

**The Shofar**

Newsletter of Kol Hadash  
Humanistic Congregation

Affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism

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*If you would like to contribute materials to the Shofar, please contact Editor Mark Friedman (shofar@KolHadash.com). The Shofar is mailed to Kol Hadash members and is posted on our website (www.KolHadash.com) during the last week of each calendar month. You can always find our events calendar on our website as well.*

*Kol Hadash members also receive a weekly e-mail with details of upcoming events and other Kol Hadash news. If you are not receiving the weekly e-mail and would like to be added to the list, please contact us at info@KolHadash.com.*

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**Shalom from Rabbi Chalom**

**Accepting Limitations**

*by Rabbi Adam Chalom  
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A line from a poem we often use for memorial services has been stuck in my mind recently. From Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things":

... I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. . . .

All too often, we tax our lives with forethought of grief, fretting and worrying and planning for disasters that never come, and ruining our lives in the meantime. Taxing your life with forethought of grief sounds like a very Jewish thing to do, but it may not be the wisest. A true humanist has to accept the limits of human power.

There is so much we control about our lives that it can be hard to accept when there is nothing we can do. And Humanistic Judaism has made the conscious choice to emphasize human power and responsibility, what we CAN know and do and improve in our lives and in the world. But there comes a point where the forces of time and age and nature get the better of our conscious attention and effort, and we face a choice. We can resist the inevitable, deny reality, spin our wheels to move a few inches. Or we can modify the famous "serenity prayer," directing our quest inward rather than upward and beyond, and seek "the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

We have every reason to emphasize human power. We can accomplish much more if we really try and work together, and we are inspired to achieve more when we celebrate what we have already accomplished. And we can influence our lives for the better in a million ways that our ancestors could not have imagined. Medical treatment has prolonged and improved life, but in the end, there is the reality that every creation story must end with: we are mortal. I once heard it remarked that Europeans believe that death is inevitable, while Americans believe that death is optional.

We need not look anywhere else for power or security that we cannot find in this world; such claims tend to be unreliable, inconsistent and unverifiable. We do need to look within ourselves for two kinds of peace—the peace that comes with being in confident control of one's life, and the peace that comes from letting go when all that can be done has been done. Each takes courage, human

power and responsibility, and each are necessary for a full and satisfying life. If our Humanistic Judaism has value, it helps us to see this reality and to live it.