



# Reconstructionist RABBINICAL ASSOCIATION

## **Platform on Reconstructionism**

### **Approved at 1986 convention Complete Text of Resolutions**

A new platform for Reconstructionist Judaism, Overwhelmingly ratified at the Convention, reaffirms such Reconstructionist ideas as Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people and the right and the obligation of every generation of Jews to formulate beliefs and practices in the light of modern understanding.

Relative to controversies currently dividing the branches of Judaism, the platform stresses, “Reconstructionism recognizes the legitimacy of diversity within the Jewish community and urges all Jews to respect the pluralist nature of our people.”

Some of the currents within the movement are illustrated by the fresh commitment to revitalizing ritual practices, and the study of tradition. The resolution stresses the need “to create authentic Jewish life and community” through study of the tradition and use of “poetry, music, movement, dance, meditation, silence, and study”. Formulation of the platform involved a process with extended over two years. It began with a resolution drafted by the committee of the FRCH. Three rounds of input and modification by congregations followed. After preliminary approval at last year’s FRCH Convention, the resolution was further amended by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. The final version represents a consensus of all the movement’s members, thus embodying the Reconstructionist commitment to a democratic community encompassing both lay and rabbinic voices.

In its conclusion, the platform states “The growth of Reconstructionist Judaism is a means toward a larger goal - building a vital, pluralistic, cooperative, and democratic Jewish community.”

A verbatim transcript of the platform follows.

## **Platform on Reconstructionism**

Passed by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, March, 1986, and the

Federation of Reconstructionist  
Congregations and Havurot, June, 1986

### **Introduction**

Reconstructionism, one of the four major Jewish religious movements in North America, has entered upon a period of rapid growth and development

These circumstances provide an opportunity to review the positions, attitudes, and direction of Reconstructionism.

This resolution serves not as a formal credo but as a consensus regarding current beliefs and principles.

It is intended to provide a framework for continuing study and discussion as a means of shaping the Reconstructionist Judaism of the future.

### **The Reconstructionist Perspective**

Reconstructionism seeks to interpret Judaism in terms of naturalism and religious humanism

Reconstructionism understands Judaism to be the natural product of the Jewish people's experience in history, rather than the result of supernatural revelation or divine intervention.

Reconstructionism affirms that Judaism should promote the fulfillment of essential human needs and should be so interpreted as to allow for maximum human growth and creativity.

From this perspective, Reconstructionists believe that each generation has the right and the obligation to study the tradition anew and to formulate beliefs and practices in the light of its own understanding of Jewish teachings and ideals.

So in our day, Judaism must evolve to meet the needs, reflect the understandings

and satisfy the spiritual yearnings of the contemporary Jew.

### **Evolving Religious Civilization**

Reconstructionism defines Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people

As a civilization, Judaism encompasses all aspects of collective life including the social, cultural, economic, spiritual, and political dimension.

Reconstructionism recognizes the Jewish people itself as the constant element of Jewish civilization and believes that our essential unity as Jews derives from our sense of peoplehood.

Thus, Reconstructionism is committed to the ideal of *Klal Yisrael*, the unity of the world Jewish community, and it concerned with the welfare of all Jewish communities throughout the world.

Under the conditions of the modern world, Judaism has been reinterpreted in a variety of modes; Reconstructionism recognizes the legitimacy of diversity within the Jewish community, and urges all Jews to respect the pluralistic nature of our people.

Reconstructionists therefore believe that Jews should seek unity of purpose rather than uniformity of belief or practice.

### **Israel, Zionism, Diaspora**

Reconstructionists are deeply attached historically and emotionally both to *Eretz Yisrael* and the survival there of a secure, prospering, and democratic state.

Reconstructionists encourage aliyah as an option in fulfillment of Zionist aspirations, and offer support both to

organizations which promote *aliyah* and the Jews who make *aliyah*.

While recognizing that *Eretz Yisrael* is central to the spiritual life of the Jewish people, Reconstructionists affirm that a satisfying, authentic and creative Judaism can also flourish in the Diaspora, nurtured under conditions of political, social, and economic freedom.

Reconstructionists advocate acceptance of religious and cultural pluralism in Jewish life in Israel.

Reconstructionists are committed to furthering the dynamic relationship between Diaspora and Israeli Jewry, recognizing that only through mutual respect, cooperation, and moral dialogue can Zionism become a means for the revitalization of Jewish civilization.

### **Community**

Living a full Jewish life requires active participation in the Jewish community, which should provide opportunities for rich Jewish experiences and serious learning.

Only in this context is it possible to reconstruct Judaism for our time.

Reconstructionism affirms that the Jewish community ought to be both voluntaristic and democratic.

Through the democratic process, the collective has the right to make demands on its members, while the members have a right to a high degree of autonomy in their search for authenticity.

Within the Jewish community, the participation of lay people in all aspects of

Jewish life, including the communal and religious, is encouraged.

Our rabbis and leaders have a crucial role to play in developing an informed laity capable of responding to the challenges of living in two civilizations.

Reconstructionism has been historically, and remains, committed to the equality of women and men in the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of all phases of Jewish life and religious practice.

In the absence of an organic community uniting all American Jews, Reconstructionist congregations and *havuro* should structure their own communities to provide as much of the benefit of an organic community as is possible, while striving to extend the concept to the general Jewish community.

### **Education**

The continued vitality of a civilization lies in the successful transmission of its culture.

Our reconstruction of Judaism requires rich experience in Jewish living and knowledge of Jewish sources, history, arts, languages, values, and ideas.

This knowledge and experience, along with the best insights of other cultures, must be brought to bear upon major global, cultural and personal issues.

### **Torah**

Torah reflects the many layers of Jewish experience, depicting the origins of Jewish spiritual, religious, and moral culture.

Reconstructionism maintains that Torah was developed from, and shaped by, the unique experiences, insights, and discoveries of the Jewish people.

The Torah tradition often soars to great spiritual, aesthetic, and moral heights in its pursuit of social justice, human responsibility, and ethical awareness.

Torah also reflects the ongoing search by the Jewish people for new insights and discoveries to meet the challenges faced by each generation of Jews; the evolving process of Torah is thus creative and responsive.

The study of the sacred traditions of our people should help us in the education of conscience and the pursuit of the prophetic vision of a world redeemed.

## **God**

Throughout its 4,000 year history, as well as in our own time, Judaism has evidenced various conceptions of God.

In consonance with our commitment to democracy and pluralism Reconstructionists recognize the diversity of conceptions of God to be both legitimate and enriching.

Reconstructionism affirms that *belief in God* is more central to Jewish religion than a *specific conception of God*.

Traditional Judaism affirms a conception of a supernatural God who possesses such attributes as goodness, justice, righteousness, and mercy.

Reconstructionist Judaism affirms a conception of God as the Power or Process within the world that makes for salvation, or human self-fulfillment.

Reconstructionism identifies life-enriching and life-sustaining attributes as *godly*, worthy of emulation as we strive to make most of our lives and improve the world.

Humans must transform into actuality the potential divinity in the world by acting in consonance with those processes and forces which ring order out of chaos and lead to moral improvement on both the individual and collective level.

## **Chosenness**

While recognizing and preserving the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Jewish experience, Reconstructionism does not accept the traditional concept of the Jews as “the chosen people.”

Chosenness, however, reinterpreted, is conceptually inconsistent with a naturalistic conception of God, and is morally untenable as it implies the superiority of the elect community and the rejection of others.

Reconstructionism affirms that Jews- and all peoples- ought to manifest through their individual and collective lives those universal values which we call godly.

Godly values include those that promote peace, harmony, and well-being between and within individuals.

## **Religion: Prayer, Ritual, and Mitzvah**

Jewish religion is an essential element of Jewish civilization and is a source of high ethical and moral principles.

Reconstructionists see in ritual practice and prayer unique opportunities for

the identification and perpetuation of Jewish religious ideals and values.

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.

Meaningful traditional forms of Jewish ritual observances and prayers might be retained, even if their original meanings are subsequent reinterpretations are no longer valid, provided they can acquire new meaning through reinterpretation.

Those traditional forms, however, which are objectionable and do not lend themselves to reinterpretation, need to be replaced or deleted.

Reconstructionists encourage retention of prayers in Hebrew, our traditional language, but also recognize the need to make the meaning of prayer accessible through use of the vernacular.

In order to create an authentic Jewish life and community, it is necessary to study the tradition while experimenting with innovative prayer and ritual.

The use of ritual and diverse modes of worship, such as poetry, music, movement, dance, meditation, silence, and study, can play an important part in the concept of *mitzvah* an obligation to perpetuate Jewish values and to hallow life through behavior which promotes our aesthetic, moral, and spiritual sensitivities.

Reconstructionists accept the imperative of the ethical and moral mitzvot to work for social justice (*tsedakah*),

compassion (*g'milut hasadim*), and the improvement of the world (*tikun olam*).

## **Conclusion**

Reconstructionism remains committed to the creative development of Judaism and the Jewish people. While functioning as a religious movement within Judaism, Reconstructionists affirm our responsibility towards Jewish life as a whole.

The Reconstructionist 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 as Reconstructionists.