

# **ISRAEL ACTIVITIES AND THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST MOVEMENT**

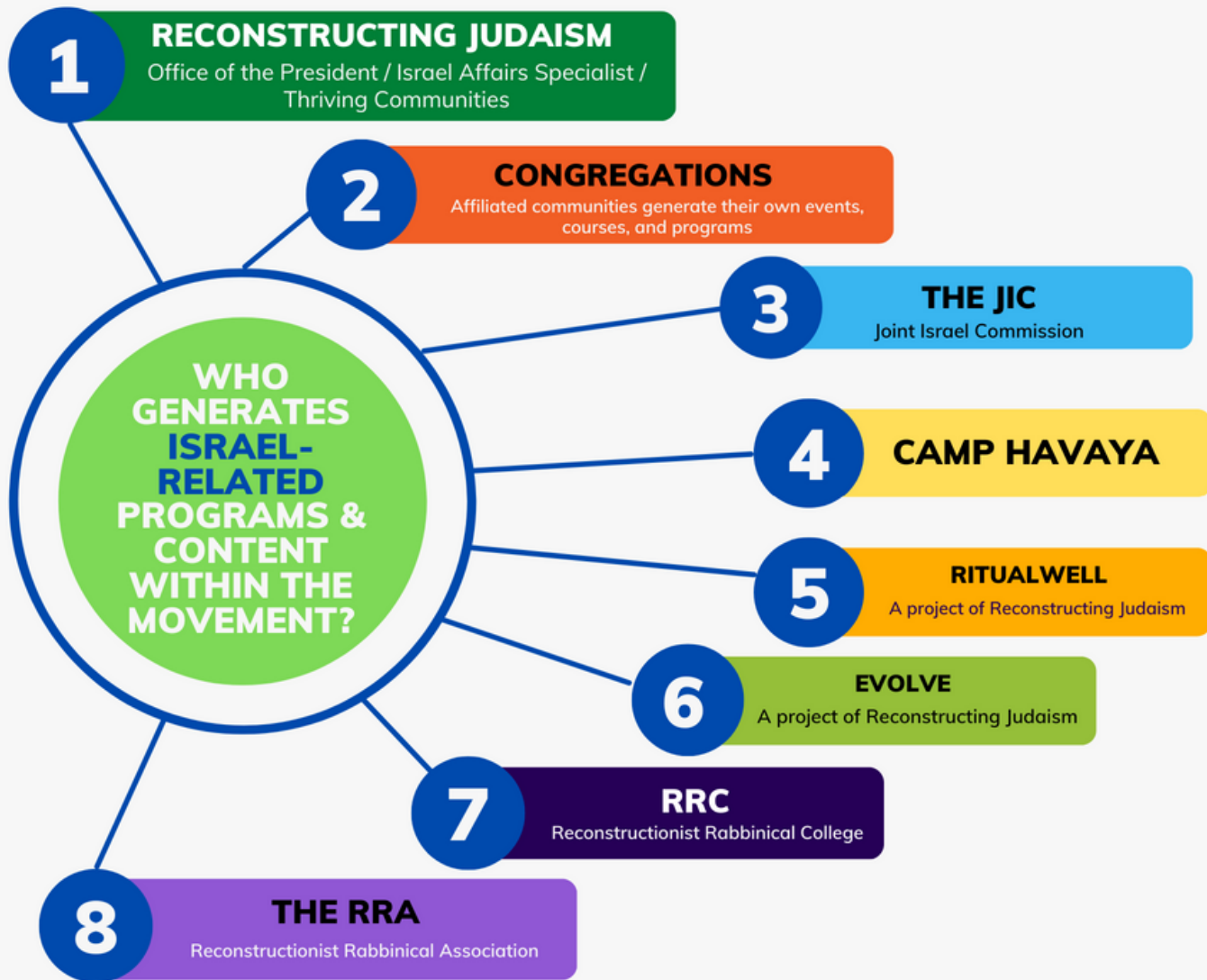
**2020-2022**

**A REPORT  
PREPARED BY:** Rabbi Maurice Harris  
Associate Director for Thriving Communities  
and Israel Affairs Specialist

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February 21, 2023

# Who generates Israel-related programs and educational content within the movement?



# Reconstructing Judaism (staff-led)

Rabbi Maurice Harris serves as Associate Director for Thriving Communities and Israel Affairs Specialist. In conjunction with Thriving Communities, Maurice regularly informs congregational leaders about programming opportunities that may appeal to some of their members. Occasionally, Thriving Communities also offers congregations original programs or resources. In addition, the Engagement and Innovation Department, the Communications Department, and the staffs of Ritualwell and Evolve generate Israel-related programming and content.

## Examples of original programs and resources:

- **Israeli-Palestinian History from a Progressive Zionist Perspective**
  - An online, multi-session webinar offered by Rabbi Harris to Reconstructionist congregations. Congregations that have hosted the course or a variant of it:
    - Or Haneshamah (Ottawa, ON)
    - Columbia Jewish Congregation (Columbia, MD)
    - String of Pearls (Princeton, NJ)
    - Darchei Noam (Toronto, ON)
    - Knesseth Israel (Wooster, OH)
    - Or Shalom (San Francisco, CA)
    - Ner Shalom (Cotati, CA)
    - Mayim Rabim Congregation (Minneapolis, MN)
    - Temple Israel (Duluth, MN)
    - Shir Hadash (St. Louis, MO)
- **Through a Reconstructionist Lens Series- Session 10: Israel**
  - This 15-session curriculum for adults recommitting to Reconstructionist learning, was originally created as an Adult B- / Re- Mitzvah program. In addition to the several congregations that offered the entire series, three affiliates made use of the Israel session for online learning:
    - Mayim Rabim (MN)
    - Shir Hadash (WI)
    - P'nai Tikvah (NV)
- **Jerusalem Crisis: What's Happening, What's Being Done, What's Needed (May 12, 2021)**
  - Webinar co-sponsored by Reconstructing Judaism, RRA, URJ, and others.
- **Project Rozana:**
  - Reconstructing Judaism and the RRA promoted this non-profit organization supported by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to purchase badly needed ventilators for West Bank and Gaza hospitals in light of the COVID-19 spike in the region.

# Reconstructing Judaism (staff-led)

## Examples of informing congregations about outside events that may be of interest:

Thriving Communities uses its listservs, direct emails to clergy, and social media to provide periodic notifications to congregational leaders about Israel-related events, webinars, trips, scholarship opportunities, and other similar resources. The Israel Affairs Specialist curates and prepares these communications. All programs and resources offered by outside organizations are sent with a disclaimer stating that the views of the presenters are not necessarily those of the movement's central organizations.

There are too many examples to list them all, but here is a sampling:

- **Partners for Progressive Israel:**
  - Webinar: Beyond One State vs. Two States: A Path to Confederation and A Land for All
- **T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights:**
  - Webinar: The Volatile Situation in Israel and Palestine with Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin
  - Race and Nationalism in Israel through Poetry: A webinar in honor of Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzma'ut with Prof. Sami Shalom Chetrit
- **The Weizmann Institute (Rehovot, Israel):**
  - International Science Summer Institute program opportunity for 18-20 year-olds
- **American Zionist Movement (AZM):**
  - Yom Hashoah program - Memorial Assembly at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai
- **The Parents Circle for Bereaved Families and Combatants for Peace:**
  - Annual Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Service
- **WZO (World Zionist Organization):**
  - Live egalitarian reading of Israel's Declaration of Independence at the egalitarian section of the Kotel
- **MASA Israel:**
  - "These are our stories" - Memorial Day ceremony
- **Liberal Judaism (UK):**
  - Chef Avi Shemtov presents "All Things Hummus"
- **Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan:**
  - The Other Israel film festival - online film screenings

# Reconstructing Judaism (staff-led)

Example of the kind of email sent to congregational leaders several times a year:

Dear Presidents, Executive Directors, Administrators, and Educators of Reconstructionist Communities,

This year Israel celebrates its Independence Day, *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, beginning Wednesday evening, April 14, 2021, and extending until sundown, April 15, 2021. (Technically, on the Hebrew calendar, the 5th of *Iyar* is Independence Day, but this year that date falls on Shabbat, so the observance was moved earlier on the calendar.)

There are many programs and offerings - all online of course - that your communities may want to highlight for your members. We'd like to shine a spotlight on just a few that look enticing to some of us on staff, and we're always interested in hearing from you about what kinds of programs you are offering - just send us an email and let us know!

Meanwhile, here are a few offerings available to the general public that may be of interest:

**Monday, April 12, 2021 - 8 pm Eastern US: Unique Flavors of Yom Ha'atzmaut** - a free, online live and participatory cooking experience, led by Kara Rosenwald, who hosts [Cooking with a Jewish Twist](#). This event is being offered through the generosity of the Bureau of Jewish Education of Chicago. Use [this link to register](#) - there's a suggested donation but it is not required in order to participate. Kara is a Minneapolis based chef who has led virtual Jewish cooking experiences for many synagogues during the pandemic.



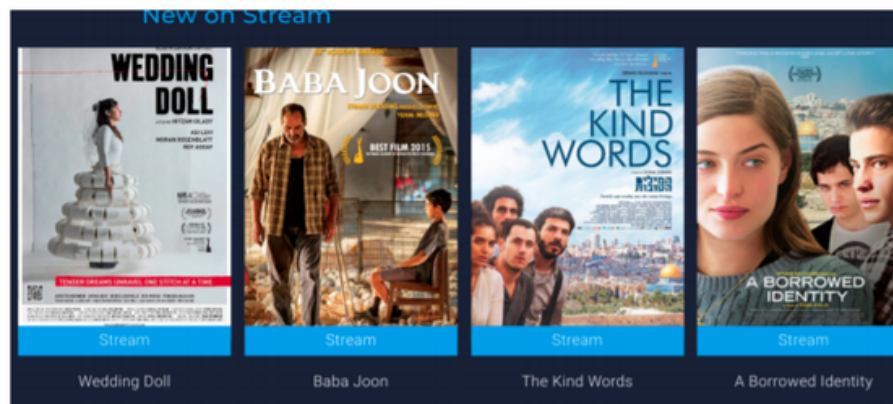
**Tuesday, April 13, 2021 - 1:30 pm Eastern US: Annual Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony.** This annual gathering drew 9,000 attendees in person in 2019, and then moved to Zoom in 2020 as the pandemic took hold. The 2020 online event drew over 200,000 participants worldwide. This year's online event is expected to be the largest Israeli-Palestinian peace event in history. Sponsored by Combatants for Peace and The Parents' Circle. [Register for free at this link.](#)



**Thursday, April 15, 2021 - 1 pm Eastern US: *Humans of Israel*:** Explore and celebrate the diversity of Israel with Erez Kaganovits and his fascinating photo exhibit, *Humans of Israel*. This event is part of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh's *Yom Ha'atzmaut* celebration, and it is open to all who wish to register at no charge. Kaganovits is a photographer, speaker, and the artist behind the *Humans of Tel Aviv*, *Humans of Israel*, and *Humans of the Holocaust* projects. You can learn more about Erez's process by watching his TEDx talk on [storytelling](#). You can register for this event by [clicking here](#).



Finally, if you'd just like to take in a contemporary Israeli film, you can stream lots of them anytime for a nominal rental fee by visiting <https://israelfilmcenterstream.org/>.



With blessings and good wishes for a new Israeli year of health, hope, compassion, and peace,

Maurice on behalf of the Department for Thriving Communities

# President & CEO

## Public Representation

Reconstructing Judaism's President & CEO, Rabbi Deborah Waxman, represents the movement in several Israeli and Zionist organizations:

- She is a member of the ARZENU delegation to the World Zionist Congress.
- She is the deputy chair of the Committee on Ethics, Standards and Governance of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) Board of Governors.

In addition, she sits on Jewish Together, a gathering of the CEOs of networked organizations convened by the Jewish Federation of North America, and brings a Reconstructionist perspective when Israel is discussed.



## Travel and Engagement in Israel

Deborah travels to Israel at least once/year to attend the JAFI Board of Governors meetings or for other reasons (e.g., study tour for CEOs of the Jewish Social Justice Roundtable, present a paper at the World Union of Jewish Studies conference, attend the World Zionist Congress). She usually engages with Reconstructionists there and meets with or does programming for aligned Israeli organizations.

## Writing

Deborah regularly writes op-eds or thought pieces that address Israel exclusively or in part. For example (all examples hyperlinked):

- ["A Clarion Call against Ethnonationalism"](#) (January 24, 2023)
- ["The Situation in Hebron Is Oppressive"](#) (December 14, 2022)
- ["Responding to antisemitism by growing community, deepening commitments and building coalitions"](#) (October 27, 2021)

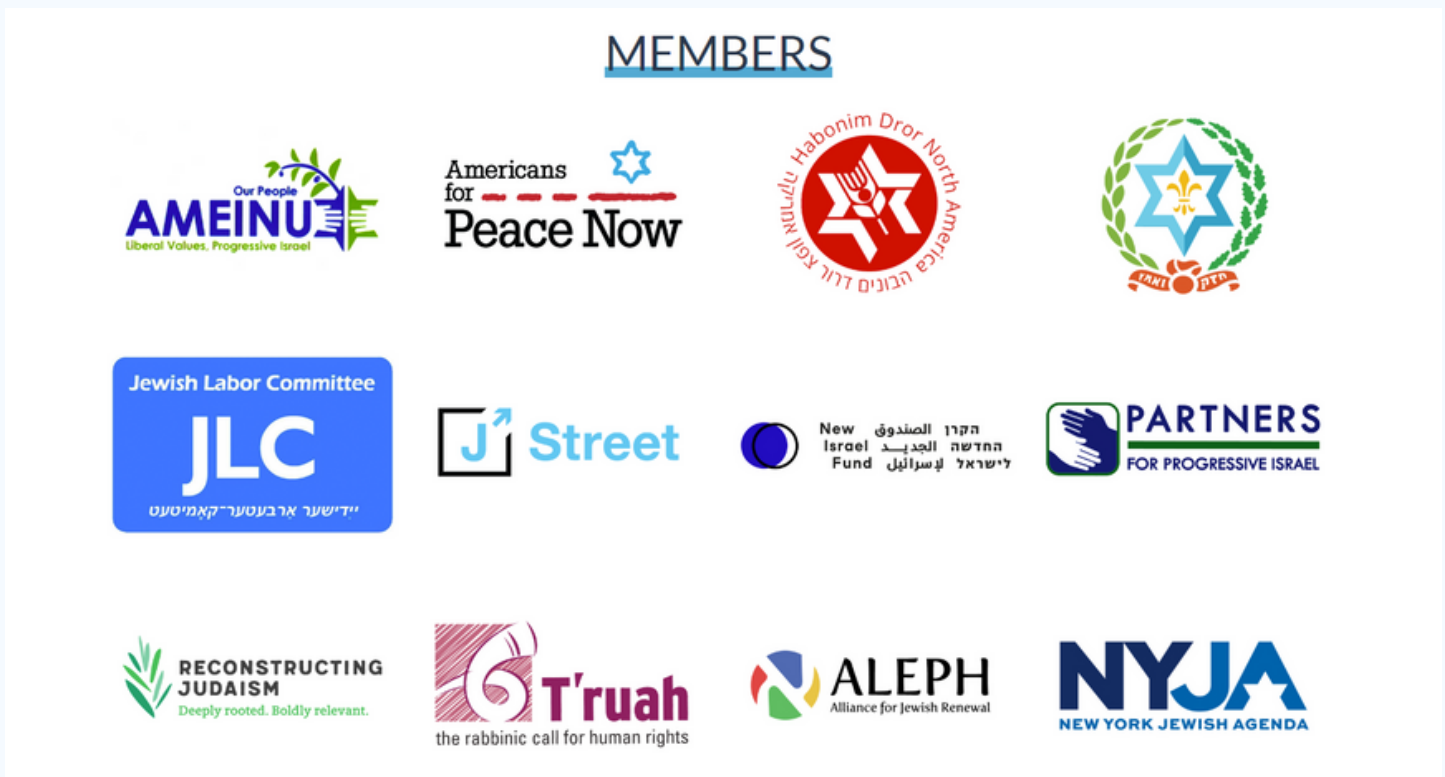
# Partnerships

## Progressive Israel Network (PIN)

Reconstructing Judaism is a founding member of the Progressive Israel Network (PIN). PIN brings together 12 organizations representing Americans who are committed to pursuing democracy, equality and peace in Israel. The coalition provides a strong, unified voice in support of its members' common goals: democracy and equal rights, religious freedom and pluralism, and a two-state solution that would secure a peaceful future for Israel and an end to a military occupation now well into its sixth decade.

The Network weighs in on significant challenges that face Israel and the US-Israel relationship. It coordinates campaigns designed to mobilize the majority of American Jews who share its progressive values and goals, supports the work of Israeli progressives, and advocates for the US government to adopt policies that further Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Network fights against US and Israeli policies that promote annexation, entrench occupation, undermine human rights and corrode liberal democracy in Israel.

You can see more about PIN's work at [www.progressiveisraelnetwork.org](http://www.progressiveisraelnetwork.org).





# Public statements on current events: a brief report on 2020 - 2022

Sometimes Reconstructing Judaism and/or the RRA issue what are known as Emergent Event Response Statements (EERS). These are public statements that are made through an emergency decision-making process described in the bylaws of the Board of Governors of Reconstructing Judaism and agreed to by the RRA. When major news events occur, sometimes the leadership of Reconstructing Judaism and/or the RRA determine that it is important to issue an EERS.

*Below are examples of some of the 22 EERS's we issued 2020 - 2022. The examples below only include the titles of each statement - they are all hyperlinked for those who would like to read them in full online:*

[Statement on the Formation of a New Israeli Government \(Nov 18, 2022\)](#)

[Reconstructionist movement in solidarity with Israeli organizations protesting raids on Palestinian human rights groups \(August 24, 2022\)](#)

[The occupation is at the heart of the stream of painful headlines coming from Israel \(June 2, 2022\)](#)

[A mid-Passover message during a time of pain in Israel and Palestine \(April 20, 2022\)](#)

[Statement on Terrorist Attacks in Israel \(April 8, 2022\)](#)

[Responding to Amnesty International's report on Israel and the charge of apartheid \(Feb 7, 2022\)](#)

[Reconstructing Judaism and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association join letter urging US Senate to fund Iron Dome replenishment \(Jan 14, 2022\)](#)

[Reconstructing Judaism joins Progressive Israel Network to welcome indefinite postponement of settlement construction in E-1 Area \(Jan 11, 2022\)](#)

To access all our statements over the past several years, visit:  
<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/positions-by-topic/Israel/>

# Congregations

In December 2021, the Joint Israel Commission (JIC) surveyed Reconstructionist congregations about what kinds of Israel-related programming they do, what challenges they experience, and what kinds of support they would like to receive from the movement. Here is the executive summary from their report on the survey (full report available [here](#)):

In December 2021, 46% of Reconstructionist congregations completed a survey about their programming around Israel and issues related to Israel/Palestine. About one third regularly or extensively offer such programming. Many of the others said they are planning to start or would like to start such programming. Half the congregations say that people in their congregation want such programming and more than half (54%) say that people appreciate their own and/or the JIC's programming.

Major obstacles to offering programming included: (1) fear of dividing the congregation, (2) previous negative experiences, (3) not knowing how to start or lead in this work. A high proportion of respondents showed interest in most of the topics about which the JIC is considering preparing resources. They also indicated which topics are the highest priority. Over 71% of respondents said they would find the following JIC resources useful: study guides, JIC-recommended literature and films, and speakers and facilitators both within and outside of Reconstructing Judaism.

One of the key findings of the survey:

**Most Reconstructionist congregations offer Israel and Israel/Palestine programming, and they do so in varied ways.**

About three-quarters (77%) of the responding congregations offer some programming around Israel or Israel/Palestine. They do this in a variety of ways:

- Host or co-host events - 41%
- Include in children's curriculum - 34%
- Include in adult education programs - 39%
- Other - 11%

## Specific kinds of programs offered included:

- Several congregations attended (and deeply appreciated) Rabbi Maurice Harris's seminars on the dual narrative history of the conflict (offered through Dept for Thriving Communities).
- One congregation has a speaker series run by volunteers who bring in four speakers a year alternating right and left-wing perspectives.
- Another congregation organized a series of eight events including one on the Jerusalem Declaration vs. the IHRA definitions of antisemitism and another on colonialism in Israel. A member there sponsored virtual tours of Israel.
- Another congregation's post b'nai mitzvah program will explore issues related to Israel/Palestine.
- One congregation has explored Israeli poetry and music and their Federation's "Young Emissaries" also offers programs with the adults each year.
- A congregation offered nine sessions from the Shalom Hartman iEngage series, "Jewish Values and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

## Specific examples of programs offered by Reconstructionist congregations include:

<p>Kehilat HaNahar - New Hope, PA, USA</p>	<p>"Mid-East Peace" - Dr. Christopher Mott, research fellow at the Institute for Peace &amp; Diplomacy, led a discussion.</p> <p>"Pre-Zionist Migrations from Russia to Palestine" - Dr. Eileen Kane.</p>
<p>Dor Hadash - Pittsburgh, PA, USA</p>	<p>"Disturbing the Peace" - Documentary about Combatants for Peace, followed by discussion with two members of the organization.</p> <p>"Two Sided Story" film screening/discussion. About the Parents Circle - Bereaved Families Forum.</p>
<p>Congregation Beth Hatikvah - Summit, NJ, USA</p>	<p>Rabbinic intern Adam Cerino-Jones taught a Lifelong Learning course on the history of Zionism.</p> <p>Year-long monthly class on Israel for teens</p>
<p>Adat Shalom - Bethesda, MD, USA</p>	<p>Israeli Dancing for Beginners</p> <p>Home to Israeli shaliach, Idan Sharon</p> <p>"Social Justice &amp; Law in Israel" - talk by Tammy Harel Ben-Shahar, the Director of Haifa University's Pro Bono Law Clinic</p>
<p>Congregation B'nai Israel - Media, PA, USA</p>	<p>Israel Trip - April 2022</p> <p>Lecture: "What about Israel?" with Debra Shushan of J Street and Ken Klothen of New Israel Fund</p>

Specific examples of programs offered by Reconstructionist congregations (continued):

Temple Hillel B'nai Torah - West Roxbury, MA, USA	"Family trip to Israel with a dual-narrative lens" with MEJDI Tours. Oct 2022. "Blue Box" documentary film screening and discussion.
Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation - Ann Arbor, MI, USA	AARC Book Group discussion of Tom Segev's, A State at Any Cost: The Life of David Ben-Gurion. Virtual Tour of Jerusalem's Silwan/City of David with Emek Shaveh, an Israeli NGO working to defend cultural heritage rights and to protect ancient sites as public assets that belong to members of all communities, faiths and peoples.
West End Synagogue - New York, NY, USA	THE VOICES OF JERUSALEM - Rabbi Donna Cephas presents an interactive workshop in which Jewish, Muslim and Christian women speak of their lived experiences.
Congregation Dorshei Tzedek - Newton, MA, USA	"Reasons for Hope: On the Ground in Israel" presentation by Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum. Shavuot - outdoor event featuring Israeli singing and dancing. CDT Film Club screened several movies on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Kehillat Israel - Pacific Palisades, CA, USA	A Taste of Israel - Passover Edition Israel Matters Presents: Conversation with Amb. Dennis Ross
Dorshei Emet - Montreal, QC, Canada	"Wine Journey - an Israeli adventure with Guy Haran"
Havurah Shalom - Portland, OR, USA	Hand In Hand schools program featuring Arab and Jewish educators. Multiple film screenings and discussions.
Nafshenu - Marlton, NJ, USA	Congregational trip to Israel w/Ayelet Tours - July 2022
Jewish Community of Amherst - Amherst, MA, USA	"Humans of Israel" photography exhibit. "Biblical Motifs in Modern Israeli Poetry" class with Israeli scholar Dr. Rachel Korazim Rabin Memorial event with Dr. Rachel Korazim
Cong B'nai Israel - Willimantic, CT, USA	"Us, Them, and We - Equal rights and how to avoid self-victimizing" with Palestinian-Israeli musical artist, Mira Awad. Zoom.

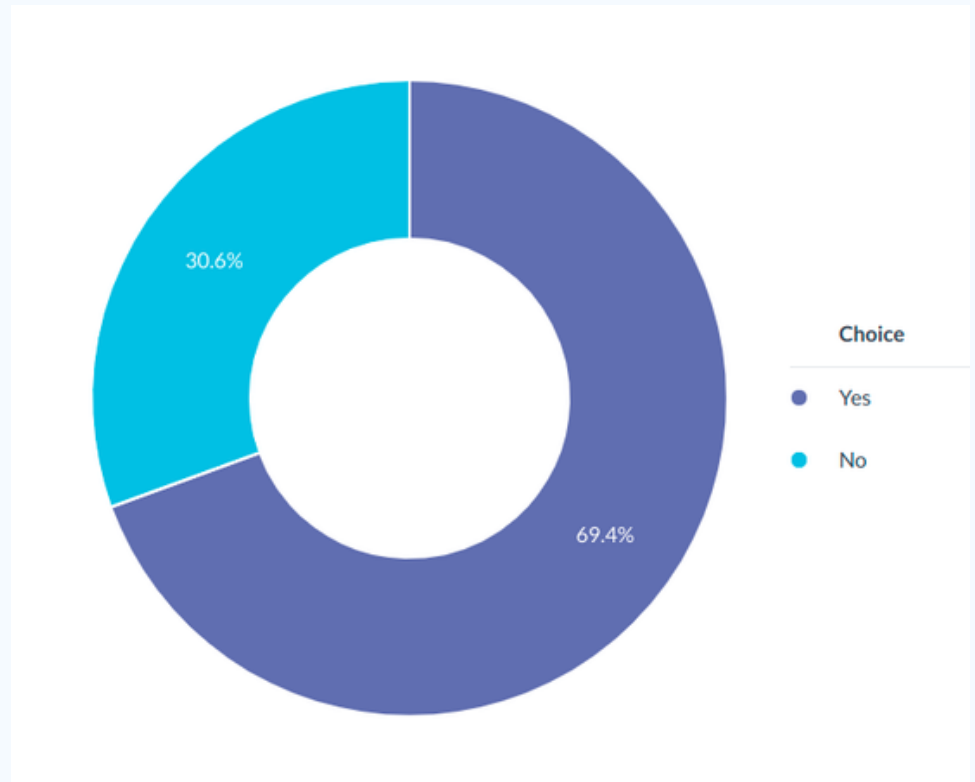
Specific examples of programs offered by Reconstructionist congregations (continued):

<p>SAJ - New York, NY, USA</p>	<p>SAJ's lasting legacy in Israel: A Conversation with Rabbi Haim Shalom of Kehillat Mevakshei Derech in Jerusalem</p>
<p>Temple Beth Hatfiloh - Olympia, WA, USA</p>	<p>"Understanding Israel." Prof. Nancy Koppelman explores 12 features of Israel's history, diverse ethnic and religious ways of life, governance and justice structures, and educational system.</p>
<p>7 congregations co-sponsored one or both of these independent webinar series in 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregation Dorshei Tzedek (MA)</li> <li>• Congregation Shaarei Shamayim (WI)</li> <li>• Israel/Palestine committee of Havurah Shalom (OR)</li> <li>• Kadima Reconstructionist Community (WA)</li> <li>• Kol Tzedek (PA)</li> <li>• Mishkan Shalom (PA)</li> <li>• Or Haneshamah (ON)</li> </ul>	<p>Webinar Series: "Reconstructionists Expanding Our Conversation about Israel/Palestine - Speaker Series with Reconstructionist Rabbis"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wednesday, January 12 - Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, "Reconstructionism Without Zionism"</li> <li>• Wednesday, January 26 - Sarah Brammer-Shlay, Solomon Hoffman, and Rachel Kipnes, "'We Find Ourselves in Tears': A Conversation About Israel/Palestine with Reconstructionist Rabbinical Students"</li> <li>• Wednesday, February 9 - Rabbi Brant Rosen, "Decolonizing Jewish Liturgy"</li> <li>• Tuesday, February 22 - Rabbi Toba Spitzer, "A New Conversation: A Land for All"</li> <li>• Wednesday, March 9 - Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, "From Preschool to Birthright: A Critique of Israel Education"</li> <li>• Wednesday, March 30 - Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari, "Becoming an Abolitionist: Antiracism and Antizionism"</li> <li>• Tuesday, April 12 - Rabbi David Teutsch, "History and Challenge: Reconstructionism, Zionism, and the Two-State Solution"</li> <li>• Tuesday, April 26 - Rabbi Brian Walt, "Nakba Denial and Teshuva/Reparations"</li> <li>• Wednesday, May 11 - Open Conversation</li> </ul> <p>Note: over 1,100 people registered for the above sessions.</p> <p>Webinar Series: "Palestinian Voices: Expanding the Reconstructionist Conversation on Israel/Palestine"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wednesday, September 14: Rashid Khalidi, "The 100 Years' War on Palestine"</li> <li>• Tuesday, October 18: Nadia Sa'ah, "The Nakba: Palestinian History through Testimonies and Images"</li> <li>• Tuesday, November 1: Yafa Jarrar, "The West Bank: Life under Apartheid"</li> <li>• Tuesday, November 15: Basma Fahoum, "Palestinian Citizens of Israel"</li> <li>• Tuesday, November 29: Jihad Abusalim, "Light in Gaza: Reflections on Gaza's Past, Present, and Future"</li> <li>• Tuesday, Dec. 13: Sa'ed Atshan, "Jerusalem: The Politics of Coexistence"</li> </ul> <p>Note: data not yet available for registration numbers.</p>

## Rabbis and Cantors of Reconstructionist Congregations Speaking and Writing about Israel

Clergy who serve 36 different Reconstructionist congregations took part in a brief survey in December 2022 asking them about whether they had spoken or written about Israel in their community between 2020 - 2022, and if so, what kinds of speaking or writing they did.

**During 2020 - 2022, did you give any talks or publish any writing about Israel, whether or not you addressed issues relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?**



Among those who did speak or write about Israel during that time period, the frequency with which they did so varied dramatically. Several did so 3 or fewer times during that 3-year span. Several did so between 5 and 9 times. And several did so more than 10 times, and in a few cases more than 15 times. The average number was 7 times over the 3-year span.

In what manner did they speak or write about Israel? They did so through sermons, prayers and kavvanot during services, and as part of panel presentations. They wrote in newsletters, on listservs, in weekly emails, and in op-eds in Jewish or secular press. Sometimes they wrote crisis-response emails to congregants, taught classes, or introduced guest speakers.

What did they speak or write about? The responses reflected a tremendous range of topics, including politics, prayer, art, poetry, travel, family ties, culture, peacebuilding, and Jewish and Reconstructionist values. Almost all who did talk or write about Israel in their community addressed aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Several mentioned that they did some of their speaking and writing during and after congregational trips to Israel and/or the Palestinian territories. A smaller number mentioned having spoken or written about Israeli poetry and music, about spiritual and liturgical connections to Israel, or about engaging in group learning with Israeli congregants or members of outside Jewish organizations.

## Examples of rabbis'/cantors' writing and speaking on Israel in Reconstructionist congregations:

Rabbi Barbara Penzner, Temple Hillel B'nai Torah - West Roxbury, MA, USA	"I Stand with Those Who Stand with Others" - May 13, 2021
Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari, Kol Tzedek - Philadelphia, PA, USA	"One Thing I Ask" - Yom Kippur, 2022
Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb, Adat Shalom - Bethesda, MD, USA	"Frequent mentions, in kavanot during prayer, discussions of Recon/Kaplan. Taught on Jewish concepts of home, leaning on Zionist thought, & on Shmita, which involves Eretz Yisrael..."
Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, Cong. Sha'arei Shamayim - Madison, WI, USA	"Collective Teshuvah: Taking Responsibility for Past and Present Injustices" - Yom Kippur, 2021
Rabbi Toba Spitzer, Cong. Dorshei Tzedek - Newton, MA, USA	"We have an Israel-Palestine Peace listserv, and there I share things... I gave a R. H. sermon on "Loving All Who Dwell on the Land," and presented about my recent trip to I-P with clergy... Occasionally when things flare up (e.g. May 2021 Gaza war).
Rabbi Ruhi Sophia Motzkin Rubenstein, Temple Beth Israel - Eugene, OR, USA	"On Kol Nidre 2021, the necessity of recognizing complexity and humanity in the conflict, and of finding "the Israel you want to support." That fall, hosted a zoom series of Israeli NGOs presenting their work, including: Standing Together/Omdim B'yachad, Roots/Shorashim/Judur, & Bereaved Families' Forum."
Rabbi Shawn Zevit, Cong. Mishkan Shalom, Philadelphia, PA, USA	Rabbi Zevit is the contact for the Israel committee whose activities are online at <a href="https://mishkan.org/committee/israel">https://mishkan.org/committee/israel</a> .
Rabbi Elliott Tepperman, Bnai Keshet - Montclair, NJ, USA	"Newsletter responses to terror attacks. I wrote about my trip to meet with peace and justice groups. We have also hosted speakers including Breaking the Silence, Standing Together, R' David Teutsch from JStreet and Sally Gottesman from Encounter. We have had 3 setting the table style facilitated discussion with R' Ezra Weinberg. I try to always say something at services when Israel/Palestine is in the news."
Rabbi Mike Rothbaum, Cong. Bet Haverim - Atlanta, GA, USA	Used J Street Rosh Hashanah Handout. Wrote d'var on Shlach Lecha / Morah Torah for T'ruah website.
Rabbi Jamie Arnold, Cong. Beth Evergreen - Evergreen, CO, USA	I joined in two series we ran on Israel led by the shaliach from Denver Federation and an Israeli congregant. I spoke about Israel several times from the bimah, including on Y.K., as part of a theme "having difficult conversations" I spoke of a rabbinic trip to the west bank with Rabbis for Human Rights.
Rabbi Les Bronstein, Bet Am Shalom Synagogue - White Plains, NY, USA	"Divrey Torah linking, say, Abraham and Sarah's 'call' with the deeper moral commitment their covenant entailed; tying this 'call' to the duty of Jews to demand of ourselves a moral compass for Israeli society. Articles/d'rashot calling for Israel's centrality in modern Jewish existence AND the compulsion to demand that Israel practice human rights across the board..."

## **Concluding Summary about Congregations:**

The data above highlighting different kinds of events and programs that took place within our congregations over the last 3 years is an unscientific sampling. Nevertheless, as a movement of just under 100 congregations, even these imprecise measurements of Israel-related activities help us form a rough sketch. What does that sketch reveal?

In sum: most Reconstructionist congregations offer programming on Israel and in particular regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and most rabbis and cantors serving Reconstructionist congregations speak and/or write about Israel in their communities. The amount and types of programming and content vary, though most of the congregations offering programming include some aspects of the challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the mix. While there are some congregations that prefer to refrain from doing Israel programming that directly addresses politics, they are in the minority in our movement.

For this report, we have much more data about adult-centered programming than we do about how religious schools and teen programs approach Israel as an educational and identity-forming component of their curricula.

In this data we can see that some of our congregations organize Israel trips. Some offer a mix of cultural, historical, and political events and courses, while others focus strongly on contemporary politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The pandemic appears to have sparked a permanent increase in the popularity of using Zoom to do programs with a wide array of guest speakers, including speakers from Israel, the Palestinian territories, and other guests with strong ties to the region.

A review of many congregational newsletters, d'var Torah archives, and High Holy Days sermons shows that most clergy serving our congregations write or speak about Israel, including sensitive political and moral issues, though how often they do and what they have to say varies.

A brief note about the two independently-organized webinar series described above (the "Expanding the Reconstructionist Conversation" series): these series demonstrate that there are some congregations within the movement that want to expand discussions about Israel/Palestine to include speakers and viewpoints that fall to the left of longstanding official positions of the central organizations of the movement.

Overall, the majority of our congregations are engaging Israel and Israel/Palestine issues to some degree. While there are sometimes concerns that their leaders struggle to navigate regarding the costs of risking controversy within their membership, generally speaking our congregations are not so fearful that they refrain from engaging some of the challenging issues. That said, there also are some congregations that do little or no programming or discussion of Israeli politics or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, possibly due to concerns about potentially divisive conflicts that such programming may evoke among members.



# The JIC - Joint Israel Commission

The Joint Israel Commission (JIC) has created several substantial educational resources and presented webinars relating to those resources. These are:

- **[Antisemitism and Israel-related Speech: a Resource Guide for Reconstructionist Communities](#)**
  - This resource is designed to help people across the movement learn about some of the current competing definitions of antisemitism, and in particular, to learn about how each of them addresses the intersection of antisemitism and Israel-related speech. It has four sections:
    - Five contemporary different definitions of Antisemitism that address Israel-related speech. These definitions differ with one another on important points.
    - Two essays by Reconstructionists from very different perspectives.
    - Ideas for how to use these resources for discussion and study in congregations.
- **[A Brief History of Annexation: A JIC Resource for Study and Discussions](#)**
  - An educational tool to stimulate discussion by providing information and historical background to those who want to learn more about annexation so they can participate in discussions and come to their own conclusions.
- **[Two States and Beyond: A JIC Resource for Study and Discussions](#)**
  - A compilation of online articles offering a range of perspectives about the future of Israel, the occupied territories, the two-state solution, and the possible resolution of the conflict. The JIC seeks through these readings to inform our communities, stimulate discussion, and raise awareness about differing Jewish views on pathways to peace.

## Shutafut

The JIC's Shutafut ("partnership") project has a twofold mission: to inform and to connect. Shutafut seeks to inform Reconstructionists worldwide about remarkable organizations in Israel that may interest people in the movement. In addition, it seeks to identify ways that congregations, rabbis, and individuals across the movement can connect with these organizations if they wish.

Shutafut has presented two webinars featuring guest speakers from 6 organizations working on the ground in Israel in areas such as religious pluralism, shared society, and peace and justice work. Organizations include BINA: The Jewish Movement for Social Change, Hiddush: Freedom of Religion for Israel, Women Wage Peace, the Hinam Center for Social Tolerance, AJEEC-NISPED, and Standing Together / Omdim B'Yachad.



# The JIC - Joint Israel Commission

## Advisory Role to Leadership of Reconstructing Judaism and the RRA

The JIC's members are always invited to offer feedback on public statements issued by the RRA or Reconstructing Judaism on Israel-related events. When time permits, the JIC is invited to comment on draft of public statements before they are released.

In addition, from time to time leaders of the two central organizations of the movement have met with the JIC to discuss matters of institutional process, especially relating to emergent-event-response-statements, as well as larger questions regarding longstanding movement positions regarding Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Visit the JIC online at [www.reconstructingjudaism.org/israel/joint-israel-commission/](http://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/israel/joint-israel-commission/).

## Congregations that have been represented on the JIC:

Ann Arbor Reconstructionist Congregation (Ann Arbor, MI, USA)  
Bet Am Shalom (White Plains, NY, USA)  
Bnai Keshet (Montclair, NJ, USA)  
Congregation B'nai Israel (Willimantic, CT, USA)  
Congregation Beth Hatikvah (Summit, NJ, USA)  
Congregation Dorshei Tzedek (Newton, MA, USA)  
Havurah Shalom (Portland, OR, USA)  
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation (Evanston, IL, USA)  
Jüdische Gemeinde Michelsberg (Wiesbaden, Germany)  
Kehillat Israel (Pacific Palisades, CA, USA)  
Kol Emet (Yardley, PA, USA)  
Kol HaLev (Cleveland, OH, USA)  
Mayim Rabim (Minneapolis, MN, USA)  
Mishkan Shalom (Philadelphia, PA, USA)  
Or Haneshamah (Ottawa, ON, Canada)  
Sha'arei Shamayim (Madison, WI, USA)  
Shir Hadash (Milwaukee, WI, USA)  
Shir Hadash (Wheeling, IL, USA)  
Temple Beth Israel (Eugene, OR, USA)  
Temple Israel (Duluth, MN, USA)  
University Synagogue (Irvine, CA, USA)  
West End Synagogue (New York, NY, USA)

## RRA Members who have served on the JIC:

Rabbi Kevin Bernstein  
Rabbi Sarah Brammer-Shlay  
Rabbi Donna Cephas  
Rabbi Michael Cohen  
Rabbi Megan Doherty  
Rabbi David Goodman  
Rabbi Marisa James  
Rabbi Amita Jarmon  
Rabbi Donna Kirshbaum  
Rabbi Rebecca Lillian  
Rabbi Vivie Mayer  
Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz  
Rabbi Steve Segar  
Rabbi Ezra Weinberg  
Rabbi Michal Woll

Reconstructionist Judaism has long viewed Israel as an essential element of Jewish peoplehood. Throughout Havaya Summer Programs, Israel has been – and continues to be – a core component of Havaya's educational mindset. Through its participation in the Goodman Camping Initiative from the Foundation for Jewish Camp and The iCenter, hiring shlichim through the Jewish Agency for Israel, and in working with master educators to develop itineraries for Havaya Israel, camp continually strives to provide opportunities for kids to connect in personally meaningful ways to the people, land, and culture, of Israel.

## Teaching Israel at Camp

October 29, 2018 @ Rabbi Isaac Saposnik

Camp Havaya programs cultivate a love of Israel in campers, and present Israel realistically. Campers learn how to listen deeply to those with whom they disagree.

We're often asked how we think about Israel education at Camp Havaya. Our response is generally the same: We want our campers to see Israel like they see their family—they love it, but sometimes it can make them angry. Our goal is to help campers build the love so that when the anger and challenge inevitably come, they can grapple with it from a place of deep commitment, rather than as a disconnected outsider. We take this work seriously; in all of our programming (about Israel and pretty much everything else), we aim to be as honest as possible, which means showing nuance even when it might be far easier to be one-sided. We work to give our campers age-appropriate opportunities to explore some of these complexities in a place that, at its core, is deeply committed to Israel and it being the best it can be. As is often the case, we're at the forefront of this work, boldly leading with our values.



Rabbi Isaac Saposnik

Full text of this article available at:

<https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/havaya-israel/>

Rabbi Isaac Saposnik, Executive Director of Havaya Summer Programs, writes:

Since 2007, we have taken over 450 teens to Israel as their capstone Havaya experience. This summer (2023), we'll have 50 teens with us! We're proud to have been a RootOne trip provider since the inception of RootOne. Our itineraries are unique and powerful. To the best of our knowledge, Havaya offered the first summer Jewish camp teen trip to bring kids to Bethlehem in the West Bank. We also have Israeli teens join us for the second half the trip as full participants.

We often tell teens our goal is for them to come home thinking differently than when they left. We strive to provide opportunities to encounter varied experiences and viewpoints that help them build personal connections and make up their own minds. We aim to be as honest as possible, with a focus on meeting people from a myriad of backgrounds who can help them gain a better understanding for what life is really like in this amazing place. (And, of course, we want them to have an amazing, fun, inspiring experience with their peers!)

# Ritualwell

From the Ritualwell website ([www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)):

"Ritualwell is the most extensive online resource that curates original Jewish rituals for Jews and fellow seekers. We publish rituals, ceremonies, prayers and poems to mark sacred moments in Jewish life."

Ritualwell has a large archive of poems, prayers, songs, and other art regarding Israel. New content is published regularly.

Prayer for the State of Israel updated to be inclusive of all its inhabitants

*Last modified August 30, 2022*

## #JusticeBlessings: A Shmoneh Esreh for Israel

Blessings for Israel to be used in the Amidah

*Last modified August 30, 2022*

## Prayer for Peace in Israel during Wartime

Prayer for peace in Israel

*Last modified August 22, 2022*

## Tefilah L'medinat Yisrael: Prayer for the State of Israel

Prayer for the State of Israel from the Recons...

*Last modified August 22, 2022*

## No Pain Like My Pain

*by Rabbi Tamara Cohen*



*(Lamentations 1:12) – for Tisha b'Av 5774/ 2014*

That's how it feels, dear God.  
That's how it felt to the lamenters exiled and Temple-shorn.  
That's how it feels to each grief-wracked mother, father, sister, son, family, nation.

הִבִּטּוּ וּרְאוּ אִם יֵשׁ מִסָּאֵב כַּמִּסָּאֵבִי

"Look carefully and see if there could possibly be pain like my pain, like the one bestowed by You upon me."

No pain like my pain,

## Israel

*by Frederick R. Weinstein*



ndow  
od,  
eeze  
is word;  
g in the light of his vision,

one breath, one life.

My body, this wall of Herodian stone,

# Evolve

From the Evolve website ([www.evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org](http://www.evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org)):

"Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations is an initiative of Reconstructing Judaism. We seek to promote the ongoing evolution of the Jewish community by facilitating communal conversations about the urgent issues of our day.

Evolve does not endorse every viewpoint posted on this site. Our goal is to cultivate groundbreaking, constructive, respectful conversations about urgent issues of concern. We choose to post submissions of a range of viewpoints that supports constructive debate while abiding by the values of tzelem Elohim (regarding and treating all people as created in the divine image), kavod (respect), redifat shalom (pursuing peace) and makhloket leshem shamayim (disagreements for the sake of heaven)."

Evolve includes a large archive of essays on Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and new essays are published regularly.

The screenshot displays the Evolve website interface. At the top left is the logo "EVOLVE" with the tagline "GROUNDBREAKING JEWISH CONVERSATIONS". To the right of the logo is a search bar and navigation links for "About" and "Contact". Below the logo is a breadcrumb trail: "Home » Topics » Israel/Palestine". The main heading is "Israel/Palestine". Three article cards are visible:

- Kaplan, Herzl and the Current State of Israeli and American Politics**  
December 6, 2022 @ Marc Overbeck  
Theodor Herzl supported a Jewish state, but not at the expense of humanistic and democratic ideals that allow all people to share equally in the benefits of the state.  
[Read More](#)
- Jewish Peoplehood, Israel and Reconstructionist Judaism**  
June 23, 2022 @ Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso  
Our movement's position papers that criticize the State of Israel are imprudent and dangerous.  
[Read More](#)
- Moving Ahead Without Leaving Anyone Behind: A Loving Strategy for Bold Leadership**  
May 31, 2022 @ Rabbi Sarah Brammer-Shlay  
Ahavat yisrael – the love of the Jewish people – is actually a belief that Jewish people always have the ability to evolve.  
[Read More](#)

# Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

RRC's core values include:

## **Ahavat Yisrael: Love of Israel**

- Ahavat Am Yisrael: Love of the Jewish People--We share responsibility for the flourishing of the Jewish People
- Ahavat Eretz Yisrael: Love of the Land of Israel--We value the Land and State of Israel as a spiritual, intellectual, and historical center of the Jewish people.

RRC aims to train rabbinical students to understand and appreciate the importance of Israel in Judaism and Jewish life, in Reconstructionism, and for rabbinic leadership; to help them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to speak about Israel with informed sensitivity to and for their diverse communities; and to help them enable others, Jews and non-Jews, to engage in constructive study, dialogue and action related to Israel.

While RRC encourages all rabbinical students to spend a semester or year living and studying in Israel, RRC requires all students to participate in our summer term Israel program before the beginning of year 4. The RRC Israel program is designed to cultivate the following objectives:

- Demonstrate familiarity with Israel's place in the history of Jewish civilizations and knowledge of the complexities of Israel and Israeli society.
- Gain familiarity with practical resources based in Israel for use in the Reconstructionist rabbinate.
- Develop Hebrew-language skills to increase facility with classical texts and maximize achievement of the other Israel Program objectives.
- Establish a foundation for an ongoing, lifelong relationship with Israelis and Israel

Students who are enrolled at least half-time during the academic year prior to their Israel summer will receive a grant from RRC that will cover 100% of the tuition and fees for the academic program, which includes cocurricular activities. Participants are expected to pay for their own travel and living expenses.

In addition, programming and conversations about Israel occur regularly as part of RRC's academic program.



# Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

This report does not cover the Israel-related activities of the RRA. However, it is important to stress that throughout this report, wherever you have read about Reconstructionist rabbis and cantors engaged in teachings, programs, writings, and community service relating to Israel, you have been reading about examples of the RRA's impacts on Israel-related activities. The RRA and its members' contributions are woven throughout much of the work described above in this report.

Through the leadership and presence of its CEO, Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, the RRA also speaks out on its own behalf and represents the Reconstructionist movement on these issues in its own way. For example, Rabbi Wechterman participated in a recent Jewish social Justice RoundTable Mission to Israel/Palestine and was a coordinator of a rabbinic mission in early November 2022. Recently as well, the RRA held a day-long mifgash (gathering) and study session in Jerusalem with 20 rabbis, half of whom are Israeli citizens/residents and half of whom were visiting from North America.

The RRA itself, as an organization, engages in a broad range activities, study, discussion, learning, and other activities involving Israel. These include webinars, newsletter articles, trips to Israel and Palestine, discussions on current Israel events, and serving as the primary professional clergy association for a number of rabbis who are Israeli citizens.

The Joint Israel Commission, while staffed by Reconstructing Judaism, is a collaboration between Reconstructing Judaism and the RRA. It is co-led by a lay chair who sits on the board of Reconstructing Judaism and by a rabbinic chair selected by the RRA, and 4 to 5 additional rabbis who serve on the commission.

Finally, in order to fully appreciate the work of RRA members regarding Israel, it is also important to consider the hundreds of RRA rabbis who do not work at Reconstructionist congregations. In those many different contexts and organizations, RRA members write, teach, travel, organize, study, and serve on committees and boards of organizations deeply involved in different aspects of Israel and Israeli-Palestinian issues. So while the RRA's activities are beyond the scope of this report, it is helpful to keep in mind that the RRA has been and will continue to be highly generative of activities in this arena.

