

Or Shalom Jewish Community Statement of Tikkun Olam in Our Times

Or Shalom Jewish Community is an active community of progressive Jews and non-Jews, diverse yet united in the effort to improve ourselves and mend our world through: limud (Jewish learning), gemilut chasadim (acts of loving kindness), avodah (Jewish spiritual practice), and tikkun olam (social action). We share a commitment to deep mutual acceptance, the spirit of questioning, and a dynamic balance between tradition and innovation that makes our Judaism alive and relevant.

— [Or Shalom Jewish Community Mission Statement](#).

Or Shalom . . . promotes members' involvement outside the community in the pursuit of tikkun olam through social action and social justice.

— Or Shalom Community Core Values

Hinenu — Here we are.

Or Shalom Jewish Community supports the global grassroots struggle to raise public awareness of and opposition to social, political and economic inequality and to the disproportionate and corrupting influence of the monied elites and corporations on our political economic system and the global environment. We have been inspired by the massive international protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Spain, and elsewhere, and by the Occupy movement in the United States, which exploded on the scene in 2011 in New York City and spread across the country. Occupy has brought economic inequality to the forefront of political dialogue and activity. Occupy was built with inclusiveness, creativity and joy — aspects so often missing in our era of divisive legislatures and narrow identity politics. Many have been moved to take actions such as abandoning the large predatory banks, to greening of our homes, to directly opposing voracious corporate and financial interests.

Or Shalom recognizes that, for us, the struggle for social justice is rooted in Torah values: our personal and collective responsibility to the poor and disadvantaged, to our communities, and to the entire world. Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, explains that the “issue of extreme wealth inequality is something Judaism has been concerned with from biblical times,” with teachings with the purpose of preventing vast and permanent inequalities of wealth. The Prophets, including Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Micah, whom we read and study, admonish us to address the needs of the poor and the homeless, the slaves and the strangers, the weak and the downtrodden, and to pursue justice, all of which are forms of *tikkun olam*, repairing our fractured world.

Every year on Yom Kippur, Isaiah reminds us that fasting is not enough, and what we are called upon to do is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, and let the oppressed go free.

Or Shalom shares the concern over the dangers of economic inequality and the disproportionate political influence of the top 1% and of corporations. Corporations should not be allowed to corrupt our political process. Corporations are not people. As abstract organizations owing their existence to the state, corporations should not have the same civil and human rights as human beings. Our culture has a worrisome tendency towards the worship of wealth and the wealthy, yet people should have priority over profits. Our duty as citizens and Jews requires that we stand for human values and support the political struggle to maintain a just society in the face of such undemocratic forces. We oppose corporate and monetary idolatry.

In our longing and struggling for a better world, we are reminded “Tzedek tzedek tirdof — Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20). We believe pursuing justice is an act of love, transforming dehumanizing I-It relationships, to use the phraseology of Jewish socialist philosopher Martin Buber, to more personal, productive, and loving I-Thou ones. In the words of Jewish anthropologist David Graeber, “We are the 99%” and we’re all in this together.

Or Shalom, which means Light of Peace, calls for non-violent protest as well as non-violent response to protest. We deplore the use of police violence against peaceful protesters exercising their cherished First Amendment freedoms of speech, press, assembly, petition, and religion, just as we abhor the use of violence by protesters or by anyone. We view violence as both morally and tactically wrong, knowing how often violence unfortunately leads to more counterproductive violence. We also oppose unjust conditions, including the vast chasm of inequality and the painful plague of poverty. Living beings are sacred ends in themselves, as our Jewish tradition teaches us, inherently deserving of rights and respect. As a community, we support social justice and oppose violence precisely because we are Jewish and progressive.

A century apart from each other, anti-racist social justice activists Frederick Douglass and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel both said that we need to pray with our legs, that we need to take action to make real our prayers, blessings, and desires. We continue to be inspired by them as well as our other sages and prophets. And in the timeless words of our ancient sage Hillel: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Pirkei Avot 1:14).

As a proudly progressive Jewish community, we stand on the side of justice and are therefore in solidarity with the global movement for the 99%. When asked to account for where we are during the worldwide struggle for social justice, we resolutely respond: *Hinenu* — Here we are.