

**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](mailto:shofar@KolHadash.com)). The Shofar is mailed to Kol Hadash members and is posted on our website ([www.KolHadash.com](http://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](mailto:info@KolHadash.com).

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**Shalom from Rabbi Chalom**  
**Community Within Community**

by Rabbi Adam Chalom  
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The *havurah* is a new-old institution in Jewish life. Might it also become a new Kol Hadash tradition?

The root of the Hebrew word *havurah* is *haver* (friend). In pre-modern Jewish life, community charity work was often done in *hevras*, societies dedicated to particular good deeds. The *hevra*

*kadisha*, for example, honored the dead by washing and watching bodies between death and burial. In addition to doing good, these *hevras* were also communities within communities, social circles that reinforced a sense of belonging.

Fast forward to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a new version emerged: the *havurah*. Initially begun by individuals and families outside of synagogue life, the *havurah* has become a powerful model of small community, now even with larger congregational connections. *Havurot* (plural) can study together, celebrate holidays together, support their members through difficult passages, and create safe spaces for intense discussions and personal growth.

At the Birmingham Temple in suburban Detroit, where I grew up and first worked as a Humanistic rabbi, there were several groups called either "Gathering of Men" or "Family of Women." These small groups of 10-20 people would come together once a month, generally at a member's home, to talk about any variety of subjects. Many groups prohibited topics like sports, politics or business—the easy subjects of conversation that do not demand much personal openness.

How do I deal with my aging parents? Do I spend my time on what is truly important? I know from my own experience in my Gathering of Men at the Birmingham Temple that these kinds of questions, discussed in a confidential and trust-building setting, moving each month from one *havurah* member's home to another, open us up to deeper connections with each other, and by extension to our larger congregational community. A rabbi or separate *havurah* facilitator does not monitor every *havurah* session; they are guides and advisors as needed or requested.

Our Membership Committee has been discussing organizing *havurot* under the umbrella of Kol Hadash. We debated whether they should be single-gender or mixed, seeing advantages to both; whether we should organize them by similar age or stage of life, or by geography, or by interest. In the end, we realized that a real, vibrant *havurah* is created by its own participants, and better to make it an open question: what would YOU want?

If you might be interested in participating in a *havurah*, please email me at [rabbi@KolHadash.com](mailto:rabbi@KolHadash.com) or call 847-347-3003. We will explore together, from those who contact me, what we will create together. As Rabbi Harold Schulweis wrote about the *havurot* in his Conservative congregation:

*The primary task on the agenda of the synagogue is the humanization and personalization of the temple. To experience true belonging is an imperative prerequisite for the cultivation of religious and moral sensibilities.*