



Reconstructionist
Congregation
Beth Israel *A Contemporary
Look at Tradition*

A Temple Israel & JCC Community
475 Grove Street,
Ridgewood, NJ 07450
201.444.9320 ext. 216

25 RECONSTRUCTIONIST STATEMENTS

About Judaism and the Jewish People:

1. Judaism is more than a religion; it is a whole, vibrant civilization.
2. The heart of Jewish civilization is its religion.
3. All civilizations evolve, including Judaism.
4. Each and every generation reconstructs Judaism in its own age, and indeed, must do so.
5. Our spiritual and religious lives are inspired by living in two civilizations, Jewish and American.
6. Being Jewish grows from belonging first, then doing and believing. Inclusiveness is a core value.
7. American civilization teaches us democracy, autonomy, egalitarianism, and pluralism.
8. The insights and values of Judaism do and should touch on the social issues confronting America.
9. Judaism and the Jewish people are unique and distinct as are other peoples. The “chosen people” is a statement of vocation, not privilege.
10. The Land of Israel is the historical center of Jewish civilization, and continues to inspire a renaissance of Jewish life and culture.
11. Other centers of Jewish civilization can and should coexist with the Jewish state.

About God:

12. God is the Source that inspires all the good in the world.
13. God works through natural law and moral law.
14. God works through us, not upon us.
15. God is a universal force, but not all-pervading or all-powerful.
16. God dwells where we let God in.

About Torah and Halacha:

17. The Torah was written by people, and expresses the wisdom, aspirations, values, rules and culture of the Jewish people at a particular moment in time.
18. God did not reveal the Torah, the Torah revealed God.
19. Torah, in part, is divinely inspired and continues to be revealed.
20. Torah is a sacred expression of the Jewish people when it promotes good as well as harmony with others, ourselves and the Earth.
21. The past has a vote, not a veto.
22. Our tradition is a rich and deeply meaningful inheritance. We are predisposed positively to it.
23. When *halacha* and conscience conflict, we seek a synthesis of reason informed by Jewish values.
24. Jewish prayer gives expression to our highest selves but it cannot change nature.
25. Jewish ritual connects us to Jewish inspiration and the Jewish people—past, present, and future.

The Past has a Vote, Not a Veto

The starting point of Reconstructionist is our quest to understand the historical and spiritual experience of the Jewish people. We believe “the past has a vote.” Therefore, we struggle to hear the voices of our ancestors and listen to their claim on us. What did this custom or that idea mean to them? How did they see the presence of God in it? How can we retain or regain its importance in our own lives?

We believe “the past does not have a veto.” Therefore, we struggle to hear our own voices as distinct from theirs. What might this custom or that idea mean to us today? What might we borrow from this custom to create a new tradition that is more significant for us today? When a particular Jewish value or custom is found wanting, it is our obligation as Jews to find a means to reconstruct it—to find new meanings in old forms or to develop more meaningful, innovative practices.

A vital, contemporary Judaism must respond fully to the changes in modern Jewish history: the Holocaust, renewed Jewish statehood, new and different family structures, the evolving relationship of men and women, as well as the role of religion in a universe threatened by both ecological and nuclear disaster. Only a combination of searching, questioning, and self-understanding within the Jewish tradition will create a Judaism that speaks convincingly to the contemporary Jew.