

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association RESOLUTION

CALLING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BENEDICTIONS FOR ENERGY USE

1992
TRADITION

Whereas our classic sages instituted the practice of reciting short benedictions when satisfying physical needs (birkhot hanehenin bematbea kazar) and urged creativity when required to further divine ends in an hour of need (M. Berakhot 9);

Whereas they stated that a person who derives benefit from something in this world without a benediction has misappropriated what belongs to God (M. Berakhot 35a/b);

Whereas they taught that all of life should be seen as related to God (M. Berakhot 9:5, Avot 3:6), and counting one's blessings by reciting benedictions helps elicit a sense of wonder, reverence, and self-transcendence;

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Whereas our economy is today practically as reliant upon energy supplied from nonrenewable fuels (coal, oil, natural gas, uranium) as the ancient economy of the land of Israel was upon rainfall - for which our sages instructed us to bless God;

Whereas creation of fossil fuels required millions of years and massive geologic upheavals, yet 80% of all the petroleum ever burned on this planet will be used up during the lifetimes of the people now living;

Whereas production and consumption of energy sources today impacts our natural environment - both locally and globally - to an unprecedented degree;

OUR OBJECTIVES AS RABBIS

Whereas Reconstructionist rabbis strive to help guide the evolution of Jewish civilization as the conditions of life change;

Whereas we desire to increase Jewish commitment by increasing the levels of Torah study, spirituality, and participation in religious life;

Whereas we aim to reach young and old, the learned and those with no traditional background;

Therefore, be it resolved that:

1. To shed spiritual light on key economic and environmental concerns and to increase the holiness of everyday actions, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association calls upon all Jews to develop appropriate short benedictions with words of praise, and to use these benedictions in relation to energy consumption;
2. In the belief that rabbis can provide valuable leadership in this endeavor, the following actions are recommended for consideration by a duly appointed Committee of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association to be created for this project:
 - o the drafting of a study guide on relevant traditional rabbinic attitudes and reasoning about benedictions;

- the proposal of suggested energy-use categories (i.e., the types of situations in which reciting a benediction is recommended);
- the publication of this material so that it may be available to interested parties;
- the sponsorship of a contest inviting the creation of new berakhot relevant to the issue of energy consumption, written in light of the rabbinic sources; and
- the invitation of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association to join in sponsoring this contest.