>
<p>Adapted from the 1995 Tikkun Olam Guidelines (paragraph #2)</p>	<p>The obligation to repair the world emerges from various Jewish sources. Some, including many of the ancient prophets, see our responsibility to engage in social action as emulating God's holiness and righteousness (Lev. 19). Others understand it as arising chiefly from the Jews' historical position as an oppressed people (Ex. 23). Still others believe that acts of tikkun olam are the primary means of satisfying the need to create a sense of Jewish community and identity, making the commitment to tikkun olam is a calling, a vocation. <u>In each case, Jewish survival and meaning depend on our being a community organized around values and committed to tikkun olam. Whatever its sources, tikkun olam is central to Judaism, and to our Adat Shalom community.</u></p>

	Challenges in Practicing Tikkun Olam
Adapted from the 1995 Tikkun Olam Guidelines (column 3, paragraph 3)	Jews today are fully integrated into American society. We at Adat Shalom are drawn to the more universal teachings of the Jewish tradition requiring care and concern for all who suffer. At the same time, we recognize our special kinship with fellow Jews, both at home and abroad. In this spirit, Adat Shalom seeks to maintain a balance between its particular concerns to be active on behalf of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and our universal commitments to help repair the larger world.
New Material (cf. Tikkun Olam Guidelines, column 3, paragraphs 1 and 2)	<u>Similarly, while we now live in a ‘global village,’ we realize that those nearest to us often require special concern. We thus seek to balance local needs with global issues, never forsaking the one for our focus on the other. In considering these questions of particular and universal, near and far, we turn to Hillel’s ancient wisdom -- “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Avot 1:14) While deeply committed to standing up for our own self-interest, we also seek out opportunities to help those less fortunate than ourselves.</u>
Adapted from the Statement of Principles	<u>Moreover, the mitzvah of tikkun olam obliges us both to serve immediate needs and to work toward the prevention of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse, and oppression among all people, as well as working toward preserving the health of the global ecosystem upon which all life depends. It obligates us to maintain democracy, equality, and free inquiry and to safeguard the Jewish people and society’s most vulnerable members. Adat Shalom promotes tikkun olam by encouraging and facilitating individual as well as group participation in efforts to repair the world. While acts of tzedakah and gemilut chasadim do manifest a commitment to making the world a more caring and compassionate place, there are occasions when tikkun olam, the healing of our world, may most effectively be achieved by taking collective action.</u>

	ADVANCING RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE
New Material	<p><u>The highest degree of tzedakah is enabling those in need to become self-sufficient (Maimonides' 12th century 'ladder') – sacred work which often requires working in coalition with others to create systemic change. Adat Shalom seeks new ways to build community and consensus, internally and externally, in order to pursue the work of justice. The Social Action Committee will continue to educate toward, encourage, and facilitate personal action to defend the Jewish people and improve the lives of others (efforts to support the Jewish State will primarily be handled by our Israel Connection Committee). At the same time, the Social Action Committee will from time to time pursue Board approval for taking communal action on issues where broad-based support exists within the Congregation, consistent with Jewish values and Reconstructionist thought. Specific procedures to approve any Adat Shalom affiliation or endorsement of collective action -- such as marching on the National Mall under the Adat Shalom banner, or putting our synagogue's name on non-partisan, issue-oriented advocacy statements -- will supplement these guidelines.</u></p>
Adapted from the 1995 Tikkun Olam Guidelines (column 4, paragraph 1)	<p><u>Our Social Action Committee is primarily responsible for coordinating member's participation in individual and group tzedakah and tikkun olam efforts. This committee identifies areas of interest and develops programs to provide a framework for membership action. Frequently this involves interaction with other organizations that share our interests and values. Individual members are encouraged to present new issues or projects they believe merit congregational involvement to the Social Action Committee, which will be charged with determining which initiatives have such broad-based support within the Congregation as to merit consideration by the Board. The congregational newsletter, the listserv, the website and other special publications will be used to give wider dissemination to social action projects or initiatives, and to solicit feedback and opinions about particular issues.</u></p>
Adapted from the Statement of Principles	<p>Ultimately, the true measure of our commitment to the advancement of righteousness and justice in the world is our actions, not our words or prayers. <u>At Adat Shalom, we encourage members of all ages to actively participate in Social Action activities within the Congregation.</u> We emphasize that acts supporting social justice, alongside prayer and study, are an essential part of our spiritual practice.</p>
From the 1995 Tikkun Olam Guidelines; new dates	<p><u>An earlier version</u> of these guidelines was approved by the congregation in 1995; these guidelines were approved by the Board on March 21, 2006 and ratified by the Congregation on May 21, 2006. Members of the congregation had opportunities for input to this statement throughout the process of development.</p>

Advocacy at Adat Shalom

<http://jrf.org/files/Adat%20Shalom%20Tikkun%20Olam%20Guidelines%20FAQ.doc>

What is Congregational Advocacy?

Congregational Advocacy is when Adat Shalom takes a formal position on a public issue. This could show up in a wide range of contexts, such as participating in demonstrations (e.g. Million Mom March), signing a petition in favor of a certain policy (e.g. gay marriage), or hosting consciousness-raising events for a particular cause (e.g. genocide in Darfur).

What's the major difference between the revised and existing versions of the Tikkun Olam Guidelines?

Under the existing guidelines, a "majority vote" of both the Board and the congregation is required before the congregation as a whole can engage in advocacy-like activities (to take the banner to a rally, for example). Since congregational votes are extremely impractical ways to govern, in practice such decisions have by and large been left to the Board (with occasional input sought from congregants via the listserv or Scroll). This problem aside, the major impediment to congregational advocacy under the existing guidelines is the requirement that such "collective political activity" should be "rare" and take place only in "extraordinary circumstances." This extremely high hurdle to any sort of congregational advocacy has created what amounts to a de facto prohibition on virtually all advocacy-related activity. In place of this language, the new guidelines assert that "there are occasions when tikkun olam, the healing of our world, may most effectively be achieved by taking collective action."

Just how will things be better at Adat if we adopt the proposed new rules?

First: the congregation will be given the opportunity to discuss--and, yes, to argue about--what the values it espouses as a congregation mean in the real world. The new guidelines are explicitly designed to insure that these discussions will both educate and, where possible, build consensus around proposed issues. Second, the congregation will have the opportunity to act, in concert, and as a unified body, on those public issues for which there is broad-based support. We hope and genuinely expect to see a significant increase in congregational energy as we find ways to become advocates for those issues we care about most.

How would the new rules work in practice? In other words: when someone says "Adat needs to take a position on X," what happens from there?

The precise answer to this question is best found in the "Procedures" attachment to the new guidelines, but here is a quick summary:

- 1.** A member (or group of members) convinces the Social Action Committee (SAC), the Israel Connections Committee (ICC), or a member of the clergy that the congregation as a whole should take a public stand on a particular policy issue.
- 2.** In most cases, a draft congregational position will then be written—or we may simply be seeking to endorse the position or statement of another group (JCRC, CMMC, etc.)--and those advocating for this position will endeavor educate the congregation on this issue (via the Adat Shalom website, the listserv, the Scroll, and via open and well publicized community meetings).

3. All feedback received will be collected, summarized and presented to the SAC (or the ICC for Israel-related issues), a member of the clergy and the Vice President for Programming. If this group agrees that the proposal has indeed gained "broad-based congregational support" with a "minimum of deep-seated opposition," the issue is deemed ready for Board consideration.
4. The board will consider the proposal, including the documentation and summary of feedback, as well as commentary on how the proposal takes into account the diversity of feedback received and a statement explaining how Jewish/Reconstructionist values support the proposal.
5. The proposal will be adopted if 2/3 of the entire board, or 80% of the board members in attendance, vote in favor. Adopted resolutions can be rescinded at any time by a simple majority of the board, and, to stay in force, each congregational position must be re-approved by a majority of the board every three years.

Does allowing the congregation to take occasional public policy positions increase the likelihood of dividing members along political lines?

We don't think so. The Board procedures contain serious consultation and content requirements before the clergy or the Social Action Committee can bring a resolution to the Board. They also raise the Board percentage needed for approval of issue-oriented resolutions. If every member of Adat Shalom is committed to respecting the right of others to think and believe differently, then we should be able to take positions on public policy issues now and again without dividing or splintering the congregation (particularly in light of the supermajority requirement for passage). We will seek to accommodate valid concerns and differences wherever possible. We have codified a checklist for consensus-building and approval. For example, the SAC and clergy may only bring forward resolutions that have "broad-based community support," they need to share with the Board "all community feedback" on the issue, the procedures state that "at open community fora, people on all sides of the issue shall be given an opportunity to state their views," and all resolutions must have Jewish/Reconstructionist theological support. The Board would then have to approve the resolution by a supermajority: 80% of those present or two-thirds of the board, whichever is greater.

But even after all that, might there not be some people that disagree?

There doubtless will be. The goal here is to move to an inclusive process in which everybody is heard, as opposed to banning a realm of activity because consent might not be unanimous. In our congregational Statement of Principles, we place an emphasis on collective social justice efforts. The proposed guidelines set up a mechanism whereby Adat Shalom, as a community, after reflection and consensus-building, could act on the values articulated in our statement of principles. The new guidelines simply allow a substantial supermajority of the congregation to act on issues where the community, after reflection, discussion and consensus-building, find it important and appropriate to speak in one voice.

Is there a legal problem with advocacy?

The short answer is no. There is a legal ban on 501(c)(3) non-profit corporations (like Adat Shalom) from endorsing candidates for elected office or devoting a significant proportion of its resources to lobbying. The new Board procedures explicitly state that "the Board will not take any action that will likely result in disqualifying the synagogue for favorable tax treatment pursuant to Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) or any other similar federal, state, or local law." Everything the board does is evaluated by legal counsel and these resolutions and actions would be no exception.

Mishkan Shalom Statement of Principles

<http://www.mishkan.org>

(The following statement was adopted as the founding principles of Mishkan Shalom at community meetings in July 1988. This initial statement will be discussed during 5749, the first year of our community, and revised for style and emphasis in a democratic communal process from March -May 1989. Mishkan Shalom welcomes all who share the values articulated in this document.)

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד:
עַל הַתּוֹרָה, וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה,
וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים
(אֲבוֹת פָּרְק א)

ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD RESTS:
ON STUDY, PRAYER AND ACTS OF CARING
(Avot, 1:2)

Mishkan Shalom is an activist, spiritual community of Jews committed to the integration of the three primary areas of Jewish life: *Avodah* (Prayer), *Torah* (Study), and *G'milut Hasadim/Tikkun Olam* (Acts of Caring and Repair of the World). Through prayer we seek to infuse our lives with the Divine Presence and with *K'dushah* (holiness). Through study we seek to enhance our understanding of our tradition and the ways in which its teachings and insights may inspire our ethical and spiritual growth. Through acts of caring and repair we seek to transform our world so that it reflects the divine values of justice and compassion.

עֲבוּדָה

Avodah (Prayer, Spiritual life)

לְעַבְדוֹ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם
(דְּבָרִים יא"ג)
וְכִי יֵשׁ עֲבוּדָה בְּלִבְּךָ? זֶה תְּפִילָּה
(סִפְרֵי דְּבָרִים מ"א)

TO SERVE YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART
(Deuteronomy 11:13)
WHAT IS SERVICE OF THE HEART? IT IS PRAYER.
(Sifre Deuteronomy)

Our relationship to God orients and governs all of our activity. We seek to create an environment that will nurture heartfelt prayer (*avodat halev*) that will help us in our quest for God. In the prayers of our tradition, we express our yearning for an abiding connection with the Divine (*d'vekut*) and our thankfulness for what is miraculous in the world and in our everyday lives (*al nisecha shebechol yom imanu*). We seek to experience the original power and passion of traditional prayers by connecting them to our daily lives.

Striving to integrate tradition and innovation, we seek to deepen our understanding of the siddur and to expand the ways in which both traditional and new prayers, blessings, and rituals express our spiritual

selves. New prayers, creative rituals, poetry, and music written or organized by our members enrich our liturgical expression.

In our community there are many different ways of understanding God. Our synagogue is a safe place to share our faith and our doubt, a place where we can ask questions and learn from one another. In our prayer we emphasize and seek to integrate a naturalist/humanist theology that sees God as a power within ourselves and nature and a theology of transcendence that sees God as the mystery that is present in the universe. The first inspires us to be aware of the God within us and to live lives that are reflective of the divine. The second inspires us to experiences of transcendence, of connection with the Unknowable, with the Mystery that lies beyond us.

While the traditional liturgy fails to recognize the experience of women, our community is committed to a feminist reconstruction of Judaism. Toward this end, we are committed to reclaiming feminist images from our tradition, including new prayers and rituals which reflect the experience of women in our liturgy, using female God language, and empowering women to take religious leadership.

Our prayer life must be connected to study and action. It must bring holiness into our lives and help us to transform our own lives and our society. It is our pursuit of godliness that impels us to *repair* the world so that the words at the end of the Alenu are fulfilled: "and on that day God will be one and His name one."

תּוֹרָה Torah (Study)

תְּלַמּוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגְדְּכֻלָּם
(פְּאֵה א. א.)

THE STUDY OF TORAH IS EQUAL TO THEM ALL. (Mishnah Peah 1:1)

We are a community committed to learning. We wish to connect with the sacred values of our heritage, the Torah, and other religious texts of the Jewish people from all periods and places. We recognize the central position of the sacred Jewish texts in our search for enduring values, as well as the importance of Jewish history and culture for gaining insight into these values. At the same time, we recognize that the study of non-Jewish sources is vital for a full appreciation of the meaning of Jewish texts and values in the modern world. Through our study, we seek to be full participants as knowledgeable Jews in a free exchange of ideas with all peoples.

The study of Torah is central in enabling us to pursue a just world. Torah teaches us our obligation not only to act, but to realize how much is in our power to change. Though much of our tradition was written in a setting very different from our own, it nevertheless has a wisdom and urgent message that speaks to our situation today. Torah gives us insights into problems that we can see, yet also helps us to see what we have closed our eyes to.

As well as leading to action, study enriches and deepens our prayers and religious life. Knowledge of Jewish languages, history, and literature enables us to understand, reform and recreate traditional practices and to maintain our connection to the Torah as a living document.

These goals that we seek for ourselves are also those that we seek for our children. We will strive to create an environment where adults and children can share in the joy of learning together and from one another. We hope that through study, we will be a community of teachers as well as learners, for *'lamad vilo limade ayn lecha hevel gadol mizeh*" ("to learn and not to teach, there is no greater vanity than this") (Leviticus Rabbah, 22:1).

גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִים/תִּיקוּן עוֹלָם

G'milut Hasadim/Tikkun Olam (Acts of Caring and Repair of the World)

לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שַׁדַּי
(סִידוּר)

TO REPAIR THE WORLD SO THAT IT REFLECTS THE
KINGDOM OF GOD (DIVINE VALUES). (Siddur)

The *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* requires both *G'milut Hasadim* and *Tikkun Olam*. *G'milut Hasadim* refers to those acts of loving-kindness, generosity and helpfulness that come from the caring heart of a nurturing community. We will support one another as we face life's passage, sanctifying important moments in our lives within the framework of our shared Jewish tradition.

Tikkun Olam refers to the imperative to repair the world, so that it reflects the divine values of justice (*tzedek*), compassion (*hesed*), and peace (*shalom*). Our ethic as a people is grounded in our collective memory of slavery and exodus, oppression and liberation. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes that our experience as slaves teaches us that we have a special responsibility to the stranger and the powerless, "You shall not oppress the stranger for you know the experience of the stranger having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." The Torah creates an Exodus morality that sees the Jewish people as a covenanted people, bound together by a common commitment to be an ethical nation, a people in the image of God. This morality requires us to oppose the enslavement and subjugation of others and to fulfill *mitzvot* that help transform the structures of oppression.

Our historical experience of victimization has reinforced this moral commitment as an essential part of our collective *consciousness as Jews*. After the Holocaust, the Biblical commandment "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" assumes a new and urgent meaning. As a people *who* suffered so much as a result of the indifference and passivity of others, we must actively oppose injustice and oppression wherever it occurs. To be neutral on issues of justice is to side with the oppressor. Our passion for justice must be applied not only to Jews but to all peoples. If we are not for ourselves who will be for us; if we are only for ourselves, what are we?

This moral tradition, and the linking of *G'milut Hasadim* and *Tikkun Olam*, guides us individually and collectively in the expression of our activism. Currently, Mishkan Shalom joins with other spiritually-based communities in the movement to provide sanctuary to Central American refugees. Similarly, our moral commitments and our sense of peoplehood impel us to oppose anti-Semitism wherever it exists, and to support the struggle of Soviet Jews for cultural and religious freedom and the freedom to emigrate. This work combines the compassionate care of the victims of oppression and racism with a challenge to the political and economic forces that perpetuate suffering and injustice. We join with other individuals and communities in the work of Tikkun Olam.

As a community of faith we are often challenged in our ability to repair and transform (*tikkun*) a broken and unjust world. We hope that we will have the faith and courage to be such a voice in the Jewish community and the community at large.

Israel

צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּט תִּפְדָּה
(יִשְׁעֶיהָ פָּרַק אֶת)

ZION SHALL BE REDEEMED IN JUSTICE. (ISAIAH 1:27)

The state of Israel is filled with symbols and hopes for Jews everywhere: it is a link with the covenantal relationship between God and the people, a vibrant center of Jewish culture, and a haven from persecution for Jews from many countries. We are dedicated to the survival of Israel as an independent Jewish state in which Jews can live in dignity, continue and revive their traditions, and shape their own future. Our need to see a secure Israel, however, must not blind us to the suffering of the Palestinians, who also have ties to the land. The perpetuation of this suffering violates the Jewish commitments to justice and compassion. Jews and Palestinians must recognize and support one another's rights to *national self-determination* in the land they share and revere. Without this, there can be no peace and no security for either people. We therefore support those groups and individuals within Israel *who* are working for a just end to the conflict and a long-term solution based upon mutual recognition.

Community Process:

אִין הַתּוֹרָה גִּקְנִית אֶלָּא בְּחֵבְרָה
(בְּרַבְּ כוֹת סָג)

THE TORAH CANNOT BE ACQUIRED EXCEPT IN FELLOWSHIP.
(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 60b)

As a community dedicated to Tikkun Olam, we acknowledge that repair of the world begins with ourselves, that our community should be a model of the world we wish to create. We thus seek to be a community that embraces those Jews among us whom the Torah and the Jewish community have rejected or made invisible: gay men and lesbians, the unmarried, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, Jews by choice, the unlearned. We *also* strive to be a feminist community, one that empowers women, and that creates a process in which all people will feel welcome to contribute, to learn, and to teach. Mishkan Shalom welcomes all Jews and partners of Jewish congregants who share our values and our aspirations to a full Jewish life in a just world.

We encourage our members to take responsibility for congregational life and for the ongoing process that gives shape to that life. At the same time, we recognize the special position of the rabbi as a spiritual leader who stimulates and guides us in our striving towards a fuller and more integrated Jewish life. It is the rabbi's responsibility to apply the ethical teachings of Judaism to issues of current concern in an atmosphere of open discussion and debate. The relationship between the congregation and the rabbi is one of mutual respect based on shared responsibilities.

Tzedek v'Shalom Process for Congregational Advocacy

<http://jrf.org/files/Tzedek%20V'Shalom%20Congregational%20Advocacy%20Policy.doc>

Definition: Congregational advocacy is when TvS, as a congregation, takes a formal position on a public issue, in any number of ways, including, but not limited to, signing a petition, participating in a demonstration, or hosting an event that advocates for a cause. As a non-profit 501.c.3 corporation under the Internal Revenue Service code, TvS would not endorse candidates for elective office or otherwise engage in politics in ways that the IRS prohibits.

1. If a member or group of members would like TvS to take a stand on an issue, he/she/they would first approach the Tikkun Olam Committee (the newly renamed Social Action Committee) and ask for approval to begin the process of educating the congregation on the issue and receiving feedback from members. If the TOC approves, the member(s) would then inform the Board that an educational process will be taking place. In the absence of a functioning TOC of at least three people, the member(s) would seek approval from the Board, through a simple majority, to begin the educational process. If the issue is one that has already been supported by the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, formal approval by the TOC or Board is not necessary; the TOC and Board would simply be informed of the member(s) intent to proceed with an educational process.
2. A draft congregational statement will be written, unless the member(s) are seeking to get congregational endorsement for the position or statement of another group. The draft proposal, or statement from another group, should be accompanied by an explanation of how this issue reflects TvS's vision statement and how endorsing the proposal may lead to specific actions (e.g., participation in demonstrations, etc.). Those advocating for this position will then educate the congregation on the issue via email, TvS newsletter, and open, well-publicized community meetings. Congregants will be encouraged to discuss, debate, and give feedback on the issue.
3. The initiating member(s) will collect all feedback received and, if necessary, modify the original statement to reflect the feedback. The revised statement and feedback will be presented to the TOC (or Board in absence of a functioning TOC). If the TOC believes the proposal has gained broad-based congregational support, the issue is ready for Board consideration. (It should be noted that no proposal for congregational advocacy is likely to have the support of all members of the congregation, and the absence of unanimous support should not prevent the TOC from moving forward.) The TOC will be responsible for ensuring that any proposed policy position or action fairly and accurately represents the preponderance of views of TvS members who have engaged in the education process.
4. The proposal will then be presented to the Board. This presentation will include a summary of the feedback received from congregants, an explanation of how this feedback has been taken into account, if necessary, in a revised draft, and an explanation of how the proposal relates to TvS's vision statement.
5. The proposal will be voted on at the next Board meeting and will be adopted if 2/3 of the Board members in attendance vote in favor. Adopted resolutions can be rescinded at any time by a majority of the Board and, to stay in force, must be re-approved by a majority of the Board at least once every two years.
6. Once a proposal has been approved, specific opportunities for action related to the endorsed position, but not spelled out in the original proposal, may arise that require a timely response. These actions will be presented to the Board for approval by a majority of Board members, either at a Board meeting or, if time is short, by email responses from Board members.

Policy statement was developed by Ruth Jampol, Ralph Posmontier, Jes Savrin, Mark Pinsky, and Stephen Perloff and approved by the Tzedek v'Shalom Board on 6/6/07.

Other Tikkun Olam Resources

- Suggested Ingredients to Synagogue Social Justice Initiatives, by [the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston](#)
<http://jrf.org/showres&rid=234>
- [Synagogue 3000](#) report on "Synagogues and Social Justice: Creating Sustainable Change Within and Beyond the Congregation"
<http://www.synagogue3000.org/synagoguestudies.html>
- Report from *Tzedek Yalin Bah/Justice Shall Dwell There: A National Conference on Judaism and Social Justice*, hosted by the [Jewish Council on Urban Affairs](#), April 10-11, 2005
<http://www.shalomctr.org/files/JCUAreportback.pdf>
- *Judaism and Justice* (book), by Rabbi Sid Schwarz
<http://www.rabbisid.org/>
- Integrating Spirituality and Social Justice, by Melanie Schneider
<http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=673>
- Political Activism as a Form of Prayer, by Christine Balka
<http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=530>
- Projecting Our Values into the Political World, by Jane Susswein
<http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=750>
- Rabbis and the God of Transformation, by Rabbi Brian Walt
<http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=695>
- Reflection As An Activist Practice, by Rabbi David Rosenn
<http://jrf.org/showres&rid=16>
- The Spiritual Dimension of Justice, text and songs, by Rabbi Shawn Zevit
<http://jrf.org/showres&rid=481>
- Tikkun Olam audio program with Brian Walt and Shawn Zevit
<http://jrf.org/showres&rid=137>
- Tzedakah and Social Action, by Jeffery Dekro and Betsy Tessler
<http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=644>