

“Plant in Their Hearts a Love of Zion”

**REPORT OF THE JEWISH RECONSTRUCTIONIST FEDERATION
ISRAEL POLICIES TASK FORCE**

**ROSH HASHANA 5765
SEPTEMBER 15, 2004**

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Communal prayer: Is it better to ask "Give us peace"
with cries of woe, or to ask calmly, quietly?
But if we ask calmly, God will think
we don't really need peace and quiet.

Mark Widoff and Rabbi Barbara Penzner, Co-chairs

Members of the Task Force:

Mark Widoff, Chair
Rabbi Barbara Penzner, Chair
Rabbi Amy Klein, Staff
Rabbi Moti Rieber, Staff
Dr. Neil Caplan
Rabbi Gail Diamond
Norman Gelman
Dr. William Gold
Ilan Hartuv
Barbara Hirsh

Val Kaplan
Dr. Sam Kelman
Betsy Landis
Haya Laufer
Dr. Adina Newberg
Dr. Ilan Peleg
Rabbi Ira Schiffer
Jessica Schroeter
Daniel G. Cedarbaum, Ex Officio

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Overview

“The Reconstructionist understanding of the civilizational character of Judaism predictably has led us to Zionist conclusions from the very outset.”¹ According to Mordecai M. Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, a civilization cannot exist with all of its cultural aspects, including language, history, traditions and art without a place in the world where that civilization is primary. A people cannot be challenged to create for itself an ethical nationhood if it is not autonomous and responsible for the fulfillment of the social, human and civil rights of the inhabitants of its land. For the Jewish people, that primary place is Israel.

Today, “the fundamental and universally accepted proposition of contemporary Zionist ideology is that Israel is central for Jewish life, though interpretations of the term ‘central’ differ widely.”² More often than not, the nature of the relationship that individual Jews living in the Diaspora have with Israel dictates the definition of centrality. For Reconstructionist Jews, belonging to the Jewish People stands at the core of what it means to be Jewish. We create a powerful sense of belonging and set of membership commitments in our local communities. However, the same feeling of belonging and mutuality does not always exist when it comes to our relationship with the land and people of Israel. Many Reconstructionist Jews are strongly connected to Israel, a connection enhanced through education and camping, Israel trips and personal family ties. However, for many others the lack of meaningful interaction between Diaspora and Israeli Jewish communities has resulted in disconnection, even alienation. Still others find it difficult to remain engaged with Israel given the way the present government has dealt with the Intifada and its consequences, the debate as to when dissent from the so-

¹ Rebecca T. Alpert and Jacob J. Staub, *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* (Elkins Park: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000), p. 65.

² Gideon Shimoni, “Zionist Idea Since the Establishment of the State of Israel,” *Zionism: The Sequel*, ed. by Carol Diamant (New York: Hadassah, The Women’s Zionist Organization of America, Inc., 1998), p. 42.

called “consensus” is appropriate and the control of the Orthodox establishment over religious practices in Israel.

Kaplan himself foresaw the potential for estrangement between the Diaspora and Israeli Jewish communities and the potential solution in Zionism itself. In *A New Zionism* he wrote, “unless Zionism can develop at once a basis for a strong sense of mutuality and interaction between the Jewish community in Israel and the Jewish communities in the rest of the world, something altogether different from what either Herzl or Ahad Ha’Am envisaged is likely to emerge...”³

Within the Reconstructionist community, an examination of our Zionist ideology and its implications for the nature of our connection to and support of the State of Israel is long overdue. Tensions surrounding relations with Israel exist on the individual, community and movement levels. Individuals often have a hard time with the difficult value choices inherent in dealing with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and with Israel’s identity both as a Jewish and democratic state. Local Reconstructionist communities have tended to shy away from Israel programs or discussion of Israel issues because of sharply (and sometimes bitterly) conflicting views within a particular congregation. The Reconstructionist movement itself has lacked coherent policies on issues affecting the peace and security of Israel, thus hampering our ability to take a significant advocacy role alongside other North American and world Jewish organizations on many vital questions.

In recognition of the above, in November 2002, the JRF national board approved the establishment of a task force on Israel that would make recommendations regarding the meaning of support for Zionism and the State of Israel for Reconstructionist Jews and the potential role of JRF in Israel advocacy.

The JRF Israel task force is far from the first body to concern itself with building connections between Diaspora and Israeli Jewry and with examining the issue of Israel

³ *Zionism: The Sequel*, *ibid* note 2, p. 58.

advocacy by Diaspora Jewish communities.⁴ Our work is supported by the ideology of many contemporary Zionist thinkers who claim that we are now in stage two of Zionism. In order to fulfill the Zionist dream, Jews must work together to create an Israel that is Jewish *and* democratic, truly a place of redemption for the Jewish people. It is important to underscore that our goals and aspirations for Israel are no less than our goals and aspirations for our own communities. In addition to our work and the work of other Jewish groups to support a Jewish and democratic society in Israel, thousands of Israelis are *now working in Israel to achieve* these self-same goals: a society that goes beyond the fulfillment of rights for all its citizens, to a society that provides for each of its citizens the opportunity for salvation.⁵

B. Objectives of this Report

This task force was charged by the JRF national board to examine the following questions and report back to the board:

1. What should support for Zionism and support of the State of Israel mean for Reconstructionist Jews in the first years of the 21st century?
2. Does JRF have the right to speak out on matters of Israeli governmental policy? If so, it is wise for JRF to do so? Might JRF even have the obligation to speak out?
3. If JRF is going to speak out, what policies should it advocate in the hopes of insuring the long-term security of the State of Israel and a just a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians?
4. What can JRF do to promote religious pluralism in Israel and to offer Israelis alternatives to Orthodoxy and to pure secularism?

⁴ Given the Reconstructionist ideological primacy of peoplehood, we should not confine our thinking to the North American-Israeli axis defined by the historic partnership between the world's two largest Jewish communities. Our vision should, in the future, include all global Jewish communities that comprise the Jewish people and recognition of the critical importance of strengthening Jewish life and Jewish civilization through mutual support and exchange of our rich and diverse cultures.

⁵ See the "Kinneret Declaration" for a vision of the State of Israel drafted by a group of prominent Israelis representing diverse political and religious views at www.achrayutleumit.org.il.

The process of answering the question “what should support for Zionism and the State of Israel mean to Reconstructionist Jews” led to the development of a Reconstructionist definition of Zionism based on our understanding of Jewish Peoplehood at the dawn of the 21st century. The statement entitled, “A New Zionism,” and a list of covenantal commitments between communities of *Am Yisrael* are found in Section II. It is our hope that this opening section will serve not only as a teaching tool, but a foundation for stronger connection to the land and people of Israel.

A second result was the expansion of the task force mandate to develop a programmatic agenda for JRF that can be found in Section III. The agenda is designed to meet the goals of life-long education about and connection to Israel in addition to Israel advocacy, placing *primary emphasis* on deepening the connection of JRF members to Israel. We felt that increased Israel programming is needed to foster the Israel component of Reconstructionist Jewish identity and to build the stronger commitments necessary to support JRF advocacy efforts.

The policy guidelines found in Section III translate the conflicting values into coherent principles and bottom lines. These principles are intended to reflect a vision of Israel in accord with our statement “A New Zionism.” The report concludes with recommendations for procedural implementation of a JRF Israel Program of education, connection and advocacy in Section IV.

Finally, the task force was particularly concerned with producing a report that would help dislodge the paralysis and inability to talk about Israel. We need to be among those who, in the words of Yitzhak Rabin z”l, “strengthen those in Israel seeking peace and ensure that Israel is a Jewish and democratic state.”

C. Values-Based Decision Making

In coming to the conclusions presented in this report, the task force followed the “values-based” model widely employed in Reconstructionist decision-making.⁶ Intensive study included texts and lectures on Israel and Zionism, Israel advocacy statements by other organizations and essays on contemporary issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Bibliography). The task force also consulted with focus groups convened at JRF congregations and havurot that were asked to respond to the questions of the task force charge. Assembling and weighing the relevant attitudes, values and beliefs was a vital step in the task force process. It was crucial in moving the task force beyond disagreements over assessments of the ever-changing military and political situation in the Middle East to dispute the weight of values in tension. The debate was honest, intense and occasionally emotional, while remaining respectful and productive.

The task force established three sets of values that are enumerated in the appendix to this report. The first two sets are regularly in tension for Reconstructionist Jews as they are the core values that form the foundation of the Reconstructionist approach to Jewish living: the values of “Survival of the Jewish Civilization” and “Justice and Equality.” The third category consists of process values for use in discussions and decision making. It should be noted that a fresh examination of values could take them out of tension into a reinforcing relationship. For example, challenging the traditional notion that increased territory increases Israel’s security can lead to a different conclusion: that withdrawing to defensible borders both protects Israel’s identity as Jewish and democratic and enhances

⁶ Values-Based Decision Making (VBDM) consists of the following steps: 1) Determine facts, alternative actions and their outcomes; 2) Examine relevant scientific and social scientific approaches to understanding these; 3) Consider the historical and contemporary context, including the history and rationales of Jewish practice; 4) Look for norms that might exclude some actions; 5) Assemble and weigh relevant attitudes, beliefs and values; 6) Formulate decision alternatives; 7) Seek consensus; and 8) Make the decision. Extensive treatment of the model can be found in David Teutsch, “Values-Based Decision Making,” *The Reconstructionist*, 65/2, Spring 2001, pp. 22-28. For application of VBDM in additional areas see *The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century* (Wyncote: The Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi, 2001); *Boundaries and Opportunities: The Role of Non-Jews in JRF Congregations* (Wyncote: Reconstructionist Press, 1998) and *Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position* (Wyncote: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, 1992).

the security of her citizens. The list of values is far from exhaustive. It has been narrowed to highlight the challenge to answering the questions in the task force charge.

It is clear to us from examining the core values which we have identified and from listening carefully to those who participated in the focus groups that Progressive Jews are very conflicted about how they should express themselves about issues relating to Israel – particularly when they disagree with actions of the government of Israel. We need to acknowledge that conflict and the reasons for it. We need not be ashamed about our conflicted feelings. Our love and loyalty to *Eretz Yisrael* and *Am Yisrael* are not compromised by feeling or expressing concerns based on values we embrace and consider core to who we are as Jews shaped by democratic ideals. The government of Israel at any moment in time is not equivalent to the State of Israel, exactly as the government of our own country may not and does not reflect our core beliefs and values at many times in our lives. That does not make us less loyal Americans or Canadians and it does not make us less loyal Jews. On the contrary, our loyalty is enhanced by the struggle and the “wrestling” we face. It goes to the very essence of who we are as children of Israel, those who wrestle with our God.

D. About the Task Force

The 17 task force members were drawn from 10 JRF congregations from the United States and Canada, with added representation from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. They hold diverse political views on Israel. Collectively their Israel experience includes representatives of the JRF and board members in national and international organizations working in the fields of Israel policy and progressive Judaism; professors of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israeli Politics and Society; members of *Ha-amutah L'yahadut Mithadeshet* (Israeli Organization for Reconstructionist Judaism); former ambassador for the State of Israel; Israeli and Jewish educators working in Israel and North America; individuals born, raised or living in Israel; and participants in JRF leadership trips to Israel.

II. ZIONISM AND COMMUNAL COVENANT: A RECONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH TO ESSENTIAL JEWISH PRINCIPLES

A. Zionism

This report calls for a recommitment to Zionism on the part of JRF. The task force was asked to answer the following question: what should the nature of support for Zionism and the State of Israel mean for Reconstructionist Jews in the 21st century? This question was posed with the understanding that the task force could not address the subsequent question as to whether JRF has the right or obligation to speak out on Israel without first determining the place of Israel in Reconstructionist Judaism. Furthermore, once the task force broadened its mandate to include programmatic initiatives, it became clear that JRF cannot foster the Israel component of Reconstructionist Jewish identity without first determining what the “Israel component” means.

Our starting point is to join a century of debate on the definition of Zionism.⁷ It should be of no surprise that Mordecai M. Kaplan, a leader among American Zionists, still stands out as the Zionist thinker most relevant to Reconstructionist Jews.⁸ Kaplan is recognized as the developer of the ideology ‘New Zionism,’ that places Israel as the spiritual center of the Jewish people while claiming legitimacy for Diaspora Jewish communities.

1. *“According to Kaplan, Zionism is a way to reconstitute the Jewish people. It is not merely an ideology of refuge, but a long-range process of a people to rededicate itself.”*⁹

Our attachment to Israel as the place of our beginning, the creation of our foundational myths and focus of future hopes is powerful but insufficient in defining the role of Israel

⁷For an excellent review of the Zionist idea since the establishment of the State of Israel and collection of essays by contemporary Zionist thinkers across the spectrum, see *Zionism: The Sequel*, *ibid*, note 2.

⁸ For more extensive treatment of the Reconstructionist understanding of Zionism see “Chapter 6: Zion as a Spiritual Center” in *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, *ibid*, note 1 and Richard Hirsh, ed., *Israel at 50, The Reconstructionist*, 62/2, Spring 1998. For Kaplan on Zionism see *The Future of the American Jew*, chs. 7 and 17 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1948); *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*, ch. 6 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1970); *A New Zionism*, (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1955); and Jack J. Cohen, “Reflections on Kaplan’s Zionism,” *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, ed. by Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult and Robert Seltzer (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

⁹ Richard Hirsh, lecture to the JRF Israel Task Force, “Kaplan and Zionism,” June 9, 2003, Wyncote, PA.

in Reconstructionist life today. Israel's critical role in providing refuge for Jews suffering under anti-Semitism also falls short of achieving Zionism's full potential. Given the emphasis we place on peoplehood as the central component of our Judaism, Zionism must be an ideology whose purpose is also to create a meaningful existence for the Jewish People as a whole.¹⁰ According to Kaplan, "For the Jewish people to serve Jews, it must provide them with the ability to make of its tradition a civilizing and humanizing force. For that, the core of the Jewish people must be situated in its homeland, Eretz Yisrael and the tradition has to be relevant to the very ideologies, cultural, economic and sociological, which challenge it."¹¹

Kaplan understood Reconstructionism and Zionism as organically united. For both, Jewish peoplehood, emerging from a common past, present and future, is central. For both, according to Kaplan, democracy is a religious value.¹² Following Kaplan's teaching, JRF by-laws require that Reconstructionist communities be egalitarian and use democratic decision making processes. Similarly, we believe that the Jewish state must be a democracy granting full equality and justice to all her citizens. Furthermore, democracy in our communities and in the Jewish state is essential to achievement of salvation of the Jewish soul and spirit. Under these conditions, Kaplan always hoped that Jewish civilization in Israel would lead the way in revitalizing Jewish religious practice, radiating to the Diaspora.

2. Equality and mutual connectedness of the Diaspora and Israeli communities.

Kaplan rejected the assertion by some Zionist thinkers of *shlilat ha-golah*, the negation of the Diaspora. Kaplan understood that the vast majority of North American Jews were unlikely to make aliyah. He also believed that thriving Jewish centers could be

¹⁰ Kaplan was influenced by Ahad Ha'am, the spokesperson for cultural Zionism, whose ideology emphasized the need to return to Israel so that Jewish culture and values could develop in a Jewish environment. He was also a supporter of the Political Zionism of Herzl that emphasized the immediate need to establish a nation-state that would be the physical salvation of the Jewish people.

¹¹ Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1967), p. 167.

¹² Richard Hirsh, *ibid* note 9.

established outside of Israel and that these centers would stand in mutual commitment and influence with the center in Israel.

Currently, 5 million Jews live in Israel and 5 million live in the United States, with another 3 million dispersed in communities throughout the globe, including a large center of 360,000 in Canada. In 20 years, Israel will have the largest Jewish community in the world. Today, despite growing cultural similarity due to the Americanization of Israel, North American and Israeli Jews do not always understand each other's realities. We don't speak the same language and Israeli culture, largely influenced by Middle-Eastern and European culture, is still very different from American culture. Nevertheless, the continued evolution of these two unique Jewish centers will enrich Jewish civilization as a whole. We must build stronger ties between people, share our cultures, intellectual ideas and new traditions and be mutually responsible for each other, to ensure a common future for the Jewish people across the globe.¹³

While Kaplan had hoped that Israel would be the center for Jewish revitalization, North America, where diverse Jewish communities and practices flourish, has been that center for decades. In contrast, orthodox hegemony in Israel has stifled pluralistic practices for years. In the past decade, however, there has been a tremendous increase in secular Israeli Jewish organizations experimenting with Jewish learning and new forms of Jewish practice. The result is both a process and product with much in common with Reconstructionist Judaism. North American and Israeli Jews can gain much by developing partnership programs involving different aspects of Jewish civilization. The fruits of our sharing would result in richer and more connected centers of the Jewish people.

¹³ "The Israel that the Jewish people is trying to build must take into account what is happening in other communities. We therefore have a responsibility for what is happening in the Caucasus the same as in Boston and as in Tel-Aviv and Sderot. If Israel had the responsibility to support the vitality of the Diaspora communities, the same responsibility falls on the North-American Jewish community. It is no longer the 'Israel-Diaspora' debate but one of the Jewish People. What is the reality of 13 million people and not what is Israel?" Paul Liptz, Tel-Aviv University Dept. of Middle East and African History and HUC-JIR Jerusalem, personal communication.

The task of reconstituting the Jewish people is urgent. What is at stake is the richness and continuity of our civilizational heritage, including 3000 years of Jewish learning, and furtherance of the values of peace, justice and equality. Redefining and recommitting to Zionism is a first step in that task. As Kaplan reflected, “Each time our ancestors, in formal assembly, knowingly and deliberately accepted certain principles and duties as governing them as a People, Judaism entered upon a new stage in its career. Whether those principles or duties were of long standing and self-evident or of recent origin, the very act of deliberate acceptance transformed them as a People and had the effect of a spiritual metamorphosis. We should, therefore, not be surprised, if as a result of a fully developed Zionist ideology that would be generally accepted by the Jewish People, it would experience a genuine renaissance.”¹⁴

In this spirit, the task force calls for a recommitment to Zionism on the part of JRF with the following statement:

A New Zionism*

**Statement by the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Rosh Hashana 5765/September 2004**

The definition of Zionism below is based on a Reconstructionist understanding of Jewish peoplehood at the dawn of the 21st century. Its purpose is to reconstruct, in contemporary terms, an ideology that yielded one of the greatest achievements in all of Jewish history – the re-establishment of a sovereign Jewish homeland in Eretz Yisrael after 2000 years of wandering and to reaffirm the potential of Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. The definition, crafted in the spirit of Mordecai Kaplan’s *A New Zionism*, first published in 1959, is offered with the conviction that Zionist ideology and commitments are essential for any maximalist Jewish identity in the contemporary era.

¹⁴ Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, *ibid* note 11, pp. 154-5.

A New Zionism affirms:

1. The unity of the Jewish people around the world, who consider Israel the birthplace of their heritage and the state of Israel the national home of the Jewish People.
2. The right to a sovereign state in the land of Israel that serves not only as a refuge for Jews facing oppression and persecution but also as a place where any Jew can create a national life more in harmony with Jewish history, culture and religion than any other place in the world.
3. A state of Israel that is founded on and governed by the prophetic ideals of equality, justice and peace.
4. A commitment to strengthen mutual ties and support between Jewish communities around the world and to preserve and enrich Jewish civilization through the fostering of lifelong Jewish and Hebrew education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values.
5. A state of Israel that represents the Biblical promise of redemption and liberation to a Jewish people that has suffered historic persecution and is, as such, viewed by Jews, as a national homeland with sacred spiritual and religious significance.
6. The right of all Jews to live in accordance with their own beliefs and religious and cultural observances and obligations.
7. That, as important as is the creation of a Jewish homeland and society which utilizes all of the symbols, language and culture of the Jewish tradition, the state of Israel must also be committed to uphold equal rights and opportunities for all of its citizens, regardless of race, religion, nationality, gender and sexual orientation.
8. That Zionism represents a consciousness that can be actualized outside, as well as inside, the land of Israel and that aliyah is encouraged because only in the State of Israel are Jews fully autonomous and responsible for the physical and moral fate of the Jewish People.

*The tenets above are based on the Jerusalem Program of 1968 adopted by the 27th World Zionist Congress

B. Communal Covenant

The Reconstructionist statement on Zionism affirms a commitment to strengthen mutual ties and support between Jewish communities. If the purpose of such a commitment not only arises from the value of unity but also exists in order to reinvigorate the Jewish People, then this commitment must be made specific through the delineation of rights and obligations. Kaplan advocated continuing to convene the World Zionist Congress even after 1948, when Israel was established, in order to develop a code or constitution of general principles that would help Jews maintain their unity, status and high purpose. In this spirit, we propose the following covenantal set of rights and obligations in which the rights of each community is limited by its own obligations on the one hand, and the rights of the partner communities on the other.¹⁵

Obligations of the Reconstructionist Community to the Jewish People:

- To support the continued existence of the State of Israel as a democratic and Jewish state, and to promote the welfare and security of all communities of the Jewish People.
- To heighten the centrality of Israel, defining and implementing an agenda for our active engagement with its land and people that includes: facilitating opportunities for member communities to deal with Israel issues and concerns; creating Israel-related educational materials, ritual and liturgy; visiting Israel; increasing the study of Hebrew among all our members; encouraging aliyah; and advocacy on behalf of Israel consistent with Reconstructionist values.
- To support and advocate for implementation of a just and lasting peace between Israel and her neighbors, including the Palestinian people based on mutual self-determination and the preservation of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. This obligation carries with it the right to exert influence, using democratic means, on the United States and Israel, and to support or dissent from official policies, publicly and privately, in a manner consistent with Reconstructionist values and the Israeli Declaration of Independence and Basic Laws, and in keeping with the

¹⁵ We acknowledge the tremendous efforts of individuals and organizations that have been working to achieve these goals for many years. See Jack J. Cohen, "Living in the Diaspora: Reconstructionists' Responsibilities," *The Reconstructionist*, 54:4, January-February 1989, p. 16.

Jewish value “*makhloket le-shem shamayim*” (dispute for the sake of heaven) as proper, given our position as a member community of the Jewish People.

- To assist in dialogue and reconciliation efforts between Jewish Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel and between Jews and Palestinians living outside of Israel.
- To advocate for equality for all of Israel’s citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish, and to support efforts to implement social change aimed at building a more just society.
- To support religious pluralism and equality in all communities of the Jewish People and to encourage Reconstructionist ideas, ideals and presence in Israel and other Jewish communities.
- To support, as able, charitable organizations in Israel and in the Diaspora which further the establishment of a just and equitable Israeli society.

Obligations of Israel to the Jewish People:

- To serve as a refuge for Jews in need.
- To be a spiritual, cultural and religious center of the Jewish People with a Jewish cultural environment expressed by Hebrew language, the celebration of Jewish festivals and marking of Shabbat, the advancement of Hebrew culture and the study of Jewish history and heritage, preserving the rich and diverse traditions of the many communities to whom Israel is home.
- To strengthen democratic institutions and to achieve social justice, civil rights and equality for all its citizens.
- To protect freedom of religion and religious pluralism, creating an environment in which individuals and communities can live according to their own beliefs and practices and to preserve holy sites of all religions with right of access to all.
- To preserve the environment of the land of Israel.
- To work together with other communities to forge meaningful connections of the Jewish people, including creating and participating in programs such as reciprocal visits, mutual educational enrichment and engaging Israel

experiences that enable Diaspora Jews to know Israelis in meaningful and diverse ways.

III. MORE THAN OUR HEARTS: EDUCATING ABOUT, CONNECTING TO AND ADVOCATING FOR ISRAEL

A. Education and Connection: Goals and Objectives for JRF Israel Programs

As a result of the task force's conclusion that JRF needs to increase significantly its efforts dedicated to fostering the Israel component of Reconstructionist Jewish identity, the task force developed the following goals and short and long-term programmatic objectives for JRF Israel programming: Education About Israel, Connecting To Israel and Advocacy for a Jewish and Democratic Israel. There are limitless conceptions possible and these categories overlap. Education is also about connecting, connecting about education and advocacy about both. Our goal is the creation of a holistic approach to Israel programming that, at the same time, enables individuals and communities to choose the point of entry that speaks to them. Recommendations for establishing an Israel Affairs Committee responsible for implementing the goals and objectives can be found below in Section IV Next Steps.

Until JRF has sufficient resources to begin implementing the full Israel program outlined below, the task force recommends, for *immediate implementation*, three of the objectives that meet the dual criteria of urgency and feasibility: 1) establish an Israel Committee with programming and policy sub-committees responsible for attending to the staffing and infrastructure needs to achieve all JRF Israel goals and objectives (and to promote recitation of the prayer for the State of Israel as initial national program); 2) promote educational initiatives using existing resources, including implementing lessons in the study companion to the report, a campaign for congregational dialogues on Israel using the prepared guide on the JRF web site with aid of experts, ongoing Israel articles in *Reconstructionism Today* and ongoing Israel programs in JRF congregations; and 3) create opportunities for congregations to connect to Israel and Israelis through learning about and advocacy on social justice Israel issues, with particular emphasis on religious pluralism and equality.

Goal: Educating About Israel – *Fostering the Israel component of Reconstructionist Jewish identity through the provision of resources for life-long learning about all aspects of Israeli civilization, including land, language, history, the arts, society and politics.*

Programmatic Objectives:

1. Develop educational, congregational resources for adults, teens and Hebrew school students that not only educate about but foster positive and realistic connections to Israel. (Note: existing resources for further development and/or implementation include the Yad Mordecai Israel curriculum, links on the JRF web site, and lessons in the study companion to the Israel Task Force Report.)
2. Use EdTalk to collect and share existing educational programs developed by JRF and individual congregations and add to existing program and curricula bank on the JRF web site Israel Section.
3. Implement national and regional Israel programs and workshops that collectively educate about all aspects of Israeli society and culture.
4. Promote acquisition of Hebrew language skills through implementation of lifelong Hebrew language programs, including for use at Camp JRF.
5. Improve the JRF web site for Israel education by increasing lists and links for books, media, Internet and other resources.
6. Interpret and provide resources on Israeli current events to JRF Education and Youth and Camping Departments, congregations and individuals.
7. Bring Israeli shlichim and campers to Camp JRF every summer.
8. Implement “Talking about Israel” programs in JRF communities that help members identify core values and shared visions relating to Israel as well as dialogue about current events.
9. Provide resources for congregations and individuals on Israeli tzedakah opportunities, including social change organizations, immigrant absorption and pluralistic institutions of Jewish identity and culture.
10. Publish a regular *Reconstructionism Today* Israel column.
11. Assist JRF and RRA members with individual Israel programming requests via phone and e-mail.
12. Respond to requests from Israelis for information about JRF and Reconstructionist ideology; complete publication of Hebrew version of *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*; and sponsor lectures.

Goal: Connecting to Israel – *Creating opportunities for experiential connection to Israel and Israelis through meaningful Israel experiences, rituals on Israel, partnership programs between North American Reconstructionists and Israelis, by facilitating helpful Israel discourse in congregations and by creating a strong presence of Reconstructionist Judaism in Israel.*

Programming Objectives:

1. Reestablish an Israel office of the JRF to direct programming and advocacy initiatives requiring an Israel presence.
2. Sponsor annual, national JRF b'nai mitzvah and adult trips to Israel that reflect Reconstructionist values.
3. Provide educational consulting for JRF congregational trips to Israel.
4. Collect successful congregational Israel itineraries and add them to the JRF web site Israel Section.
5. Implement programs in Israel for visiting Reconstructionist groups (e.g. presentations on current religious, political and social issues; meetings with activists; or study encounters with Israeli partner organizations).
6. Develop and implement Israel summer and year-long programs for Reconstructionist youth.
7. Maintain, with RRC, the Jerusalem Reconstructionist minyan as a service to visiting JRF congregations and individual members.
8. Promote regular recitation of the “Prayer for the State of Israel” in Reconstructionist worship.
9. Work together with the RRC and RRA to develop rituals and ceremonies for synagogue and home use that connect Reconstructionists to Israel, including use of poems and other writings relating to Israel.
10. Represent the Reconstructionist movement in important forums in Israel.
11. Implement partnership programs for JRF and Israeli children, teens and Noar Hadash youth (e.g. the previously implemented “*Huliot – Links*” holiday partnership program for 4th-6th graders and “*Mar’ah – Mirror*” exchange for Noar Hadash and Sderot teens).
12. Implement social service partnership programs between JRF congregations and Israeli social service and community action organizations.
13. Implement *kehilot lomdot* (learning communities) partnership programs between JRF congregational study groups and Israeli study groups.
14. Pursue partnership with the urban kibbutz movement “*Ma’agal Ha-kvutzot.*”
15. Send at least one Reconstructionist shaliah (representative) each year to help build a liberal Jewish community in Eastern Europe.
16. Encourage and assist members to make *aliyah* to Israel.
17. Develop a national outreach program to native Israelis for use by local congregations.
18. Implement a campaign to establish an Israel Committee in all JRF congregations, including a workshop on building a successful committee.

Goal: Advocacy for a Jewish and Democratic Israel – Become a strong voice for values based advocacy for the full realization of the Zionist dream of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state by keeping the JRF and congregational leadership informed of crucial Israel issues, being at the tables both in North America and Israel, and promoting religious pluralism and freedom, equality and social justice in Israel.

Programming Objectives:

1. Provide consulting and keep JRF leadership informed of crucial Israel issues for reactive and proactive responses and action.
2. Provide information to membership that enables individuals to participate in advocacy initiatives on the peace process.
3. Take an active role, working whenever possible with Israeli partners, in advocating for religious pluralism and freedom, equality and social justice in Israel.

B. Advocating for Israel's Future

The task force was charged with developing guidelines for JRF policy on the issue of ensuring the long-term security of the State of Israel and a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. It was also asked to recommend what JRF can do to promote religious freedom and pluralism in Israel.

Creating policy on Israel is a complex business. Before it could begin, the task force had to answer the following question in the affirmative: does JRF have the right or perhaps even the obligation to speak out on issues central to Israel's existence and future? And, if so, what process should the task force employ to ensure that the policy guidelines reflect the Reconstructionist commitment to maintaining Israel as a Jewish and democratic state outlined elsewhere in this report. The task force determined that we do have an obligation to speak out as summarized below. The guidelines for determining when and in which policy areas JRF can and should speak out, are divided into areas of social justice and peace and security. Recommendations for procedural implementation of the policy guidelines for JRF Israel advocacy can be found below in Section IV Next Steps.

1. JRF has an Obligation to Speak Out on Issues of Israel's Future

The question of whether JRF has the right or even the obligation to speak out on issues affecting Israel's future is both intellectual and emotional. There are those who maintain that Diaspora Jews, because they do not have the obligations of Israeli citizenship and do not face the same risks to their security, are not entitled to voice an opinion on Israeli policy. Others are concerned that open criticism of Israel will only contribute to anti-Israel attitudes and policies in the international arena. In addition, because people of good will disagree on the specifics of each issue presented below, speaking out risks creating or exposing divisions within both the Reconstructionist and broader Jewish community. *However, there are supporters of Israel's security or a "Greater Israel" who advocate policies that would compromise human rights, undermine Israel's democracy and make it impossible to achieve a just and lasting solution to the conflict, or, at the other extreme, who would sacrifice the Jewish State in favor of a democratic bi-national one. It is precisely because of Reconstructionists' love for Israel and*

commitment to her preservation as a Jewish and democratic state that we believe that JRF must speak out.

The Reconstructionist community is one of many communities bound in the covenant of the Jewish People with Israel as its cultural center. Reconstructionists understand Israel as the one place where Jewish civilization can be lived fully given the confluence of land, language, culture and diversity of her Jewish communities. Kaplan teaches that the social implications of this status are the sense of oneness and the mutual responsibility of Jews for their material and spiritual well-being. The political implication is the concern of all Jews with the freedom, stability and security of the State of Israel.¹⁶ The Jewish People are an endangered species without Israel and Israel is an endangered species without world Jewry. The actions of the North American Jewish community and of the State of Israel directly influence one another.

The real question is not whether JRF has a right to advocate on issues affecting Israel, but how JRF chooses to exercise that right. It must fulfill a corresponding obligation to remain informed of developments on central issues and to educate its membership. It must have as its goal the achievement of the vision articulated in our statement “A New Zionism” (see Section II above).

Reconstructionists believe that Israel’s survival as central to Jewish civilization depends not only upon her physical security, but also on her commitment to democracy and human rights. It should be self-evident, that as a religious community, we have the obligation to speak out when issues of justice are implicated. The context for the talmudic teaching that “*kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*” (all Israel are guarantors one for another) is that in which we are held accountable for failing to prevent the wrongdoing of our fellow when it is in our power to do so.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask* (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1956), pp. 33-35.

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shevuot 39a-b.

We do not pretend that we would be wiser or more effective if we had decision-making responsibility in Jerusalem. As an autonomous nation, Jews face greater challenges today than during centuries of exile. We choose to become engaged in Israel issues in order to lead and support our members who want to stand proudly as individuals committed to a democratic, progressive Zionist path. Unfortunately, the subtlety of that message is too often trampled by voices for either the non-democratic or non-Zionist extremes. By raising ours, we are, among other things, signaling to policy makers that within the Jewish community there is support for continued U.S. involvement as an honest broker between Israel and the Palestinians. We can also give strength to Israelis with whom we share the same vision. We are confident that as Reconstructionists we can find common ground in advocating Israel policies that are appropriate given our position as a Diaspora Jewish movement, and that successfully contribute to resolving the values conflict between Israel's long-term security and her status as a state committed to freedom, justice and equality.

2. JRF Policy should be based on Preserving our Fundamental Values of Jewish Civilizational Survival and Freedom, Justice and Equality

The Appendix of this report provides an annotated list of what we determined are the core values in conflict in determining JRF Israel policy. Professor Ilan Peleg, a member of the task force, has written, "The tension between the commitment of most Israelis to the Jewishness of the State, on the one hand, and to its democratic principles, as they understand these, on the other, is one of the most significant and complex issues faced by contemporary Israelis."¹⁸ This same tension is recognizable in Diaspora Jewry communities debating the nature of appropriate Israel advocacy. The policy guidelines below are the result of our own debates over the fundamental values implied in envisioning Israel's future. The guidelines are not presented as JRF recommended solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, neither are they mere platitudes. They are targeted where we believe that the values of freedom, justice and equality demand the fulfillment of fundamental rights and obligations to all Israelis and

¹⁸ Ilan Peleg, "Israel Between Democratic Universalism and Particularist Judaism: Challenging a Sacred Formula," *Report of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies*, 2002-2003, p. 5.

Palestinians alike. Because of our basic belief that an applicable formula can be found that preserves Israel's identity as a Jewish and a democratic state, the guidelines are also unequivocal in their insistence of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish polity.¹⁹

In light of the foregoing JRF affirms that:

While we recognize that taking positions on issues runs the risk of being divisive; and
While we recognize that as Jews living outside of Israel we are much less affected than those living in Israel; and

While we recognize that dissent has the potential to be used in ways that we do not intend,

We nevertheless believe that we have the right and even obligation to speak out

Because “kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh”

Because we are affected by what Israel does and does not do, and by what is done to Israel

Because: we care! We have a deep and abiding love and commitment to Israel and the Zionist dream.

3. Social Justice Policy Guidelines

As a result of its discussion of JRF's obligation to speak out on issues of Israel's future, the task force decided to broaden its mandate beyond religious freedom and pluralism to include a guideline on the crucial issue of equal rights. The task force recommends that a JRF Israel Committee be created to build upon its current efforts and develop guidelines on additional issues such as economic justice and environmental defense (see Section IV Next Steps). This expansion stems from our understanding that the peace and security and social justice issues are inexorably linked, and from our belief that JRF's most constructive impact can be realized in the arena of Israel's domestic policies. By including issues of social justice, we urge JRF to call upon its members to become partners in creating a more equal, just and healthy society for all in Israel.

¹⁹ “An Israel that eliminates all the particularist features that result in the discrimination against non-Jews will still be ‘Jewish’ in several important ways: the Jewish majority will be sustained, the dominant language will remain Hebrew and the culture Hebraic and Jewish, and most of the symbols accepted within Israeli society will continue to be rooted in the Jewish tradition, and so forth. Even the controversial Law of Return could survive the type of reconstruction suggested here, especially if a Palestinian state with its own law of return is established side-by-side with Israel.” Ilan Peleg, *ibid*, note 18, p.17.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PLURALISM

Introduction

Israel's Declaration of Independence promises its citizens "full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex" and guarantees "freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture." Regrettably, the promise has not been fulfilled.

The lack of true Jewish religious freedom in Israel (or – from another perspective – Jewish religious pluralism) is understood by many to be *the most compelling domestic conflict* affecting Israeli society today. This issue also deeply engages the attention of Reconstructionists, other progressive Jews outside of Israel and, indeed, all non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. Among these groups, the consensus on the issue is both broad and deep.

As Reconstructionists, we are committed to an understanding of Judaism that is evolutionary and pluralistic. We affirm that all streams of Judaism are capable of making important contributions to the Jewish nation in the 21st Century.

The reality of our shared Jewish homeland being run since 1948 as an exclusive Orthodox monopoly is incompatible with our understanding of the highest values of Jewish peoplehood. Orthodox religious authorities continue to control all "personal status" issues (marriage, divorce, etc.) for Israeli Jews, interfering with individual freedoms in ways that would be totally unacceptable in other Western democracies. This conduct results in discrimination against women and those whose status as Jews is challenged by the Orthodox religious authorities. We are, therefore, opposed to the continuing hegemony of the Orthodox religious establishment in Israel.

On the issue of religious freedom and pluralism, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. The State of Israel must not give any stream of Judaism *de jure* or *de facto* precedence over another. Such practice is contrary to our values of freedom and pluralism, the intentions of the founders of the State of Israel, international agreements to which Israel is a signatory, as well as the practice and desires of a majority of the Israeli public.
2. The State of Israel must guarantee full social and political equality to all Jewish citizens without distinction as to religious or secular affiliation in areas including but not limited to:
 - a. Resolving personal status issues such as marriage, divorce and burial.
 - b. Determining "Who is a Jew" for purposes of the Law of Return.
 - c. Conversions.
 - d. Allocating funding for religious institutions.

- e. Financing religious and secular schools and programs.
 - f. Governing worship at the Kotel.
 - g. Equal participation by non-Orthodox men and women on religious councils until the decision to disband them is fully implemented.
3. JRF supports Knesset passage of the proposed Basic Law, Freedom of Religion as a means for achieving religious freedom and pluralism in Israel.²⁰

On the issue of religious freedom and pluralism, JRF commits to the following actions:

1. Support continuing legal efforts by such groups as the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC) in coalition with other organizations to advance the cause of religious freedom and pluralism in Israel.²¹
2. Actively support passage of the Basic Law, Freedom of Religion and assist with its implementation in whatever ways are feasible.
3. Work for the adoption of legislation to provide an opportunity for recognition of civil and non-Orthodox marriage and divorce conducted in Israel. Because 20-25% of Israeli Jewish couples are forced (by reason of personal status or by refusal to accept religious coercion) to marry abroad or enter into legal, non-religious contracts rather than marry through the Orthodox establishment, such legislation is particularly important.
4. Support efforts that recognize conversion conducted in Israel under the auspices of the non-Orthodox Jewish streams.
5. Support groups and organizations, such as *Panim for Jewish Renaissance in Israel*,²² working to provide equitable funding for programming and institutions across the Jewish spectrum, so that all Israeli Jews are enabled to choose the option that best fits their beliefs. These efforts include, among others, equalizing

²⁰ Relevant sections of the proposed Basic Law, Freedom of Religion, include: 1. “Freedom of Religion” – including the freedom of belief and the freedom from religion; 3. The purpose of this basic law is to protect the freedom of religion of the citizens and residents of the State...; 4. Every person is entitled to freedom of religion; 6. The State authorities shall consider the interests and needs of the religious communities and *the various movements to maintain their way of life or to observe their religious commandments, all on the basis of equality*, [emphasis added] with due balance of these interests with the needs of the general public.

Within this framework, the State may support the public religious needs of its residents but shall refrain from intervening in religious matters; 7. a. Every man and woman may marry and start a family, without restriction on religious grounds. b. A couple may choose to marry in a religious or civil ceremony. Divorce shall be conducted according to the manner in which the marriage was conducted.

²¹ IRAC is the public and legal advocacy arm of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, with which the JRF is associated through its membership since 1990 in the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

²² Panim for Jewish Renaissance in Israel is an umbrella for partner organizations in the field of Jewish identity and education. Panim brings the message and values of pluralistic Judaism to the center of Israeli public discourse through advocacy, facilitating cooperation between diverse groups and implementing projects in the broader community.

funding for non-Orthodox religious programming in the Israeli school system, such as the Tali school program, and for progressive religious youth groups and other similar organizations.

6. Support efforts to ensure that all sectors of the Israeli public equally shoulder the burdens of national defense either through military or alternative service.
7. Develop JRF national and communal outreach efforts towards Israelis residing temporarily in the US, in an effort to expose them to Jewish pluralism so they that can become agents of change and renewal when they return to their communities in Israel.

EQUALITY

Introduction

Israel's foundational document, its Declaration of Independence (May 14, 1948), commits the State to "uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex," to "promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants," and to "guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture."

Since its establishment, Israel has developed numerous democratic institutions in accordance with these fundamental principles. These include a parliament (the Knesset) that represents a broad spectrum of views, including minority views, an independent judiciary headed by the High Court of Justice, a vibrant free press and political parties with different ideological platforms. Moreover, not only has the country developed economically in an impressive way, but also such democratic principles as freedom of expression and the right to equality have, over the years, been strengthened via legislation and court rulings.

Despite these remarkable achievements, the full vision of Israel's democracy remains to be realized.²³ The picture is complex, with numerous reasons cited for the endurance of inequities. Regardless of history, Israel has arrived at the stage of her political development at which, for both moral and strategic reasons, she must continue on the path toward full equality and equality of opportunity for all. In particular, Arab citizens continue to suffer from discrimination and neglect in numerous areas, as recently reaffirmed by a State Inquiry Commission, headed by Supreme Court Justice Theodore Orr and established after the violent events of October 2000. While Arabs enjoy religious and cultural (including linguistic) rights, justice requires that they be better integrated into Israeli society and politics as equal citizens.

In adopting our position, we are mindful of the attitude adopted at Israel's birth by our movement's founder, Mordecai Kaplan, an ardent and early American Zionist:

"Judaism can certainly not afford to harbor any doctrine which is in conflict with the ethical basis of democracy. That basis is the intrinsic worth of the individual human soul, a worth which is independent of the people, race or church to which one belongs. This implies that no people, race or church can confer upon its members a higher human status than does any other. Democracy as such calls for the treatment of individuals, despite their marked differences, as equals, from the standpoint of law and of their right to happiness and salvation. Ethical democracy goes one step further and calls for the treatment of all peoples, races and churches as equals in all respects."²⁴

²³ For Reconstructionist policy on democracy and religious pluralism in Israel, see guideline on Religious Freedom and Pluralism.

²⁴ Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, *ibid* note 8, p. 224.

On the issue of equality, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. As Reconstructionists, we believe that Israel must work diligently to realize her full vision of democracy and equality.
2. As Reconstructionists, we believe that Arab citizens of Israel must be granted equal rights. JRF commends the efforts to equalize the conditions of Arab citizens via rulings of the High Court of Justice and by other means. We believe, however, that further steps must be initiated in order to bring about full equality, in law and by practice, between Jewish and Arab Israelis, thereby producing a more just society and a more stable political system. These steps include but are not limited to: a) active recruitment, in areas where they are eligible, of Arabs for government service until at least proportional representation is reached; and b) allocation of equal economic resources to Arab individuals and communities as those to Jewish individuals and communities.
3. As Reconstructionists, we believe that women must be granted equal rights. JRF commends the recent passage of legislation aimed at reducing domestic violence and sexual harassment, and the institution of support programs that have resulted in a doubling of the number of women willing to prosecute in sexual assault cases. However, while awareness about domestic violence and sexual harassment has grown significantly, due in large part to the work of non-profit organizations, funding is needed to continue and expand the programs offered in these and other areas, especially in the ultra-Orthodox, Ethiopian, Russian, Arab and Bedouin communities. We also call on the government to intensify efforts to eliminate trafficking in women. Resources must be allocated to ensure the advancement of women in Israel and to retrain and empower those who are not economically independent.
4. As Reconstructionists, we believe that gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered in Israel must be treated as equal citizens in all respects. We commend the advancements in the 1990s that made, at that time, Israel one of the world's most progressive countries in terms of eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation. The 1992 Knesset amendment to Israel's Equal Workplace Opportunities Law outlawing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; the 1993 rescission by the Israeli military of regulations discriminating against gay men and lesbians; the 1994 Supreme Court ruling ordering El Al Israel Airlines to treat equally partners of gay employees; and the election of Professor Dan Even to the Knesset (MK Meretz), the first openly gay man to run for office, and of Michal Eden to the Tel-Aviv City Council, the first openly lesbian candidate to run for office – all are important steps towards making Israeli democracy more complete.

While celebrating these advancements, we call for eliminating remaining areas where discrimination still prevents gay men and lesbians from enjoying the same rights as heterosexuals, including equal marriage opportunities for same-sex

couples. We call for a transformation in remaining, rampant anti-gay opinions and expressions and we protest against the use of scriptures and religion to incite against gay individuals and the rights of the gay community. We encourage Reconstructionists, and people of all faiths, to support the ongoing struggle for equal rights and to work against the misuse of religion to inflame hate and fear.

5. As Reconstructionists, we believe that the government of Israel must guarantee basic human rights to all foreign workers and their children residing in Israel, particularly in light of the fact that most foreign workers are brought or allowed into Israel by the government at the request of private sector employers. These rights include adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care and education, and must be guaranteed independent of whether one believes Israel should have a policy allowing foreign workers to be part of her workforce. *“He executes the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and raiment. Love therefore the stranger: for you were strangers in the land of Mizrayim.”* (Deut. 10:18-9) We call upon the government to prosecute employers who illegally withhold wages, passports and other identity documents from foreign workers in their employ, to refrain from illegal treatment and arbitrary and long-term detention of foreign workers and to provide decent living conditions for those legally held. We also urge the government to recognize the human right to a minimum living wage and to enforce existing minimum wage laws with regard to foreign workers.

4. Peace and Security Policy Guidelines

Like most North American Jews with a deep commitment to the future of the State of Israel, we were extremely hopeful in the period from 1993-2000 that a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could be achieved. The violence that followed the collapse of negotiations at Camp David, and that has continued to this day, has been deeply disheartening, costing the lives of large numbers of innocent people on both sides. Terrorism directed against Jews must be stopped, the terrorist infrastructure dismantled and the incitement to violence and the teaching of hatred to Palestinian schoolchildren must cease. The suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation must end and Palestinians must have the right to self-government in a viable state of their own comprising Gaza and most of the West Bank as well as the sections of Jerusalem populated by Palestinians.

We continue to believe that a two-state solution negotiated between the parties remains the best hope for peace and security in the region, and deeply appreciate the on-going efforts of individual Israelis and individual Palestinians to arrive at formulations that will satisfy the needs of both Israelis and Palestinians. JRF encourages Israel to remain open to new ideas and efforts to resume the peace process. The guidelines below are intended as a means for enabling JRF and individual Reconstructionists to join in these efforts. Only peace can bring true and lasting security to the region. Peace therefore must remain our goal for as long as required to achieve it: “Seek peace and pursue it: seek peace within your own place and pursue it in other places.” (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:15)

In the area of peace and security, the task force drafted six policy guidelines:

1) Pursuing Peace; 2) U.S. Involvement in the Peace Process; 3) Borders; 4) Israel’s Presence in the West Bank and Gaza; 5) Refugees; and 6) Jerusalem. It is important to note that the guidelines are *not* intended as finished statements. They are **guidelines** for future JRF Israel advocacy. During the period of drafting this report, the task force was keenly aware that the most relevant issues for JRF attention in the current political reality were the pursuit of peace, U.S. involvement in the peace process and unilateral

withdrawal (addressed in “Israel’s Presence in the West Bank and Gaza”). Guidelines for the remaining issues have been included because they are central to any peaceful resolution of the conflict and, as such, could become ripe for advocacy at any time. Even during periods that have the appearance of a complete breakdown of the peace process, negotiations are usually taking place at various levels that may change the political reality. The task force wanted to ensure that JRF would be in a position to respond flexibly, and has prepared guidelines based on principles it anticipates will remain relatively unchanging. It is imperative, however, that the guidelines be periodically reviewed and updated, particularly before issuing any statements (see Section IV Next Steps: Implementing the Report).

PURSUING PEACE

*Don't stop after beating the swords
into ploughshares, don't stop! Go on beating
and make musical instruments out of them.
Whoever wants to make war again
will have to turn them into ploughshares first.*

An Appendix to the Vision of Peace, Yehuda Amichai

On the issue of pursuing peace, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. In accordance with the commandment to “choose life,” JRF has a religious obligation to help its membership envision and work toward a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by being *rodfey shalom*, pursuers of peace, even during the most troubled of times and despite stalemates in negotiations.
2. JRF supports all genuine efforts at reaching a political compromise between Israelis and Palestinians and bringing an end to the conflict. Our position is based on both moral and practical grounds.

It would be consistent with the above principles to advocate for the following specific policy:

JRF supports such recent attempts to move the peace process forward as the Ayalon-Nusseibeh initiative and the Geneva Accord, without necessarily endorsing every element in those documents.

UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Observe now, said Rabbi Shimon, that the way of the Holy One Blessed be God is not like the way of a mortal. If a mortal king goes to battle he goes accompanied by armies and legions, but when he goes on a peaceful mission he goes alone. But the way of the Holy One Blessed be God is not so. When God goes on a mission of peace God goes forth with armies and with legions; as it says 'he makes peace in his high places,' (Job 25:2) and after that it is written 'is there any number of his armies?' (Job 25:3) ...On the other hand, when God goes to war, God goes entirely alone; as it says, 'The Lord is a man of war the Lord is his name,' (Exodus 15:3); God fights by God's name alone and requires no aid...Numbers Rabbah 11:7

On the issue of United States involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. JRF recognizes with appreciation the historic role of the U.S. government in supporting Zionism and the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, culminating in its diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel in 1948.
2. JRF recognizes the achievements and applauds the contributions of the United States, under different administrations, to the furtherance of peace between Israel and her Middle Eastern neighbors.
3. JRF makes a parallel commitment to promote ongoing United States involvement in such a way as to bring about a solution to the conflict in accord with the principles stated elsewhere in this report.
4. In recognition of the crucial role of the United States in achieving peace in the Middle East, JRF encourages the United States to maintain a high level of commitment to serving as "honest broker" between Israel and the Arab world, and in particular between Israel and the Palestinians, with the aim of helping the parties reach a mutually acceptable negotiated settlement to the conflict.
5. JRF should proactively support any proposal initiated by the United States and accepted by the parties for achieving peace and resolution of the conflict.

It would be consistent with the above principles to advocate for the following specific proposals:

1. Urge the United States government to maintain its commitment to and support for the "Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" published in April 2003.

2. Work for and welcome United States encouragement of peace initiatives such as the Ayalon-Nusseibeh initiative and the Geneva Accord (without necessarily endorsing every element of those documents).
3. Support United States efforts to discourage further Jewish settlement expansion in the disputed territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (see also below, Israel's Presence in the West Bank and Gaza).
4. Support use of United States resources in stopping Palestinian and third party efforts that promote and support terrorism.
5. Support United States government efforts to combat resurging anti-Semitism.
6. Support United States government efforts to work toward the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Arab and Moslem countries who have not yet done so and Israel.
7. Urge the United States Government to continue advocating the acceptance of Magen David Adom into the League of Red Cross Societies (International Red Cross).

BORDERS

*Thus said the LORD:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears;
For there is a reward for your labor
Your sons will return to their borders
V'shavu vanim lig'vulam.*

Jeremiah 31:16

On the issue of final borders of the State of Israel, JRF endorses the following principles*:

1. JRF defends Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized borders in accordance with the universally recognized right to self-determination, while rejecting the idea that God has determined Israel's final borders.
2. JRF commends Israel and Egypt and Israel and Jordan for making peace and establishing internationally recognized borders between the countries. JRF also commends Israel for unilaterally withdrawing from South Lebanon to the internationally accepted border as approved by the United Nations.
3. JRF supports all genuine efforts at reaching a political compromise between Israelis and Palestinians and bringing an end to the conflict. Our position is based on both moral and practical grounds.
4. JRF rejects the idea that increased territory equals enhanced security for Israel, and believes that a demilitarized, stable Palestinian State will, in fact, enhance Israel's security and economic stability.
5. JRF supports a two-state solution, based on mutual Israeli-Palestinian recognition, as the cornerstone for achieving peace and security for both nations. We believe that solution is compatible with both a Jewish and a democratic Israel and a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian state.
6. The 1949 - 1967 cease-fire lines (the Green Line) should be the initial basis for any negotiations on mutually agreed upon and final borders between Israel and Palestine. That final border should maximize the security of both sides and the long-term viability of both states.

*Please see guidelines on "United States Involvement" for additional principles regarding peace initiatives.

ISRAEL'S PRESENCE IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

Introduction. Maintenance and defense of most settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has a corrosive impact on Israeli soldiers carrying the tremendous burden of protecting Israeli citizens; leads to increased tension and violence within Israeli society; is a drain on Israel's economy when Israel needs increased revenues for health, education and welfare; and leads to the violation of Palestinian human rights. JRF concurs with the majority of Israelis who believe that Israel must end her occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and notes that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon recently began using the term "occupation" to describe Israel's presence there.

On the issue of Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza, JRF endorses the following principles and actions:

1. JRF views most settlements in the West Bank and Gaza as an obstacle to peace. These settlements will need to be evacuated in any final peace agreement.
2. The evacuation of settlements is in Israel's security, moral, social and economic interests. Recognizing demographic realities, evacuation is also necessary to preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic identity.
3. JRF supports an immediate freeze on settlement building and on expansion of existing settlements. It also supports the dismantling of illegal outposts in accordance with the "Roadmap" of April 2003.
4. Dismantling of settlements must be done in recognition that settlements were part of government policy under all political parties and that such changes will bring human and economic hardships on the residents of settlements. Therefore, compensating settlers who will need to relocate and start lives anew should be part of any withdrawal plan. JRF supports Israel's efforts to establish a compensation fund for those settlers who wish to move now.
5. Recognizing that a negotiated peace may not be achievable at the present time and possibly not for some time to come, we support the emerging consensus among Israeli Jews that unilateral evacuation of settlements is required to maintain the democratic and Jewish identity of Israel and to provide security for Israel's citizens. Unilateral acts are not, however, a replacement for continued efforts to reach a negotiated settlement and to rehabilitate and strengthen the Palestinian economy.
6. Israel must protect the human rights of Palestinians whether under occupation, after unilateral withdrawal from Jewish settlements, or while living under new conditions created by the separation barrier.

7. Withdrawal for the sake of peace and security and the other reasons mentioned above far outweighs the concern that withdrawal may be perceived as a sign of weakness.
8. JRF supports those in Israel who are working toward the above principles and goals.

REFUGEES

Introduction. Displacement is a core identity issue for both Israelis and Palestinians. It is also painful for both peoples. Israel is the place where Jews were to stop being refugees. Sadly, as a byproduct of establishing the state, Palestinians have also become refugees. The Palestinian refugee problem is, in part, a consequence of competing nationalisms. Resolving the problem is particularly challenging given that history and myth shape its different understandings. The Jewish experience of being refugees should cause us to open our hearts in empathy for Palestinian suffering and our minds to tolerance for the ambiguity resulting from conflicting narratives. Justice requires that the Jewish people acknowledge its share of responsibility for the suffering of Palestinian refugees and that the refugees be compensated not only by Israel, but also by the Arab countries and Palestinian Authority with whom primary responsibility rests.

On the issue of Palestinian refugees, setting aside, for the time being, the unresolved issue of compensation to Jewish refugees from Arab countries, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. JRF acknowledges that every Israeli government at least since 1950 has agreed to share in funding the resettlement of refugees in the context of a full peace and that numerous refugees have been absorbed into Israel through family unification programs.
2. JRF supports the emerging consensus that it will be necessary for international bodies to play a role in the implementation of any solution and calls on the United Nations and the relevant Arab countries to accept such a role in light of their share of responsibility in perpetuating the refugee crisis.
3. JRF acknowledges the tremendous efforts to date to advance a resolution of this difficult issue, such as that of the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Agreement and the Geneva Accord (without necessarily endorsing every element of those documents). It also endorses the language of the Nusseibeh-Ayalon Agreement that “recognizing the suffering and plight of the Palestinian refugees, the international community, Israel and the Palestinian State will initiate and contribute to an international fund to compensate them.”

In accordance with the above principles, it would be consistent for JRF to advocate for the following specific proposals:

1. Adopt the Nusseibeh-Ayalon proposal regarding the return of displaced refugees, that “Palestinians will return only to the State of Palestine; Jews will return only to the State of Israel.” This should not be construed to invalidate the citizenship of Arab citizens of Israel.
2. Practical implementation of the right of return for Palestinian refugees means compensation to them for losses incurred as a result of their refugee status and/or payments to rehabilitate needy refugees.

JERUSALEM

*Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem; May those who love you be at peace.
Great solace be upon your force, salvation's rest in your halls.*

Psalm 122:6-7

I said to myself: Redemption will come only when they are told, "Do you see that arch over there from the Roman period? It doesn't matter, but near it, a little to the left and then down a bit, there's a man who has just bought fruit and vegetables for his family..."

Tourists, Yehuda Amichai

On the issue of Jerusalem, JRF endorses the following principles:

1. Jerusalem is the center of the Jewish faith and has been the focus of our prayers and texts for three thousand years. It is also an important center for Muslims and Christians. As a center of religious importance it should:
 - a. Model religious freedom, pluralism and tolerance.
 - b. Be maintained as an open city with full access to her holy sites guaranteed to all.
2. Jerusalem's unique religious, historical and archaeological importance requires establishing mechanisms for protecting Jerusalem's holy sites and maintaining open access to all.
 - a. Israel must be the guardian of the Western Wall, the Jewish Quarter in the Old City and the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives for the benefit of the Jewish People.
 - b. Palestine must be the guardian of the Temple Mount for the benefit of Muslims.
3. Jerusalem is a center of political importance. JRF agrees with the emerging consensus that if the Palestinians agree to peace and a two-state solution, Jerusalem could become the capital of both Israel and Palestine, under mutually determined Israeli and Palestinian sovereignty. JRF accepts, in principle, mutually negotiated solutions to the division of Jerusalem.

IV. NEXT STEPS: IMPLEMENTING THE REPORT

In this report, the task force has urged JRF to set and execute goals and objectives for Israel programming and to take a leadership role in advocating for a Reconstructionist vision of Israel's future. Implementation of the language contained in the policy guidelines and elsewhere in this report is conditional upon JRF accepting this report in whole or in part.

The task force advises the establishment of two distinct bodies to implement the recommendations of this report: 1) a tripartite Reconstructionist Movement Israel Commission ("Israel Commission") with membership from JRF, RRA and the RRC and 2) a JRF Israel Committee. The Israel Commission would be responsible for *developing* a comprehensive approach to the relationship of the Reconstructionist movement with Israel and for Israel policy formulation. The work of the task force can serve as foundation for this next step. The involvement of RRA and RRC representatives on the JRF Israel task force and their contributions to this report have been invaluable, and the task force believes that continued RRA and RRC involvement should be formalized. The JRF Israel Committee would be responsible for *implementing* Israel policy, e.g. advising JRF leadership regarding response to media requests for comment on Israel issues or deciding whether to join an Israel demonstration, and for offering guidance on Israel policy to congregations seeking clarification. It would also be responsible for *carrying out* programmatic objectives such as Israel education, trips and partnership programs. Importantly, until a tripartite Israel Commission is established, the JRF Israel Committee must also be responsible for policy formulation.

JRF Israel Committee Work Plan:

In the immediate future, JRF should form an Israel Committee comprised of two sub-committees: Israel Programs and Israel Policy. This work plan assumes initial responsibility for policy formulation. Again, should a tripartite Israel Commission be established, it is recommended that policy formulation (but not policy implementation) shift to that body.

*The functions of the **Israel Programs** sub-committee should include:*

- Oversight of the Israel Programs staff.
- Developing of short and long-range plans.
- Promoting and implementing Israel trips.
- Developing and promoting Israel education and ritual initiatives (in coordination with the Education and Youth and Camping Departments and using existing movement and congregational resources).
- Developing and promoting partnership programs (in coordination with the Education and Youth and Camping Departments).
- Ensuring publication of consulting services, educational resources and programs in RT, regional newsletters, rabbis and presidents mailings, on the JRF web site and in other appropriate forums.

*The functions of the **Israel Policy** sub-committee should include:*

- Formulating JRF Israel policy for adoption by the JRF leadership.
- Advising the JRF leadership when it is called upon to comment on Israel issues.
- Researching, proposing and implementing JRF Israel advocacy activities, primarily in the social justice areas of religious freedom and pluralism, equal rights, economic justice and environmentalism (it is recommended that JRF not operate independently in these areas, rather that it become a partner in Israeli efforts for social change).
- Assisting JRF congregations and individual members with issues of Israel advocacy (e.g. providing policy language, information on Israel advocacy organizations, consulting on queries regarding local advocacy initiatives).

The Israel Policy sub-committee should be large enough to represent diverse political views and JRF communities, yet small enough for effective and rapid mobilization. This sub-committee should also include representatives from Israel, the RRA and RRC and be assigned a JRF staff member knowledgeable in Israel affairs to assist in its operation.

Recommended Israel Policy Sub-Committee Operating Guidelines:

1. JRF, in adopting this report, obligates itself and its representatives to making statements within the parameters of the guidelines stated below. Any material deviation from the guidelines recommended by the Israel Committee or any individual authorized to speak on behalf of JRF requires further discussion and re-adoption by the JRF board. The policy of consultation between the three institutions of the movement before issuing statements remains in effect.
2. Support for or criticism of specific Israeli policies and decisions is never intended as a statement of support or criticism for the current Israeli government in power or other officials proposing or implementing those policies and decision. JRF must refrain from all partisan politics when carrying out its advocacy activities.
3. The Israel Committee should meet at least twice yearly to review the policy guidelines and bring any changes and additions to the JRF board for approval. A procedure should be adopted at the outset for handling time urgent matters by conference call, e-mail exchanges or other means.
4. The Israel Committee should regularly consult with Israeli Reconstructionists who can reflect whether policy recommendations are appropriately specific for a Diaspora community.
5. Individual JRF members hold different opinions on these issues. JRF advocacy is not meant to be exclusionary but representative; being a member of JRF or a JRF congregation does not obligate one to agree with adopted policies. JRF must remain committed to ongoing internal dialogue on issues affecting Israel and the meaning of the State of Israel to Reconstructionist Jews and Judaism.
6. JRF commitment to Zionism and to the preservation of the State of Israel and its democratic character and Jewish identity should be emphasized in every statement released or action taken unless that commitment has no bearing on the issue at hand.
7. JRF should remain committed to ongoing dialogue with organizations in the wider Jewish community.

APPENDIX: VALUES INFORMING DECISION MAKING²⁵

SURVIVAL OF THE JEWISH CIVILIZATION

Brit (covenant) – The relationship between God and the Jewish people is described in the Bible as a *brit*, which is also used to signify a solemn pact between individuals. (Ex. 19:4-8; Gen. 31.) The parties in a relationship have obligations to each other. Jewish tradition suggests not only the importance of the Jewish people’s commitment to God, but also the covenant made with all members of the Jewish community.

Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) – As the ancient homeland of the Jewish people, the land of Israel has always had special meaning for Jews. “Only *Eretz Yisrael*, where Judaism is the civilization of the majority of its people, can serve as the center of Jewry.” (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask*, pp. 33-35.) With the revitalization of the land, *aliyah* (migration to Israel) and creation of the modern State, the Jewish attachment to the land has come to mean a commitment to the welfare and safety of the State of Israel as well.

Jewish Civilizational Continuity and Evolution – The future growth and enrichment of Jewish life are specific goals of Reconstructionism. Our approach teaches that for Judaism to remain authentic and compelling, we must engage in the study of the Jewish tradition, adapting it to changing political, scientific, social and technical circumstances, and thereby renew our commitment to Jewish living. Furthermore, “as there is no future for Israel as a Jewish state without the Jewish People, so there can be no future for the Jewish people without a strong, secure, democratic, and spiritually and culturally Jewish Israel.” (Emanuel S. Goldsmith, introduction to *Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, p. 26.)

Klal Yisrael (unity and survival of the Jewish people) – For Reconstructionists, “Jewish Peoplehood is not a political category but a moral spiritual category – a religious communion. That communion today needs to build unity without uniformity.” (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism Without Supernaturalism*, pp. 168-9.) Despite the schisms that have historically been a part of the Jewish community, the Jews are one people with a shared history. We recognize that we are responsible for each other regardless of differences in ideology and practice and that we should rely on each other not only for our own survival but to make the world a better place.

Vishavtem Betah (security) – The right to security and to dwell in safety (*vishavtem betah*) belongs to all peoples. The context of this phrase from Deuteronomy 12:10 emphasizes that the blessing of security is bestowed for obeying the commandments of the Eternal.

²⁵ Some of the language for the values definitions was taken from: *The Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: A Vision for the 21st Century* (Wyncote: The Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi, 2001); *Boundaries and Opportunities: The Role of Non-Jews in JRF Congregations* (Wyncote: Reconstructionist Press, 1998) and *Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position* (Wyncote: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation and Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, 1992).

JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Darkhey Shalom/ Rodef Shalom (*paths of peace/pursue peace*) – “Seek peace and pursue it: seek peace within your own place and pursue it in other places.” (Jerusalem Talmud, Peah 1:15.) We are not only obligated to be on a path toward peace; we must pursue it actively. The obligation of active pursuit acknowledges the temptation to surrender when the task becomes difficult. We seek strength from the teaching “The whole of the Torah is for promoting peace, as it is written, ‘Her ways are pleasant, and all her paths peaceful.’” (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 59b.)

Democracy – For Reconstructionists, democracy is not only a humanistic value but also a religious value coherent with Jewish life. A full-fledged democracy must meet the following requirements: conduct regular, fair and free elections in order to establish the rule of the majority; protect legally the fundamental freedoms such as speech and assembly, including freedom of and from religion; guarantee the equality of all individual citizens and social groups before the law, as well as in practice. (Ilan Peleg, “Israel Between Democratic Universalism and Particularist Judaism,” *The Report of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies*, 2002-2003, p.6.)

Equality – “Humanity was created as a single individual...for the sake of peace among humankind, that no person should say to another, ‘My ancestor was greater than yours.’” (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4.5.) In modern times, we define equality to include both equal rights and equal opportunities. It is a commitment to equal political, religious, social and legal treatment for people of all races, ethnicities and religions and for all women and men, regardless of sexual orientation. Combining traditional and modern understandings, we arrive at the teaching that, “the ideal of equality when conceived both as spiritual and as economic equality would mean that all human beings are entitled to experience the dignity of selfhood or personality, the moral character of society, and the reality of God.” (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, pp. 324-27.)

Haganat Hateva (*environmental justice and protection*) – We are the beneficiaries of the bounties of nature and the stewards of the natural world. As our power to damage the earth’s ecology grows, our ability to benefit from Creation and perhaps even human survival depend upon the effectiveness of our stewardship. *Haganat hateva* obligates us to implement policies that protect and repair our environment and to refrain from acting in ways that cause the disenfranchised to bear the brunt of environmental pollution.

Human Rights – “Fundamental human rights in Israel are based on recognition of the value of man, the sanctity of human life and freedom, and shall be honored in the spirit of the principles in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.” (Preamble to Israel’s Basic Laws: Human Dignity and Freedom of Occupation.) Among the list of human rights requiring protection are the right of equality and equal protection under the law, the outlawing of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the outlawing of slavery, the right to recognition as a person before the law and rights to sustenance, healthcare and education (for additional rights, see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948).

Kavod (*dignity/respect/honor*) – Created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-7), we can see the spark of the Divine in each other. In recognizing that each human face is in part a face of the Divine, we recognize that we are bound to respect the dignity of each human being and act in a way consistent with that dignity. Pirke Avot 3:14 teaches, “Let the honor of your fellow be as dear to you as your own.”

Pluralism – Pluralism is the doctrine calling for the tolerance of diverse practices within Judaism. “The pragmatic implication of the demand for equality of opportunity to experience the reality of God is the abandonment of all efforts at trying to win people away from one religious communion to another. Any ideal that is of universal significance, that belongs to the worship not of power but of spirit, is capable of adoption by, and adaptation to, any and all religious traditions.” (Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, pp. 324-27.) Diverse practices have always existed in Judaism and the right to dissent from majority practice is defended in our tradition in many places, including in the famous talmudic disputes between the houses of the great rabbis Hillel and Shammai. While the tradition treats divergence from the majority with varying degrees of tolerance, Reconstructionists believe that not only must diversity be tolerated, that the open exchange of ideas has been critical to the evolution of Judaism and the maintenance of vigor in Jewish life.

Tohar Haneshek (*purity of arms*)– The Doctrine of the Israel Defense Forces states: “The Israel Defense Force servicemen and women will use their weapons and force only for the purpose of their mission, only to the necessary extent and will maintain their humanity even during combat. IDF soldiers will not use their weapons to harm human beings who are not combatants or prisoners of war, and will do all in their power to avoid causing harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property.”

Tikun olam/Geulah (*improving the world/redemption*) – We live in a world that is far from perfect. Judaism has always had a messianic vision of a world redeemed, a world characterized by justice, sufficiency, harmony and peace. “We cannot expect to complete the task of bringing the world to that ultimate redemption, but we are not at liberty to neglect the task” (Avot 2:16.) On the interpersonal, political, and environmental levels, there is an enormous amount to be done, and each good thing we do makes a difference.

Tzedek (*justice/righteousness/social justice*) – “Zion will only be redeemed through justice and those who return to her through acts of righteousness.” (Is. 1:27.) From Biblical times to the present, our tradition stresses the obligation to resist oppression and to treat the other justly. Ensuring just treatment means preserving human dignity and meeting basic human needs, including education, dignified work, food, clothing and shelter. We live in a just society only when every one of its members is treated justly. The repetition of the word “justice” in Deuteronomy teaches us that “we ought to follow justice with justice, and not with unrighteousness, ‘that means that the use of unrighteousness as a means to a righteous end make the end itself unrighteous.” (Martin Buber *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings*, p. 7.)

PROCESS

Emet (truth/integrity) – The rabbis said that *emet* is the seal of God. Speaking truth to oneself and to others, striving for intellectual honesty and living in a forthright fashion allow us to create communities characterized by trust, cooperation and mutuality. “Rabban Shimon, the son of Gamliel, said, ‘The world stands on three things: on truth, on judgment, and on peace; as it is stated: Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates (Zech. 8:16).’” (Pirke Avot 1:18.) According to Maimonides, *emet* here refers to both intellectual and ethical truth.

Hesed (grace/caring/love/covenantal loyalty) – Old translations of the Bible rendered *hesed* as “lovingkindness,” but contemporary scholarship sees *hesed* as a dimension of the covenantal relationship. (Ex. 34:6-7.) *Hesed* implies commitment, reliability, stability and loyalty; characteristics that sustain relationships over time and that often carry a dimension of unconditionality.

Makhloket Le-shem Shamayim (dispute for the sake of Heaven) – The rabbis of the talmudic era ruled that only disputes for the sake of heaven are enduring. (Pirke Avot 5:17 with commentary by Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura.) Parties must aim to discern the truth and promote justice and not their private ambitions and agendas. *Makhloket le-shem shamayim* is essential for guiding a process that is civil and respectful, however intense, and that ensures we distinguish differences between us that are based upon values and not on personal needs and desires.

Rahamim (compassion/kindness) – *Rahamim* is the disposition towards compassion and caring, a reaching out towards the other in support and solidarity. It implies an attempt to understand the circumstances of the other person, and a predisposition towards kindness. The tradition understands that acting with *rahamim* is not always easy. A story is told in which God asks R. Ishmael ben Elisha for a blessing, who responds: “May it be your will that Your mercy subdue Your wrath and Your mercy prevail over Your other attributes, so that You deal with Your children according to the attribute of mercy; and may You, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice!’ And God nodded God’s head towards me.” (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 7a.)

Teshuva (acceptance of responsibility) – *Teshuva* operates on both the individual and national level. (Hosea 14:2-3.) Doing *Teshuva*, or returning to relation with the Eternal after we have committed wrongs, first requires accepting responsibility for our sins and misdeeds. According to Adin Steinsaltz, “Repentance also comprises the notion that we have a measure of control over our existence in all dimensions, including time...even though the past is ‘fixed,’ repentance admits of an ascendancy over it, of the possibility of changing its significance in the context of the present and the future.” Accepting responsibility and following through with the additional steps of asking forgiveness of ourselves, those we have wronged and from the Eternal can also contribute to successful conflict resolution and rehabilitation of communities and societies.

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