



Reconstructionist
Congregation
Beth Israel *A Contemporary
Look at Tradition*

A Temple Israel & JCC Community
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What Makes a Reconstructionist Jewish Community Unique?

Orthodox Judaism has about it a seriousness and level of devotion that are truly admirable. We seek to retain that seriousness. Unlike Orthodoxy, Reconstructionism does not view Judaism as a total and immutable revelation from God to Moses at Sinai that is essentially unchanged through all generations. We see Judaism as the ever-evolving civilization of the Jewish people, an ongoing process of forging a society based on holy values.

Conservative Judaism has made significant contributions to Jewish life, in the realms of education and scholarship. Reconstructionism diverges from Conservative Judaism in terms of priorities. We believe that beyond adjustments in practice, the basic tenets of Judaism need to be re-examined and restated for our age. Concerning observance, we differ specifically on the issue of how far one may go in amending Jewish law and who has the right to be involved in that process. We believe that rabbis and scholars should work together with committed lay members of the Jewish community to formulate guides for Jewish practice in our day and in our individual communities. These guides should reflect a desire to protect and preserve tradition as well as openness to creativity and evolution as we optimistically face each new age as a Jewish people.

Reform Judaism emphasizes the centrality of the prophetic tradition and insists that standards of ethical monotheism be applied universally. We Reconstructionists affirm this emphasis on ethics and share in a deep commitment to many social justice causes. For this and other reasons, Reconstructionist Jews reject the idea that the Jewish people is special over other peoples, but insist on our equality with others. Reconstructionism also differs from Reform Judaism, which affirms the chosenness of the Jewish people, in our orientation towards tradition. Generally, many Reconstructionists believe that considerably more of the tradition needs to be preserved. We emphasize that Judaism is more than ethical monotheism, more even than a religion. Judaism is the historical and unique expression of the Jewish people, our cultural and ethnic traditions, a guide for living out our values in community, and an inspiring and continuously revealed set of teachings through which we make meaning in our individual lives.