

# Havurah Suggested Guidelines

## July 16, 2010

A havurah, from the root of the Hebrew word meaning “friend,” is a small affinity group of around ten adults or small clusters of families who meet regularly with the intention of building deep and lasting relationships over time. Different havurot (plural of “havurah”) will have different activities but will share a common purpose: to develop meaningful relationships among individuals or families within the Shir Tikvah community and thereby further deepen members’ relationship with one another and the Temple.

### **Types of Havurot/Themes:**

There are as many different types of havurot as there are members of the Shir Tikvah family; successful havurot come in all different flavors. While a theme is often what forms the seed for a havurah, the shared experiences and communications maintain the group long past the original connection. Here is a sample of some themes that have been expressed by Temple members:

- Families with children
- Community action
- Women over 40
- Outdoor activities/camping/hiking/sports
- Interfaith families
- Singles
- Living with disabilities or family members who are struggling with disabilities

### **Havurot Activities:**

The activities in which havurot engage will depend on the members’ interests and preferences. Some groups may want to plan an activity for each meeting, while others may want to be less formal in their approach. Here are a few ideas expressed by Temple members:

- Read a book and share a discussion or form a study group around a Jewish theme
- Hiking/camping activities
- Sharing meals
- Shared community social action
- Shabbat or *Havdalah* events

### **Maintaining a Connection to the Temple:**

Each havurah is encouraged to share its work (vision, activities, etc.) with the larger Shir Tikvah community. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as hosting an *oneg*, participating in a Shabbat service, providing an update in the monthly newsletter or weekly electronic update, etc. The purpose is to support an ongoing relationship between the havurot and the Temple.

### **Meeting and Hosting:**

Meeting frequency will vary depending on the nature of the group and the planned activities. While some havurot will find that meeting monthly is the right balance of cohesion and busy lives, others might find meeting biweekly or even weekly works for them.

### **Communication:**

It is important to maintain regular and open communication among the members. Some groups may want to take advantage of the many social networking tools available or establish email lists and group pages. Others may want to communicate by phone. These are simply tools to get the word out about meetings and a way to stay in touch between activities but are clearly not a substitute for meeting in person, which is the ultimate goal.

### **Havurot Advisory Team (HAT):**

During 2010, the Havurot Advisory Team will assist in launching several havurot. The Team will initiate and support the havurot, but it will be up to each autonomous havurah to define and administer itself. The Havurot Advisory Team will hold periodic meetings where we encourage at least one member of each havurah to participate. This will ensure that the havurot receive ongoing support from the HAT and each other, and that their relationship with the Temple remains vibrant.

### **Guidelines for Participation**

In our research, we've learned that havurot are more successful over time if they begin by establishing some basic expectations for participation. It's a good idea to start your havurah with a discussion about participation to make sure that members are on "the same page." The following is a list of guidelines that other havurot have used. This list can provide a good starting place for your discussion:

- Participating in a havurah does require a degree of commitment. If you decide to participate, please try to participate fully in as many activities as possible. As with any Shir Tikvah gathering, mutual respect and consideration are our guiding principles.
- If you find that you need to leave the group for any reason, please make sure to inform the other group members.
- Sometimes, havurah members share confidential and personal information. Always assume that you should not share this information outside of the group, unless the originator of the information expressly states otherwise.
- Take note of whether one or two members seem to be dominating the conversation, and make an extra effort to allow equal time for each member's participation at meetings and activities.
- Should disagreements arise among group members, it is important to resolve them quickly and thoughtfully. If your group needs support from the Havurah Advisory Team, please feel free to reach out to them. They are there to help with these types of issues.
- Again, as at all Shir Tikvah events, meetings, and gatherings, the children in a havurah should be respectful and cooperative with the other children as well as all the adults.

### **Questions?**

Please contact any member of the HAT team or email Vice President for Community at [VPLeadership@Shir-Tikvah.org](mailto:VPLeadership@Shir-Tikvah.org).