

JEWISH RENEWAL

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Jewish Renewal is a phenomenon, not a denomination. It resembles Reform Judaism in some ways, Reconstructionism in other ways, and even Orthodoxy – especially Hassidism – in some important ways. But it is not a formal denomination with a formal hierarchy or structure. It is the ongoing creative project of a generation of Jews who are seeking to renew Judaism and bring its spiritual and ethical vitality into our lives and communities, and at the same time embrace a global vision of the role of all human beings and spiritual paths in the transformation of life on this precious planet.

Jewish Renewal is dedicated to revealing Judaism's inner spirit and nurturing the spiritual life of Jews. Jewish Renewal draws significant spiritual inspiration from the legacy of Jewish mystical and Hassidic traditions, which is expressed in the cultivation of traditional practices such as meditation, chanting, and *davening* and the study of traditional *Kabbalistic* and *Hassidic* sources to enhance both individual and communal practice.

Jewish Renewal seeks to transform and renew the *kavanah* (spiritual intention) with which Jews of all kinds practice Judaism.

Jewish Renewal is a "movement" in the sense of a wave in motion, a grassroots effort to discover the modern meaning of Judaism as a spiritual practice. Jewish Renewalists see "renewal" as a process reaching beyond denominational boundaries and institutional structures, more similar to the multi-centered civil-rights or women's movements than to contemporary denominations. This renewal process is happening in Jewish music, liturgy, *midrash*, education, politics, etc., in synagogues as well as *havurot*, and even in "secular" settings.

Jewish Renewal sees itself as trans-denominational, a movement that transcends the boundaries of the various denominations. Its membership includes people who are active in the Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Orthodox worlds as well as many others whose only religious/spiritual affiliation is Renewal.

In a deep way, Jewish Renewal is built on the idea that we live in a transformative moment in time, in which a new paradigm for spiritual life is being developed. Jewish Renewal draws heavily on the thought of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, which is a loving critique of the limitations of traditional Rabbinic Judaism and a call to continue the ongoing renewal of Jewish life in our time, as the Talmudic rabbis did in theirs.

Jewish Renewal actively seeks a relationship with God as the immanent reality that suffuses all creation and from time to time calls to us from beyond creation as well. This changes how we view the earth, the human race, the Jewish

people, the relationship of human beings to the rest of creation - everything.

Jewish Renewal is neither "*halakhic*" nor "anti-*halakhic*" but "neo-*halakhic*." Just as Rabbinic Judaism involved transcending the *halakhah* of Temple sacrifice, so Jewish Renewal seeks to go beyond the limitations of traditional Rabbinic Judaism to forge a new *halakhah* in which Judaism is conscious of its place in an interconnected world. This new *halakhah*, for instance, includes expansion of the practice of *kashrut* to include ecological and ethical criteria, a new exploration of the concept of work as it applies to both the personal and societal Shabbat, and re-examination of intimacy and intimate relationships.

Jewish Renewal has long been committed to a fully egalitarian approach to Jewish life and welcomes the public and creative input of those who were traditionally excluded from the process of forming the Jewish tradition.

In Jewish Renewal:

- women and men are fully equal & participatory in shaping the future of Judaism;
- those who have often been marginalized in Jewish life are welcomed and honored;
- there is respect for and often learning from other spiritual paths (e.g., Buddhism, Sufi, etc.),
- people seek to heal the earth and society through seeking peace, justice, and ecological wholeness;
- chant, meditation, dance, and drama are encouraged as ways of connecting with God & Torah;
- people desire to ****embody**** wisdom rather than etherealize or intellectualize it;
- people strive to personally sense God as suffusing the world with Divinity.

Jewish Renewal is "maximalist" about Judaism – that is, Jewish spiritual practice is undertaken joyously and Jewish values are applied in many down-to-earth life dimensions (food, money, sex, health, politics, etc.) rather than restricted to prayer, holidays, or Torah study.