

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
RESOLUTION
ISRAEL
1997

Preface

Israel has been central to our movement's understanding of Judaism since Reconstructionism's earliest days. Our commitment has been expressed in a variety of ways, from the requirement that our rabbinical students study for a year in Israel, to the political importance of Zionism to our congregants and rabbis and the cultural attachment so many Reconstructionists feel to the Jewish state. To hold that Judaism is a civilization, and as such, has a land at its center, means that Reconstructionism requires a strong connection to Israel. Furthermore, Israelis' mostly unacknowledged diversity of Jewish practice calls out for Reconstructionism. Israelis seek ways to explore their Judaism that are consistent with contemporary lives and pluralistic values. While such a desire amongst Israelis might indicate compatibility with Reconstructionism, it is important to emphasize that Israelis are also not receptive to ideas that they perceive to be wholly American. Nonetheless, Kaplan's idea of an organic community and Reconstructionist Judaism's placement of pluralism as such an important value, give us the tools to act as a catalyst for the growth of a significant Israeli alternative to what is mostly offered now. Now that Reconstructionism has emerged as the fastest growing movement in North America the time is ripe to focus our energies on expanding our practical commitment to Israel. Which we have always placed in a place of great ideological significance. Furthermore, the current discussion in Israel concerning the right of non-Orthodox rabbis to perform conversions and to officiate at religious rituals underscores the need in Israel to continue developing alternatives to Orthodox Judaism which can provide a meaningful alternative to both native Israelis and immigrants. Though the fate of non-Orthodox conversions in Israel appears to be a sealed, this does not mean that we as rabbis committed to developing a maximal, liberal Judaism must abdicate the quest for establishing a presence in Israel. Rather, it is because of the current Orthodox hegemony that we must work [toward] educating the Israeli population about Reconstructionism as a viable and attractive alternative to orthodoxy.

Resolution

Part I

In North America, we see a need for rabbis and lay people to make Israel a more significant focal point of educational programming, fund-raising, and travel. Efforts such as the planned JRF "Rabbi-as-educator" and family trips constitute great initiatives for an expansion of [Israel's] role in the lives of rabbis and congregants.

Part II

In Israel, we see the need for an official Reconstructionist presence, which should include an office, a professional, and the facilitation of the growth of a local Reconstructionist approach to Judaism. Any such approach should be cultivated in accord with the needs and desires of Israelis, without any shaping according to North American preconceptions. We feel that this method is the most realistic [for] approaching Israelis with Reconstructionism, and also most in accord with the grassroots tone and ideals of communal determination that are central to Reconstructionism.

- A. An office: The presence should include an office offering resource materials in Hebrew, English, and Russian. The office would be a resource center in many ways. It would be a classroom for:
- o Classes on Reconstructionism for Israelis, and
 - o Some classes for RRC students. It would be the primary address and phone number, as well as a resource center for:

- Anyone interested in learning about Reconstructionism or forming a Reconstructionist Havurah;
 - Temporary residents and visitors to Israel who might become involved upon their return to North America;
 - [Reconstructionist rabbis, congregants, and rabbinical students visiting Israel];
 - Reconstructionist living in Israel looking to maintain their connection to those visiting from North America, as well as the movement in North America; and
 - The advisor to RRC students in Israel. We are currently the only North American movement that does not have an official presence in Israel. We would hope to establish an initial presence in time for Israel's jubilee celebration in 1998.
- B. **Staff:** The person to staff this office should be knowledgeable in Reconstructionism, Hebrew, and Israeli society. Their role would include the following:
- Translation into Hebrew and publicity of Reconstructionist material;
 - Making available such literature to people throughout all segments of Israeli society; and
 - Doing outreach throughout the country, including the Kibbutzim and Moshavim. The staff ought to include, at least on a part-time basis, a native Israeli.

Plan of Action

We realize that the establishment of such a Reconstructionist presence in Israel as outlined above will take a great deal of time, effort, and financial support. To this end we resolve to establish a committee of the RRA, jointly with JRF and the RRC, dedicated to developing a detailed plan of action for establishing such an Israeli presence in a reasonable amount of time. The goal of this committee would be to develop a comprehensive long-range plan for the development of an official Reconstructionist presence in Israel. This plan would involve strategic aspects as well as budgetary and fund-raising concerns. In the interim it remains essential that all Reconstructionist rabbis living in or visiting Israel do their utmost to promote the ideals of Reconstructionism through the World Union for Progressive Judaism, its new Liberal Bet Midrash and any other means possible.