



Mishkan Shalom Statement of Principles


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 Chasadim/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 of the world we seek to transform our world so that it reflects the divine values of justice and compassion.


AVODAH

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 (*alnissecha 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 *Aleynu* are fulfilled: “And on that day God will be one and His name one.”


TORAH

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





G'MILUT CHASADIM/TIKKUN OLAM


The mitzvah of *tzedakah* requires both *G'milut Chasadim* and *Tikkun Olam*. *G'milut Chasadim* 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 frame-work 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 (*chesed*) 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 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, 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 as well as our sense of peoplehood impel us to oppose anti-Semitism wherever it exists. However, our passion for justice must be applied not only to Jews but to all peoples as has been reflected in our historical involvement in providing sanctuary to Central American refugees. If we are not for ourselves, who will be for us; if we are only for ourselves, what are we?

Our moral tradition, and the linking of *G'milut Chasadim* and *Tikkun Olam* guide us individually and collectively in the expression of our activism. As a community of faith, we are often challenged in our ability to repair and transform (*l'takeyh*) a broken and unjust world. We hope that we will have the faith and courage to be a voice for tikkun olam in the Jewish community and the community at large.





ISRAEL

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 long-term solution based upon mutual recognition.

PHILADELPHIA


As a Reconstructionist congregation, inspired by the prophetic Jewish vision of a just society – a society that takes care of all its members – Mishkan Shalom is committed to combating the structures of poverty that oppress and impose impenetrable walls of isolation on the poor. Our Jewish heritage teaches us this:

1. All wealth belongs to God, and human beings are permitted to use it only as stewards of God and in consonance with the values we attribute to God.
2. Material prosperity is a blessing, but it is a blessing that contains within it the twin dangers of selfishness and greed.
3. We bear a collective responsibility as a spiritual community – a covenant – to the larger community.
4. The test of our community – of a community – is in how we treat our most vulnerable.

And our Jewish heritage also teaches us this: Justice demands that all people have access to employment, to housing, to health care, to safety, to education, to social insurance, and to rest and leisure.

Together, these spiritual commitments should serve as a concrete guide for our vision of a just society in the modern world.





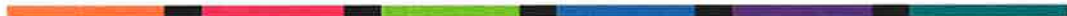
Though our pursuit of justice is universal, based on the rabbinic teaching that “the poor of your city should take precedence,” Mishkan Shalom will dedicate itself to working to combat the structures of poverty that exist in the Philadelphia region. We are committed to an ethic of mutual care and interdependence that overwhelms boundaries of class and geography. We are concerned about the separation between city and suburbs, between rich and poor, that we are dedicated to the pursuit of economic and social justice for all residents of the Philadelphia region.


This dedication will guide and inform us as we seek to working partnership with other religious and civic groups to make the Philadelphia region a just and humane place for all of its inhabitants.

COMMUNITY PROCESS

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 and lesbians, the unmarried, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, Jews by choice, Jews of color, and 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 is committed to being a safe Jewish environment where all people can examine their prejudices and act to overcome them, and where those who suffer discrimination and marginalization feel welcome and valued for who they are. We seek to create a Jewish community where our diversity is reflected in our prayer, our study, and our struggle to repair the world. 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 concerns in an atmosphere of open discussion and debate. The relationship between the congregation and the rabbi is one of mutual respect and shared responsibilities.

The principles outlined in this document are consistent with the values espoused by Reconstructionism. Mishkan Shalom is affiliated with Jewish Reconstructionist Communities. This Statement of Principles articulates the fundamental beliefs that motivate and govern our existence as a synagogue. While it is written as an enduring vision, an ongoing commentary by congregants will, we hope, ensure that it continues to reflect and guide the values of a vital Jewish community.

– Adopted 1988; Amended 1996 and 2003





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On three things the world rests:
On Study, Prayer, and Acts of Caring

Mishkan Shalom is an affiliate of the Jewish Reconstructionist Communities

www.jewishrecon.org