

**The Shofar**

Newsletter of Kol Hadash  
Humanistic Congregation

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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.*

**Shalom from Rabbi Chalom**

**The Evolution of Judaism**

*by Rabbi Adam Chalom  
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We believe in the evolution of Judaism.

One of the proposed PR slogans for Kol Hadash was: *For like-minded people who don't think alike.* We certainly welcome a diversity of perspectives to our community on many issues,

and we encourage people to make up their own minds about what they believe. But I suspect there is little disagreement within our congregation over the question of Jewish creation or evolution.

A "Jewish creationist" would believe that Judaism was created—divinely or "by tradition." What is done today that is "truly" Jewish is the same as it has always been, in the spirit of its founders and following the letter of the law they received, explained, and established for all time. The most important elements of Jewish identity—belief, ritual practice, revelation, study and worship—are constants, not variables such as where Jews live or what language we speak every day. Any changes through Jewish history were either minor or are being misinterpreted, since the eternal harmony of Jewish life between then and now must be true. And any change to those constants is a challenge and a threat to the very basis of eternal, created Judaism.

A "Jewish evolutionist," on the other hand, sees radical changes in almost every aspect of Jewish life over the last 3 millennia—from animal sacrifice at many shrines, to worship at only one temple in Jerusalem, to portable worship in the Diaspora, to a diverse global culture. Jewish civilization, like an evolving organism, has always adapted to and adopted from its surrounding cultures.

Just as Judaism has changed over the centuries, so, too, do we continue the Jewish tradition of changing Jewish life and practice. The *siddur* (prayerbook) was compiled and composed over centuries, and before it existed or at earlier stages of its evolution Jews were Jewish. So, too, are we Jewish—we who have broken the mold to create our own celebrations.

You can see where Humanistic Judaism lands in this debate. For us, Judaism was not created for us to be custodians; Judaism evolved and continues to change and grow like any living thing. If the Bat Mitzvah was developed to meet a pressing need and moral demand for equality, its newness is far less important than its proof of Judaism's adaptive value and instinct for survival in the modern world. Indeed, variety is the spice of living things in a world of

evolution; the more options, the more ways in which to survive and thrive.

When we celebrate Jewish tradition, we know that we are the heirs to a long chain of change, as well as transmission. As the earliest rabbis reinterpreted the Temple and sacrifices, so do we take the best from our past for our future.

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