

# ADAT SHALOM RECONSTRUCTIONIST CONGREGATION

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## Statement of Principles

Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation is dedicated to the moral and spiritual fulfillment of its members and to Jewish continuity. We affirm the idea that Judaism is the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. Through this congregation, we will explore, enjoy, evaluate, and participate in revitalizing and reconstructing Judaism in all its aspects. We are determined to make the process of reconstructing Jewish civilization a responsible, communal undertaking.

Drawing on the richness of historical Judaism, we seek meaningful ways to express our Jewishness and to enrich our lives. In this search, people take precedence over doctrine and communities over institutions. We insist that the essential guidelines of our faith be judged by standards of morality and justice that members of the congregation feel to be relevant to their lives.

We strive to be a community where members at all levels of observance and commitment to Judaism are welcomed and encouraged to freely express themselves. This freedom of expression encompasses differences of opinion. We view ideological diversity or uncertainty as a challenge to be faced; we seek a more reliable basis for Jewish unity and the future of Judaism than a uniformity of belief and practice.

We are Jews who stand in a relationship of combined affection and challenge to the norms of our tradition. We are Jews in search of contemporary, reasoned, and still evolving ways of thinking about our Judaism. We are, in short, *ba'alei she'elah*: Jews with questions.

We believe that, just as Jewish civilization has adapted to new circumstances throughout Jewish history, so must it adapt to late 20th-century North American society. In a world changing ever more quickly, it becomes increasingly important to make the effort to think through carefully how we will reconstruct Judaism in every generation. We hope that by undertaking this reevaluation seriously, we will be able to fulfill ourselves Jewishly and pass on a thriving Jewish culture to our children.

### Learning

We recognize that learning produces growth -- intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. We experience the rich variety of traditional and contemporary Jewish belief and practice through our exposure to a wide range of religious, social, and educational programs. Adat Shalom is to be a resource for those exploring our vital Jewish heritage.

### Worship and Religious Practice

Religious observance in our congregation is to be performed in a meaningful, traditional manner that is consistent with evolving Jewish values and culture. Through intimate, participatory services, we seek to discover ways to sense and manifest the divine presence in our lives. Despite our diverse religious views, we commit ourselves to collective and individual "God-wrestling" -- grappling ceaselessly with the central questions of theology, the infinite, and the divine.

Our ties to our Jewish past and our sense of the secular present often pull us in opposite directions. We seek to find ways to merge those two sensibilities while remaining true to both. Thus, while respecting tradition, we are willing to bring changes to the law and practice of religion. While respecting *halacha* (Jewish law) as a guide and as a sign of past convictions and value judgments, we are prepared to have the law changed by Jews themselves, by rabbis and lay people acting in responsible concert.

In setting communal standards and proposing individual guidelines for religious behavior, the congregation is to operate on a democratic model with decisions made by the community as a whole. In this process, the past has a weighty vote but not a veto.

## Shabbat

Shabbat has been variously described in the tradition as a day of creative rest, a day of soul-calm and tranquility, a sanctuary in time designed to help us rise above the pressures of daily existence to experience self-fulfillment and the realization of what makes life worthwhile.

Although we honor these visions of Shabbat, we acknowledge that traditional and ritual observance, in the form of many proscribed behaviors, presents modern Jews with dilemmas. We believe that visions of Shabbat may be realized in a number of ways, both traditional and creative. Therefore, at Adat Shalom, we encourage an acceptance of various levels of Shabbat observance, while at the same time we seek to keep Shabbat holy, a special day apart from the rest. By educating ourselves about traditional ritual observance and by experimenting with new ways to observe Shabbat, we believe that Adat Shalom can provide a context for its members to develop a meaningful, evolving relationship with Shabbat so that this day may continue to function as a potent influence in sanctifying and beautifying Jewish life.

## Israel and World Jewry

We feel connected to Jews everywhere by our religious beliefs, our traditions, and our history. We view being part of the Jewish people as a source of pride, inspiration, and great privilege; we also acknowledge the attendant responsibilities and obligations of that peoplehood. We support the State of Israel and recognize its importance to Jewish renewal and survival. We believe that Jews everywhere must have the freedom of religious expression and of emigration, which we consider to be basic human rights, and we support efforts to gain these rights.

## Social and Community Responsibility

The examples of our ancestors impel us to maintain a consistency between our values, our beliefs, and the ways we conduct our daily lives, both in and out of the congregation. *Tzedakah*, whose Hebrew root means righteousness and justice, is a uniquely Jewish means of supporting good in the world. *Tzedakah*, in its broader sense, can be divided into three traditional areas: *tzedakah*, in the narrower sense of supporting good in the world through financial contributions; *gemilut chesed*, doing kind things for others in small and large ways; and *tikkun olam*, repairing the world through social action.

- **The mitzvah of tzedakah.** Although the values of today's secular culture, with its emphasis on accumulating wealth and using it for personal consumption, makes it difficult for us to strike a balance between our personal desires and needs and our sense of responsibility to help others, we are committed both as a community and as individuals to the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*. The traditional concept of *maaser*, which refers to the obligation to withhold a portion of our income for the advancement of righteousness and justice, provides a strong foundation upon which we can build our own personal, contemporary

response to *tzedakah*. With so many demands on our resources, we affirm the Jewish principle of giving *tzedakah* as a priority to those spheres closest to us even as we strive to share our resources with ever-wider spheres of need.

- **The mitzvah of gemilut chesed.** Our compassion for and commitment to our community finds its voice and expression in the physical world through *gemilut chesed*. We believe that such relationships hold the potential for spiritual experiences and that both the giver and the receiver are enriched by the process. *Gemilut chesed* requires continuous, diligent education to enable us to learn how best to both give and receive.

We fulfill the *mitzvah* of *gemilut chesed* by visiting the sick (*bikur cholim*), behaving graciously and hospitably (*hachnasat orchim*), and comforting the mourner (*nichum avelim*). We resist the tendency to leave the performance of these mitzvot to professionals. Members of Adat Shalom are challenged to continually expand the ways in which *gemilut chesed* is expressed.

- **The mitzvah of tikkun olam.** This *mitzvah* obliges us to help alleviate hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse, and political oppression among all people. In addition, we have a responsibility to preserve the health of the global ecosystem upon which all life depends. We should be prepared to take actions that are ethically and socially responsible, even when doing so may be difficult or unpopular.

Ultimately, the true measure of our commitment to advance righteousness and justice in the world is revealed through our actions, more than in our words or prayers.

## Gender Equality

The congregation strongly affirms the principle of gender equality in all areas of Jewish life. Women and men are encouraged to participate in the responsibilities and voluntary activities of the congregation at

whatever level they feel comfortable. This principle extends to such religious and life cycle events as *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremonies, marriage and divorce proceedings, being called to the Torah, counting in the *minyan*, and selecting rabbinic leadership.

## Family

The Jewish family is central to our survival. The congregation is committed to providing programs that enrich Jewish family life. It is our hope that family participation in all facets of congregational life sets examples necessary for the perpetuation of our Jewish heritage.

## Participatory Community

Active participation is a necessary and integral part of the workings of our congregation. Every member is encouraged to participate, and the extent of the participation is limited only by one's imagination, initiative, and energy.

The congregation works to foster a sense of community through the active commitment of its members. We recognize the necessity of ongoing commitment to one another and attempt to evoke mutual caring and responsibility among members of all ages.

Join us as we work to put these principles into practice. This is a living document, which the congregation will reappraise periodically and revise or replace as necessary. These principles were approved by the board directors of Adat Shalom on 15 March 1992 (10 Adar II 5752) and by the congregation at the annual meeting on 14 June 1992 (13 Sivan 5752).

If you would like more information about Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation or would like to be become involved in our community, please call (301) 840-8983 or write to Adat Shalom, c/o JCC, 6125 Montrose Road, Rockville, MD 20852.