

# Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association RESOLUTION

## ON RECONSTRUCTIONISM

1985

### INTRODUCTION

1. RECONSTRUCTIONISM, one of the four major Jewish religious movements, has recently experienced rapid growth as well as major changes in leadership.
2. These new circumstances provide an opportunity to review the Reconstructionist movement's positions, attitudes and directions.
3. We believe that each generation of Jews has the right and obligation to review and where necessary reconstruct Judaism for its own time.
4. This resolution is not a formal credo but is designed to serve as a framework for continuing study as a means of shaping the beliefs and practices of our members.

#### A. AN EVOLVING RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION

1. Judaism is an evolving religious civilization that is the product of our unique history, experience, and insights as a people.
2. It encompasses the social, cultural, economic, spiritual and political as well as every other aspect of collective life.
3. While rooted in tradition, Judaism changes to meet changing contemporary circumstances.
4. We affirm our commitment to Klal Yisrael, the unity of the world Jewish community.
5. We urge all Jews to respect the pluralistic nature of our people, seeking unity of purpose rather than uniformity of belief or practice.

#### B. ISRAEL, ZIONISM AND DIASPORA

1. We are deeply attached historically and emotionally to both the land of Israel and to the survival of a secure, prospering and democratic Jewish state there.
2. The land of Israel is central to the spiritual life of the Jewish people.
3. We advocate the acceptance of religious and cultural pluralism in Jewish life in the State of Israel.
4. We commit ourselves to furthering the dynamic relationship between Diaspora and Israel Jewry, for a satisfying authentic and creative Judaism must also flourish in the Diaspora.
5. We recognize that only through mutual respect, cooperation and moral dialogue can our Zionism become a means for the revitalization of Jewish arts, culture, and thought.
6. Our commitment to Klal Yisrael also leads us to concern for Jewish communities throughout the world.

#### C. COMMUNITY

1. Living a full Jewish life requires active participation in the Jewish community, which should provide opportunities for rich Jewish experiences and serious learning.
2. Only in this context does it become possible to reconstruct Judaism for our time.
3. We affirm that the highest form of community is voluntaristic and democratic.
4. We encourage the active participation of all men and women in every aspect of Jewish life and practice.
5. The collective has the right to make demands on its members through the democratic process, and the members have a right to a high degree of autonomy in their search for authenticity.
6. Our rabbis and lay leaders have a crucial role to play in developing an informed laity able to respond to the challenges of living in two civilizations.

7. Since the Jews of America have not yet been able to create an organic community for all American Jewry, it is the task of Reconstructionist congregations and havurot to strive to create organic Jewish communities for their members.
8. To preserve community and creativity, pluralism must be preserved within congregations and havurot as well as among them.

#### D. EDUCATION

1. The continued vitality of a civilization lies in the successful transmission of its culture.
2. The individual Jew's authenticity and ability to reconstruct Judaism require a rich experience of Judaism and knowledge of its sources, history, arts, languages, values and ideas.
3. This knowledge and experience, along with the best insights of Western cultures, must be brought to bear upon the major global, cultural, and personal issues which face us.
4. The individuals, congregations and havurot, and institutions of our movement together will determine the strength of our future by their dedication to learning and by the programs they create to implement it.

#### E. RELIGION

1. Religion is an organic element of civilization concerned with discovering what is ultimately important in human life and strengthening the individual's commitment to those ultimates.
2. Religion is concerned with developing moral courage, spiritual depth, and the search for truth within each person.
3. Every civilization is vitalized by its religion; Judaism has meaning only insofar as it maintains that source of vitality.

#### F. TORAH

1. Torah reflects the many layers of the historical Jewish experience, depicting the origins and constitution of our people in the Bible and continuing to the present day.
2. In its pursuit of social justice, human responsibility, and moral awareness, the Torah tradition often soars to great spiritual, aesthetic, and moral heights.
3. By participating in Jewish culture and study, we contribute to the creation of Torah for our time.

#### G. GOD

1. Torah and Israel play more central roles in the Reconstructionist understanding of Judaism than does any particular conception of God.

[1a. The Reconstructionist movement rejects the idea of a supernatural God.]\*

- The idea of God should help us to achieve greater intellectual clarity, spiritual depth, and moral fervor.
- Since no conception of God can be proved to be correct, we judge conceptions of God by the light they cast on the decisions we face, and by the help they give in our search for meaning in our lives.
- This statement is a founding principle of RECONSTRUCTIONISM, It is in harmony with the rest of the resolution. Yet because it is couched in negative terms and differs tonally from the rest of the resolution, it is perhaps the most divisive in the document. It is included in brackets to indicate that a vote will be taken as to whether to strike it.

4. Divinity can be found in the universe and in the potential of every human being to act in a godly manner.

5. It is up to us to make divinity a significant part of our daily lives.

#### H. CHOSENNESS

- We recognize the special and unique nature of every people.
- Thus we call ourselves a people chosen through our ancestors; our authority is the community through its inherited wisdom.

- Our pride in the Jewish people rests upon our choosing to be dedicated to universal values, not upon any divinely ordained superiority.
  - It is up to us to choose God, and thereby to link ourselves in the task of perfecting the world to all right-thinking people everywhere.
- I. PRAYER AND RITUAL
- Prayer and ritual should lead to heightened spirituality, greater tranquility, increased moral vigor, a sense of family unity and community, increased social concern, greater aesthetic awareness, thankfulness for life's blessings, and renewed dedication to the Jewish people.
  - We have inherited many meaningful and inspiring rituals and prayers.
  - Some traditional prayers contain concepts which we cannot accept literally-such as reward and punishment, the coming of a physical messiah, petitionary prayer or the restoration of Temple sacrifice, with its priestly caste system.
  - Yet we affirm the choice of retaining traditional prayer language wherever doing so would not be a violation of conscience, where worshipers would find greater meaning in the traditional mythic wording, or where the original language can acquire new meaning for us through re-interpretation.
  - We encourage the use in prayer of Hebrew a rich Jewish language.
  - Recognizing the need to make the language of prayer accessible, we affirm the use of English in worship.
  - We affirm the importance and validity of studying the tradition while experimenting with ritual as a part of creating an authentic Jewish life and community.
  - The ritual we have inherited can be filled with new vigor by close attention to its form and function as well as reevaluation of its meaning.
  - Experimentation with new ritual and diverse modes of worship, such as poetry, music, movement, dance, meditation, silence and study can play an important part in the life of a Jewish community.
- J. MITZVAH
- We recognize in the concept of mitzvah an obligation to perpetuate Jewish tradition and to hallow life through behavior which promotes our aesthetic, moral, and spiritual sensitivities.
  - We affirm the importance of mitzvot in promoting moral behavior, transmitting values, and creating bonds between Jews past, present and future.
  - We accept the imperative of the ethical and moral mitzvot to work for social justice, compassion, and the improvement of the world (tikun olam).
  - We maintain our pioneering commitment to the full equality of women and men in all aspects of Jewish life.
  - We believe that we must confront the controversial moral and political issues of our time.
- K. CONCLUSION
- Reconstructionism remains committed to the creative development of Judaism and the Jewish people.
  - While functioning as a religious movement within Judaism, we affirm our responsibility towards Jewish life as a whole.
  - Our movement, therefore, defines its agenda as mandating the growth of Reconstructionist Judaism as a means toward a larger goal-building a vital, pluralistic, cooperative, and democratic Jewish community.
  - To the achievement of that goal we dedicate ourselves a Reconstructionists.

## PROCEDURAL MOTIONS

- For all resolutions affecting the whole movement, the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, and Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation have cooperated to produce a procedure which will lengthen the time needed to generate a final position but guarantee that all voices within the movement will be heard in that position. See the attached.

- For the Reconstructionism resolution, several alternative procedural motions have been made. In order for us to follow the most broadly supported procedure, we will have a single pro speaker for each of these. A straw vote on each will be taken. The single motion most strongly supported by the plenum will then be made and voted upon. This will all probably occur on Thursday afternoon in order to devote the Friday afternoon plenum to substantive issues. The procedural alternatives as follows:
  - Table to an indefinite time and have an open discussion of issues facing the movement instead.
  - Table and replace with a process of dealing with one section of the resolution each year.
  - Discuss the resolution but agree in advance to postpone any vote on it for at least one year.
  - Discuss the resolution, but agree that after all amendments have been voted upon, a motion to table the resolution to a definite time will then be considered.
  - Discuss the resolution with no procedural pre-conditions.