

1. In Boston

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HAVURAT SHALOM:

A PROPOSAL

Arthur Green

Havurat Shalom is a group of men and women involved in an ongoing religious quest, largely nurtured by our contact with the insights and traditional forms of Judaism. The search each of us has thus far undergone in seeking his own path in the celebration of life's divinity and in seeking out his own role in the realization of the Kingdom of God in human affairs, has brought us to the need for *Havurah*, for religious fellowship, and to the establishment of *Havurat Shalom*.

Each of us strives to make the above statement true concerning his role in *Havurat Shalom*. We all know that each of us is here for all kinds of other reasons as well: emotional, intellectual, sentimental, academic, etc. Many needs are fulfilled by an undertaking which occupies so much of one's emotional energy. Yet we seek to subordinate these to the needs of the Spirit as the most essential meaning of *Havurat Shalom* and of our being here. That all decisions we make are in the context of the *Havurah* should be borne in mind.

If the human spirit is to survive in our age, there will need to be many attempts at its intentional cultivation. We see ourselves as part of a great effort in this latter part of the

Rabbi Green comments: "This is the most complete essay I have written on my ideal of *havurah*. It was a proposal submitted as part of a reorganization effort in January, 1970. It was never accepted in full and should not be taken as a description of the present *Havurat Shalom*".

twentieth century to preserve human values and religious truths which are elsewhere being swept aside. A small but terribly significant spiritual subculture is being created in the West; we seek to identify with the highest elements in that cross-cultural and cross-religious effort.

We further stand in the context of a particular religious tradition and a particular people in the world's history. Our living commitment to Jewish tradition is one of study and experimentation; we have a particular commitment to the spiritual renewal and meaningful religious survival of the Jewish people.

The particular path of this *Havurah* is one that recognizes the legitimacy of religious personalism. We know that each of us must find his own spiritual path, and we would seek in the *Havurah* the context, knowledge, and atmosphere that would enrich this search for each of us. It is hoped that we will grow in the ability to share elements of this search with one another, and that we will all be concerned with one another's spiritual and personal growth.

The range of particular religious paths is and may healthily be a broad one. It would appear, however, that on either far end of the spectrum there are those who could not be comfortable in this *Havurah*. Those whose Orthodoxy in attitude does not allow them to accept the legitimacy of alternative paths for other Jews, and those who find no validity in the entire enterprise of personal religious search, are probably beyond our scope.

When we enter into the *Havurah*, we accept certain obligations upon ourselves. Without obligations the *Havurah* could not exist. We affirm that the *Havurah* has a right to make serious claims upon our time and energies. Each of us is in the *Havurah* because it is of great importance to us; it is an expression of those matters which are (or which we hope to make) central to our lives. While nearly all of us need to work outside the *Havurah* to earn our material sustenance, and outside personal involvements are of course not discouraged, we agree to take most seriously the *Havurah's* claims upon

such as meals, worship, retreats, etc., and such menial but nonetheless crucial obligations as household chores and financial contribution.

Each of us takes upon himself the obligation to participate in all activities of the *Havurah*, unless there is some substantial physical or spiritual reason why he cannot do so. Each individual will remain his own arbiter as to the validity of such reasons, but we are asked to take the question of group obligation quite seriously, much more so than we have done in the past.

Study of Judaism is a central defining task of membership in the *Havurah*. While hopefully not an end in itself, but rather an expression of the more basic attitudes outlined above, study of Torah occupies an essential place in our group value system and a major portion of our time. We seek to develop new models of religious study, to make study itself once again a form of worship. We also recognize, however, that constant learning is needed as a source of access to our tradition, and that we cannot tolerate Jewish ignorance in ourselves. Inability to become involved with a serious program in the study of Judaism may well be sufficient reason to leave this particular *Havurah*, to which study is so central.

A specific study requirement is the acquisition of skill in Hebrew language to the point of ability to read classic unpointed texts in the original with some minimal fluency. It is to be understood that no one who enters the *Havurah* without this ability will be allowed to remain a *Haver* for more than one year without embarking on a serious effort to master the Hebrew language. (If such a person chooses not to do so through the regular course offering in Hebrew, *Havurah* will ask its regular teacher of elementary Hebrew to evaluate for it the seriousness of such efforts.)

One of the purposes of study in the *Havurah*, in addition to personal spiritual development, is the cultivation of well-taught and personally sensitive leaders for the Jewish community. To this end certain *Haverim* will require carefully planned courses of study, in some cases leading to the granting of titles which may help them to serve in

leadership roles. Such programs will be described in detail elsewhere, but the *Havurah* as a group here undertakes a responsibility to those *Haverim* to see to it that such serious study is possible in our context. This is a commitment of both teachers and fellow students.

The attitude of the *Havurah* toward traditional patterns of Jewish ritual observance and liturgical worship is one of open-ended experimentalism of great seriousness. While no particular observance pattern is insisted upon, concern for and willingness to attempt the ritual life patterns remains essential to our vision of Judaism as the sacralization of the everyday. Those for whom the possibility of living their lives in deep accord with the Jewish ritual rhythm of Shabbat and holidays does not exist, those who see no chance for the meaningfulness of the prayer experience in any form, and those for whom being an heir and transmitter of the symbol-system of Jewish piety is not significant, should not be a part of this *Havurah*. On the other hand, we hope for the emergence of new ritual and liturgical forms of the *Havurah*, and frankly deplore our own lack of such creativity thus far.

Participation in communal worship experiences is an important part of our participation in the *Havurah*. It is hoped that the frequency and variety of such experiences will increase, and that absence from them will not be taken lightly by *Haverim*. Of course the *Havurah* will always respectfully appreciate the fact that participation in a religious service is not done casually by most of us, and there may often be good spiritual reason why certain *Haverim* do not feel it right for them to take part in certain forms of religious worship.

We recognize that the present *Havurah* is a large and highly diverse group in terms of personalities and life-styles. None of us will have relationships of equal intimacy with all of his *Haverim*, nor can real personal closeness be legislated. Nevertheless, we have chosen to join the *Havurah* out of a need for religious fellowship, and none of us would deny the relatedness of the personal and religious dimensions in human relationships. Some attempt at the religious appreciation of one's *Haverim* as fellowmen and companions must be

part of the *Havurah*. Such appreciation, which involves being open to viewing the other in the light of one's own religious ideals, will mean a certain degree of seeing through defences and letting down one's own masks. For all of us, the very recognition of one another's defences as such may be a terribly significant step in this direction.

It must be emphasized that the way to such a style of the interpersonal has to be trod with great delicacy, respect, and patience. Openness does not happen automatically when we join the *Havurah*, and is not something that can be delivered on demand. The goals are long-range, and pressure is not the way. On the other hand, the attempt on the part of all of us is essential. It would be hoped that there is no one who is not seriously working on himself in these areas, and that none of us have closed off the possibility of seeing all of our *Haverim* in the light of the Divine Image.

Married persons are generally accepted into the *Havurah* as couples, unless otherwise stipulated. While it is understood that it will often be one member of the couple who is engaged in full-time pursuit of Jewish study, it is expected that all members of the *Havurah*, both male and female, will be involved in study at least on a one-course equivalency basis, and will make equal commitments to all other *Havurah* responsibilities. Spouses of *Haverim* who do not feel they can fulfill the requirements of *Havurah* membership, or who are not comfortable in the spiritual climate of the group, are, of course, welcome to attend all functions of the group, but are asked not to participate in *Havurah* meetings.

Many of us are not comfortable with the idea of formal legislation in the *Havurah*; we might be still less comfortable with a *Havurah* judiciary. There are times, however, when we feel we have legitimate complaints against one another with regard to the shirking of communal responsibilities. It would be hoped that we will first attempt to clear up such matters by personal contacts. If such informed approaches fail, the matter should be brought to the attention of the coordinator. He may then decide, after consultation with the individuals involved, to bring the matter up for discussion at a meeting of

the *Havurah*. The coordinator is trusted to be aware of the injunction forbidding the public disgracing of one's fellow-man.

In the case of extremely serious or continued neglect of responsibility to the *Havurah* as outlined above, the group in meeting may issue an ultimatum to be backed up to the point of terminating that individual's membership in the *Havurah*. It is of course hoped that such decisions would be mutual.

While it is agreed that the *Havurah* does not exist primarily for the purpose of group therapy, as that term is generally used, it is also recognized that there arise in our group tensions and hostilities that take us away from our goals. It is recommended that the *Havurah* create a ritual, based on the tradition of *Yom Kippur Katan* on the eve of the new moon. It is recommended that on that evening each month the *entire Havurah* come together for a half-hour silent meditation service, to be followed by a communal meal, real or symbolic. During the course of the half-hour silence we shall try to regain perspective on one another. Anything that need be said, addressed to the group or addressed aloud to any other individual, for the sake of reconciliation, may be said in the course of the meditation service.

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