

# AN INTRODUCTION TO RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM



*What is Reconstructionist Judaism?  
Explore the history, values, and ideology of the  
Reconstructionist Movement.*

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# Introduction

## What is Reconstructionist Judaism?

The name “Reconstructionism” was adopted by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan in the 1920s to communicate that Judaism itself—its structure, beliefs, rituals, customs and culture—must be “reconstructed” in each generation to renew its relevance and ensure its sustainability. We are proud to carry on Kaplan’s legacy of grounded, purposeful and brave innovation.”

(Source: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/reconstructionism/>)



## How to Use This Resource

There are many ways you might use this resource in your educational program. Here are a few suggestions:

- Provide a copy to all teachers in order to familiarize them with Reconstructionist Judaism
- Choose topics in this packet to explore with students
- Use the activities and classroom reference guides with your students
- Answer questions from families and potential members about the unique offerings of a Reconstructionist education



**Looking for quick answers? Check out the FAQs about Reconstructionist Judaism**

<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/teaching-reconstructionism-frequently-asked-questions>

# Who's in the Reconstructionist Movement?

**1**

**Rabbinical School**

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

<https://rrc.edu/>



**1**

**Summer Camp**

Camp Havaya

<https://camphavaya.org/>



**95**

**Affiliate Congregations**

6 Countries

3 Continents



**400**

**Reconstructionist Rabbis**

<https://therra.org/>



**15500**

**Affiliated Families**





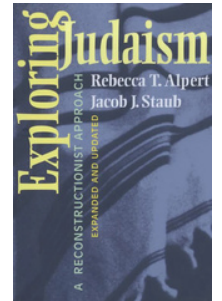
# Reconstructionist Resources

The Reconstructionist Movement has a wide variety of resources to serve our communities and individuals.

## Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach

*By Rabbi Rebecca T. Alpert, Ph.D. & Rabbi Jacob J. Staub, Ph.D.*

From Kaplan's belief through contemporary innovations, this engaging text explores Reconstructionist views on God, ethics, Zionism, spirituality, text study, Tikkun Olam, life cycle ritual, intermarriage, gay and lesbian issues... and more!



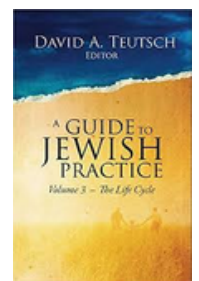
## Evolve (Podcast)



Evolve: Groundbreaking Jewish Conversations promotes the ongoing evolution of the Jewish community by grappling with urgent issues: race, climate change, Israel-Palestine and many others.

## Guide to Jewish Practice (edited by Rabbi David Teutsch)

This three volume series contains a wealth of information about all aspects of Jewish life through a Reconstructionist lens: rituals, Shabbat and holidays, life cycles, daily practice, theology and Jewish thought.



## Hashiveinu (Podcast)



Hashiveinu is a podcast about Jewish teachings and practice around resilience. Cultivating resilience in challenging times, both individually and collectively, is an essential path to personal renewal.

## Reconstructing Judaism

Reconstructing Judaism cultivates, provokes and inspires a deeply rooted, boldly relevant and co-created Judaism that provides individuals and communities with tools to lead lives of meaning and joy.



### Ritualwell.org



An extensive online database that collects original Jewish rituals. Check out Ritualwell to find rituals, ceremonies, prayers, poems and thoughtful writing about life cycles, Jewish holidays and customs, Shabbat, healing, and more.

### Siddur Kol Haneshamah

The Siddur offers a Reconstructionist liturgy, along with contemporary commentary and prayers. It also contains poetry and readings for holidays and life cycle moments. There is a Weekday Siddur, a Shabbat Siddur, a High Holiday Makhzor, and a Prayers for a House of Mourning booklet.



### Siddur Kol Ha'Noar: The Voice of the Children



A siddur for children in kindergarten through 2nd grade (ages 5-8) and their families. Durable, full-cover hardbound containing services for Shabbat evening and morning in accessible English, Hebrew, and transliteration.

# Timeline

1881 Mordecai Kaplan born in Lithuania (his family moved to the United States in 1889)

1902 Mordecai Kaplan ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America

1910 Rabbi Kaplan joined faculty of JTS, where he taught for 53 years

1913 Mordecai Kaplan began keeping diaries, which he continues to write through the early 1970s

1915 Kaplan's radical rethinking of Judaism first documented in articles

1922 Establishment of Society for the Advancement of Judaism (1st Recon synagogue created by Mordecai Kaplan)

1922 Judith Kaplan Eisenstein's Bat Mitzvah

1934 Judaism as a Civilization published

1935 – 1st issue of the Reconstructionist magazine

1941 Formation of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation

1941 Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation begins printing "The Reconstructionist"

1941 The "New" Hagaddah published

1935-1945 "The Reconstructionist" was the primary voice of American Judaism

1942 Judith Kaplan Eisenstein first woman appointed to the editorial board of The Reconstructionist

1945 The Sabbath Prayerbook published (and burned as heretical by Union of Orthodox Rabbis – Kaplan is “excommunicated”)

1945 Rabbi Ira Eisenstein became the rabbi of SAJ

1953 Equal status for women at SAJ

1954 First Reconstructionist Convention

1954 The Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations was formed

1955 The formal creation of the Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations began with 5 congregations

1959 Rabbi Ira Eisenstein began to actively promote Reconstructionism – Eisenstein became head of the Reconstructionist Federation and edited the Reconstructionist magazine

1968 Establishment of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) with Ira Eisenstein as president

1969 First Woman Rabbinical student at RRC

1974 Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly (RRA) formed

1974 First female rabbi- Sandy Eisenberg Sasso graduated from RRC

1982 An Organizational restructuring of the Recon movement began



1982 Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations

1982 RRC moved to its current location in Wyncote, PA

1983 Mordecai Kaplan died at age 102

1983 Symposium on Inter-marriage

1984 First openly gay and lesbian rabbinical students accepted to RRC

1986 FRCH and RRA passed the “Platform on Reconstructionism”

1989 Kol HaNeshama soft cover Erev Shabbat prayerbook was published

1992 Judith Kaplan Eisenstein celebrates second Bat Mitzvah ceremony at age 82, surrounded by Jewish feminist leaders, and read from the Torah.

1993 Reconstructionism Today created as the publication for members of the Reconstructionist movement

1994 Kol HaNeshama hardback prayerbook series published its first volume –Shabbat V’Hagim

1996 RRC approved rabbinic officiation at same sex commitment ceremonies

1996 Judith Kaplan Eisenstein died

1999 Kol HaNeshama Machzor for the High Holidays was published

1999 Reconstructionist Haggadah – A Night of Questions published

2001 Rabbi Ira Eisenstein died

2001 Ritualwell.org created to collect rituals, prayers and thought pieces

2002 Camp JRF opened at Camp Henry Horner

2002 No'ar Hadash was launched at Montreal biennial convention

2003 "A Guide to Jewish Practice" by Rabbi David Teutsch is published

2006 Camp JRF's inaugural summer at their own camp in Sterling PA

2009 No'ar Hadash Israel Program began

2011 Unification of the Reconstructionist Movement (RRC and JRF merge to recreate Reconstructing Judaism)

2014 Rabbi Deborah Waxman PhD becomes the President of RRC/RJ, and is the first woman and first out lesbian to head a rabbinical school and congregational union.

2015 RRC opens its doors to rabbinical students with non-Jewish partners

2017 Camp JRF becomes Camp Havaya

2017 Rabbi Georgette Kennebrae graduates RRC as the first Reconstructionist trained Black rabbi

2017 Reconstructionist movement adopts Resolution Affirming Full Inclusion of Transgender, Non-Binary Jews

2018 Reconstructionist Rabbinical College celebrates 50th anniversary

2018 Camp Havaya Arts opens

2018 Evolve launches

2022 SAJ celebrates 100th year anniversary

2022 Reconstructing Judaism adopts Resolution on Reparations

2023 Civil Rights Pilgrimage to the South

2023 Rabbi May Ye and Rabbi Asher Sofman graduate RRC as the first Reconstructionist trained Asian American rabbis

2024 Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association celebrates 50 years

# Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan

**Mordecai Menahem Kaplan (June 11, 1881 – November 8, 1983)**

Kaplan was born in Sventzian, Lithuania, to Rabbi Israel Kaplan and Chaya Nehama Kaplan. His family immigrated to New York in 1889, when Kaplan was 8 years old.

He attended City College of New York, received a Masters Degree from Columbia University, and semikha (rabbinic ordination) from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1902. He served



Kehillath Jeshurun, and orthodox congregation from 1903-09. Kaplan then became principal of the newly founded Teacher's Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary; he taught education and rabbinical students at the Seminary until retirement in 1963.

In 1922, Kaplan established the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, according to his ideology, "Reconstructionism" that saw Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. At SAJ, Kaplan created the first recorded Bat Mitzvah ceremony for his daughter Judith, in 1922.

Following the 1945 publication of Kaplan's "The Sabbath Prayerbook", he was excommunicated by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, who publicly burned the prayerbook.

Kaplan died at the age of 102 and is buried in Queens, New York.

*(Source: The Mordecai Kaplan Center for Jewish Peoplehood)*

For an expanded biography of Mordecai Kaplan, check out:  
A Child's Biography of Mordecai Kaplan (by Rabbi Lewis Eron, Nov 2016)  
<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/childs-biography-mordecai-kaplan/>



# Notable Works by Mordecai Kaplan

## **Judaism as a Civilization (1934)**

- American Jews can live in two civilizations with contradiction.
- Peoplehood is a central tenet of modern Judaism and is the cause of Jewish survival throughout the centuries. Judaism is an evolving civilization.
- Torah, revelation and God can and should be understood in a framework of Jewish Peoplehood.

## **The Reconstructionist Magazine (1935-2007)**

- Kaplan, along with other scholars and Jewish thinkers, addressed modern challenges and questions through a Reconstructionist lens.
- The magazine was renamed “The Reconstructionist Journal in 1996 and ended publication in 2007.

## **The New Hagaddah (1941) and The Sabbath Prayerbook (1945)**

- The first Reconstructionist prayerbooks, which integrated Reconstructionist theology and ideology into the liturgy.

## **The Future of the American Jew (1948)**

- Addressing contemporary challenges and opportunities for American Jews, including community, Peoplehood, God and Israel.

## **Questions Jews Ask (1956)**

- A question and answer format to address the modern challenges facing American Jews. Kaplan provides Reconstructionist answers for these contemporary dilemmas.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Kaplan published  
19 books during  
his lifetime



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Kaplan kept journals  
with his thoughts  
and ideas, spanning  
almost 70 years

## (Some of) Kaplan's Big Ideas

### **Jewish Peoplehood**

Judaism is not merely a religion, but a civilization with culture, music, myth, values, and traditions. Peoplehood, and the importance of continued community connection, has helped maintain the Jewish People through the millenium and will continue to do so.

### **Rejecting "Chosenness"**

Kaplan rejected the traditional idea of "chosenness" that could be understood as Jewish superiority, and rather interpreted it as the Jewish obligation to God and the world. This led to liturgical changes in Kiddush and the Torah Blessings, away from language of chosenness.

### **Judaism as an Evolving Civilization**

Jews are dispersed throughout the world and we are impacted by the local communities around us. As a civilization, Judaism continues to evolve to integrate modern ideas, values and technologies. Judaism is not stagnant, but constantly grows and changes.

### **Not a supernatural God**

Kaplan rejected the idea of a supernatural God, as previously understood in Jewish tradition. God is not "believed in", but rather "experienced" in the blessings of daily life and through our actions. God is not an external, supernatural force, but is made manifest through us.

### **Israel & Zionism**

Kaplan believed that establishing a Jewish state was key to Jewish survival. He was influenced by the cultural Zionism writing of Ahad HaAm, and believed that Jewish civilization needed a Jewish environment in order to become fully realized and flourish.

### **A Vote, but not a Veto**

One of Kaplan's famous ideas, "the past has a vote but not a veto" is a Reconstructionist ideology that honors tradition and history, while simultaneously understanding that the wisdom of the past must be integrated with the wisdom of the present.

### **Jewish Innovation**

As Judaism continues to evolve, rituals may be adapted, updated, or even set aside if they no longer hold meaning. The ability to balance traditional practice with modernity is vital to the ever evolving story of Jewish Peoplehood.

### **A Democratic Judaism**

Kaplan promoted the idea that synagogues and Jewish communities should practice democratic leadership, instead of top-down legislation. He advocated for elected leadership, expansive membership and respecting individual religious opinions.

# Want to learn more about Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan?

## The Reconstructionist Archives

### Kaplan Listening Center

*Listen to Mordecai Kaplan's voice as he addresses a variety of issues surrounding contemporary Judaism.*

- Jewish Identity
- Social Justice
- Teaching Reconstructionism
- Israel
- Jewish Identities

*<https://www.correspondingwithkaplan.com/kaplan-listening-center-introduction>*

### Corresponding With Kaplan: Letters From the Reconstructionist Archives

*Read Kaplan's correspondence with scholars, rabbis and Jewish thinkers.*

- Social Justice
- Jewish Education
- Women's Roles
- Zionism
- Kaplan as a Person

*<https://www.correspondingwithkaplan.com/home>*

## The Mordecai Kaplan Center for Jewish Peoplehood

The Kaplan Center shares the writings and thought of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, promoting a Kaplanian approach to 21st century Judaism.

*For more information, check out:*

*<https://kaplancenter.org/>*



# Values Based Decision Making

Values-based decision making (VBDM) has become a catch phrase in Reconstructionist circles, reflecting a desire to develop an orderly and valid process for individuals and groups to decide upon their policies, procedures and behavior. The need for a system as self-consciously considered as VBDM grows out of several realities. Most Jews no longer consider themselves to be bound by halakha, and will not simply accept the opinion of a rabbi.

*(Source: The Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume 1.)*



## When engaging in VBDM, it's important to



- clarify the principles at play to ensure productive conversation
- have a shared understanding of cultural context
- clarify individual and community assumptions, beliefs and moral building blocks
- have transparency and agreement on who will make the final decision

*(Source: The Guide to Jewish Practice, Volume 1.)*

## When do we use VBDM?

Individuals and communities can use VBDM as a way to roadmap and ultimately make decisions.

For example, a community could use VBDM to decide if the synagogue kitchen will be kosher, if they will host programs for political conversations, or if they want to add or change a prayer.





Determine facts, alternative actions and their outcomes

Examine relevant scientific and social scientific approaches to understanding these

Consider the historical and contemporary context, including the history and rationales of Jewish practice

Look for norms that might exclude some actions

Assemble & weigh relevant attitudes, beliefs and values

Formulate decision alternatives

Seek consensus

Make the decision

# Reconstructionist Ideology: God

## “What do Reconstructionists believe about God?”

In this section you will find excerpts from a variety of Reconstructionist thinkers that explore this question and whether “belief” is a helpful framing or not.

### “Do Reconstructionists believe in God?”

Definitely. We believe that there is one God, but there are many ways of understanding and talking about God.

The traditional idea was that God created the universe, gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai and decided each person’s fate, that the Torah was a God-given list of instructions and that Judaism was important because of that direct connection to God.

But Jews have always had a lot of different ways of thinking about God. For most Reconstructionists, God does not decide everyone’s fate individually and intervene in human history through the use of miracles. Exactly what Reconstructionists do believe about God is as unique as each individual. While some feel comfortable with a more traditional way of thinking about God, a God with whom they can be in direct relationship, others perceive God more as a force in the world, and may feel God in the good things in life – when we see a flower, or when we feel better after hurting ourselves. And we may feel God when we act like our better selves – when we help someone, or are nice to someone, or love someone. This is when we see God in action in the world. We can effectively appeal to the natural, inherent spirituality that all children possess, by asking the question not as, What is God, but rather as, When is God.

When we say we believe in God, we are really saying that we believe that people can be good, caring, and loving, and that they can care about things that are bigger than themselves.

(Source: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/teaching-reconstructionism-frequently-asked-questions>)

**“If all conceptions of God are allowed, what do we teach the students? That there might be a supernatural power? That kind of ambiguity would disturb me as a parent.”**

In dealing with issues of faith and belief, there is nothing but ambiguity – certainly nothing can be proven scientifically. In any kind of talking about God, we are in the position of trying to express the inexpressible, explain the inexplicable, and help our students comprehend the incomprehensible. That this is difficult, or is usually done imperfectly, should be of no surprise to us.

Remember first of all that children of different ages are at different stages developmentally, and that the kind of ambiguity and abstract thinking about God that 14 or 15 year olds might understand would be completely incomprehensible to a 4 or 5 year old – and vice versa. (See “Introduction part A: Developmental Introduction” for more on this.) So we need to deal with our students where they are.

Second, all language about God is metaphorical. If we call God Healer, or Peacemaker, or even Father, it is because these words are a metaphor for some aspect of God that we are keying into at that moment. Younger children are more likely to use concrete language to represent abstract concepts, which means that it is our job to point out that no description can capture what God really is. Educating about God is on some level a gradual process of teaching what metaphor is, and how it applies to talking about God, as well as creating an environment that engages with profound and ultimate questions about our lives and our world.

When a question about God’s nature comes up, understand and respect the student’s opinion, and work with them, not to convince them of something else, but to go deeper into their own point of view. Answering, “Yes, that’s one way to view God or God’s presence. What might be another view?” or, alternatively, “What makes you think (picture God) that way?” or

sometimes, “Huh! I might not have thought of that. What does it mean to you when you say \_\_\_\_\_?” fulfills these functions of respect and deepened understanding.

(Source: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/teaching-reconstructionism-frequently-asked-questions>)



### **Reconstructionist Judaism and God, Introduction**

Learn from Rabbi Maurice Harris who discusses Reconstructionist theology and how we can approach teaching children about God and spirituality.

<https://bit.ly/42b0Xw0>

### **Reconstructionist Judaism and God, Developmental Stages**

Listen to Rabbi Maurice Harris talk about how we can teach children about God at their developmental and learning stages.

<https://bit.ly/3DSeApT>



### **Reconstructionist Theology (Mordecai Kaplan)**

“We learn more about God when we say that love is divine than when we say God is love. A veritable transformation takes place. . . .Divinity becomes relevant to authentic experience and therefore takes on a definiteness which is accompanied by an awareness of authenticity.”

“And since faith in God is essentially faith in [God’s] power to redeem [humanity], to lose faith in the potentialities of human nature is to lose faith in God as well. The cynicism that surrenders to brute force, as inevitably supreme, is the ultimate atheism”

(Source: “*The Future of the American Jew*”)



“We must go beyond thinking of God either through naive personification or through philosophical abstraction. Both are inadequate. We should use human experience as the criterion.”

“Translated into action, the doctrine of the unity of God calls for the integration of all life's purposes into a consistent pattern of thought and conduct.”

“Both the creative powers in the physical world and the spiritual forces in the human world that make for personal and social redemption are treated as manifestations of the divine.”

“This effort of life to achieve and express unity, harmony, and integrity is what makes life holy; this is the evidence of the divine, whatever thwarts this tendency is sin.”

*(Source: “The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion”)*

### **Kaplan’s Reframing of God (Rabbi Sid Schwartz)**

“For every traditional Jewish tenet that Kaplan rejected, he offered a positive reformulation:

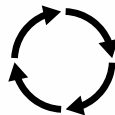
- Rejection: God is not a supernatural being who can suspend the laws of nature or speak to human beings;
- Affirmation: God is a force in the universe or an aspect of reality through which human beings can fulfill themselves, both ethically and spiritually.
  
- Rejection: Jews are not the chosen people;
- Affirmation: Jews do not have a monopoly on religious truth. All religions are symbolic systems that seek to offer their respective adherents a sense of identity and purpose. We cherish Judaism and seek to live in accordance with its values and observances because it gives us a sense of belonging and purpose.

- Rejection: The Bible is not the immutable “word of God” that must be believed and observed literally;
- Affirmation: The Torah is a record of the Jewish people’s search for God or for ultimate truth. For 3,000 years, the rabbis of the tradition have added their wisdom and insights into words that were believed to be God’s. We are the beneficiaries of that wisdom regardless of how the Torah was originally written. We are challenged to study and apply that wisdom to the personal and societal challenges that we face every day.

[...] The operative question for Reconstructionists is not “Do you believe in God?” but rather, “When is God?” [...] Finding God in our lives does not require an embrace of the supernatural. It does require a state of mind that replaces despair with hope. It requires a state of mind that replaces cynicism with faith. It requires a state of mind that replaces apathy with discipline and resolve.

*(Source: “What’s God Have to Do With It?” 2007.*

*<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/whats-god-have-do-it/>*



### **God as Process (Rabbi Toba Spitzer)**

Process theology understands all of reality as a constantly emergent process. In each moment there is an element of novelty, of something new emerging, yet it is shaped by the past, by what has gone before, by the world as it is. That which emerges is shaped by what has gone before but is not determined by it. Chance and contingency are real, and the result is the world of complexity in which we live—a world that is both beautiful and difficult, awesome and dangerous. It is a world in which ever-increasing levels of complexity have led to us, human beings, to a level of consciousness that makes possible both great good and great evil.

In process theology, that which is called God—but perhaps we will call it Ehyeh instead—plays a dual role. It is on the one hand the repository of

possibility, the source of novelty. In the language of our liturgy, God is that which m'chadesh b'chol yom tamid ma'aseh Bereshit—the Power that makes new every day the work of Creation.

[...] I also encounter the persuasive Power of Ehyeh that nudges, encourages, leads me to better attune myself to what it is that the Universe needs from me.

[...] I experience Ehyeh as the Source of Transformation, of the novelty and uncertainty that makes every moment a doorway into something new, something never seen before. With this understanding of Godliness, I try to bless my own uncertainties, to embrace the ways in which I am always in process.

[...] I experience Ehyeh as a profoundly deep well of joy and of love that is expressed in the relational power that suffuses the universe.

*(Source: "Changing the Equation: A Reflection On God", Rabbi Toba Spitzer, 2009. <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/changing-equation-reflection-god/>)*



### **God in Daily Life (Rabbi Jacob Staub)**

God is the Source of the universe. God is therefore met in the laws and cycles of nature, in the expanse of the galaxies, in the miracle of life. Even as scientists explore quarks and black holes, new facets of DNA and new evidence about evolution, we are aware that we will never comprehend it all. But when we catch the breeze on a sunny spring day or watch a toddler take her first step, we get a glimpse of the ineffable oneness underlying it all.

God is the Source of our spiritual and moral passion. The human species may or may not be the crown of creation, but there is definitely a

connection between our minds and souls and the divinely infused world out there. It is as if God's word overflows perpetually, embedded in the color of the sky and the behavior of groups, in test tubes and mathematical formulas, waiting for us to open to its message and interpret it for our lives and time. The more open we are, the more we hear.

God is the source of all our tendencies to help and love and cooperate. It is easy enough for each of us to remain self-centered, not to care about others, to regard others as Other and therefore not worthy of our kindness. Human history documents the prevalence of these tendencies. But there is a divine spark in each of us that can be nurtured, a source of goodness and caring that can move us to act on principle, to do what is right even if it is not in our own best interest in the short term. It enables us to envision a redeemed world so that we can work towards that vision.

*(Source: "How Can Reconstructionists Pray?" Rabbi Jacob Staub, 2016.)*



### **God Loves the Stranger (Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg)**

To see and understand this is the purpose of practice. To provide the social and cultural conditions to deepen this understanding is the purpose of all efforts toward justice and peace. The idea that God loves the stranger unites our inner work and our outer work. The inner work shines light, again and again, on the false conclusions I draw about my self. When I look carefully, calmly, through the lens of divine love, I see that I am none of these labels. I am indeed a stranger even to my own awareness. Now I inhabit this mood, this moment of joy or sadness, fear or envy, generosity, clarity, or confusion. Then it changes.

When I remember that God loves the stranger, the very category of stranger ceases to have meaning. God's love is undifferentiated,

unconfined, unlimited. It is an expression of the reality of deepest unity and interconnection of all life in the cosmos, drawn from a single source, ever spiraling, expanding, and returning. All other beings are working with their own limited ideas of who they are and who I am, just as I am working with mine. There is no difference that is substantial.

When I am receptive to the love of the stranger who lives within my own heart and mind, I can extend this love to the other, to one I think I know and to one I do not know. Without exception. This attitude aspires to create a world that is moving toward a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, a world of respect and sharing, a world saturated with the recognition of unity and love.

*(Source: "God Loves the Stranger", Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg, 2017.*



### **Holiness (Rabbi Elyssa Cherney)**

... the smallest acts of kindness, showing up as community whether it's asked of you or not, going the extra mile in helping your children achieve their goals, and leading by example, do matter. In fact, I think this is how we create holiness. Through our actions, by example, we teach holiness.

We may think of it as emulating the holy one, we may not. But when we do our best to listen to others, to show up, to volunteer, to make our community grow, holiness is created. It isn't tangible, and I don't think we can see it. But we can certainly feel holiness. You can feel what it is to be cared for by another member of your community, by your family, by your friends. You can walk into a room and feel that others believe in your success. You can feel the distinction between ordinary conversations and extraordinary ones. And you can in fact seek holiness.

*(Source: "Finding Holiness in Everyday Experience", Rabbi Elyssa Cherney, 2016.*  
<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/finding-holiness-everyday-experience/>

## **God is the Space Between Us (Rabbi Alex Weissman)**

God is the space between the one that needs and the one that is needed. God is the invisible connective tissue that brings us together. God does not solve our problems; God is the possibility of solving our problems together.

*(Source: "God is the Space Between Us", Rabbi Alex Weissman, 2020.  
<https://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/god-is-the-space-between-us/>*

**Looking for more writing on Reconstructionist theology? Check out [www.reconstructingjudaism.org](http://www.reconstructingjudaism.org)**



# Reconstructionist Ideology: Jewish Peoplehood

When Kaplan said that “belonging precedes believing,” he wasn’t saying that belonging was necessarily more important than believing. He was making what was to him a statement of fact: that human beings form their belief systems in the context of community, within a particular culture and civilization. And even more than cultural context, a person’s civilization—especially his or her religious civilization—is the vehicle for that person’s “salvation,” meaning, for Kaplan, the fulfillment of his or her potential as a human being. People need community because it is only in the communal context, and in relation to their history and inherited belief systems, that they can discover meaning and attain the highest human values.

And even more: for Kaplan, the ethnic or religious group had a kind of creative energy, as well as a group consciousness, that gave life to those values and ideals, that shaped them over time. Kaplan understood that ideas and beliefs couldn’t exist in a vacuum, didn’t float “out there” in some detached way. They were the organic outgrowth of vital, meaning-making communities.

*“Peoplehood” Reconsidered”. Rabbi Toba Spitzer. 41st JRF Convention, 2006.*



For Mordecai Kaplan, one of the most important Jewish thinkers of the Twentieth Century, belonging to the Jewish people was central to the Jewish experience. A person might or might not believe in God or Jewish rituals (though incidentally, he both believed and practiced), but as Jews we share a civilization that has spanned thousands of years with a common history, language, literature, music and tradition. While other denominations of Jewish life emphasize behavior and/or belief as the primary aspect of Jewish identity, Kaplan focused primary on the third “b” – belonging.

“Kaplan’s purpose in developing the idea of Peoplehood was to create an understanding of Judaism broad enough to include everyone who identified as a Jew regardless of one’s individual understanding of or approach to that identity. Kaplan was radical in proposing an organizing principle, Peoplehood, that ran counter to the American ethos of the day, transcended Jews’ understanding of what lay at the root of their identity, and insisted that the Jewish enterprise was not an end in itself.

[...] Making Peoplehood primary implies that Judaism is, at its core, a family of families, which is Kaplan’s definition of a civilization. It means that while Judaism contains beliefs, creed is not primary; while it contains timetested patterns of behavior, halakha is not primary. Embracing Judaism as a civilization, as an ever-changing, evolving family of families rather than as a divinely-ordained belief or behavioral system means embracing a people-centered Jewish life.”

*“The Primacy of Peoplehood.” Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz. Contact Magazine, 2008.*



Covenant is an ancient Jewish concept that puts relationships at the center. Where the Torah and Jewish liturgy emphasize the hierarchal nature of covenant, with God as King or Judge, I, as a child of democracy, am emphasizing covenant on a horizontal axis. For many of us, it is in our relationships with family and friends that we experience the Divine, in the interactions we have with one another. After the teachings of Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, we can know that godliness is present when we bring to life the characteristics attributed to God, when we act with mercy or lovingkindness or in healing ways – to and with each other.

Building covenantal community means that we articulate our values and our commitments – across generations and across differences. We talk together to articulate norms that translate them into day-to-day living. We pledge to continuously build up the skills and the structures to nurture relationships. Guided by Jewish values and the needs and aspirations of other members of our community, we consider where and when we submerge our individual aspirations on behalf of something bigger than ourselves.

*‘Covenantal Community’ and Classical Reconstructionism.” Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph.D. 2024.*



# Reconstructionist Ideology: Israel

## What is the place of Israel in Reconstructionist thinking?

Mordecai Kaplan was a Zionist and believed that Jewish long term survival and success depended on developing a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael. He also believed that a Jewish state would be intertwined with Diaspora Jewish life.

“We consider the establishment of Palestine indispensable to the life of Judaism in the diaspora. We seek to enable Jewish civilization so to root itself in the soil of Palestine as to make of that land the cultural center for Israel’s intellectual and spiritual rebirth. We oppose any attempt to render Palestine the object of imperialist aims or the victim of private profit-seeking. We endorse every effort to reward the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth in Palestine based upon social justice and social cooperation.” (The Reconstructionist 1.1, January 1935, p. 4.)

“We must drive home the realization to Jews the world over that Palestine and the Diaspora are joint partners in a common endeavor. One without the other, one to the exclusion of the other, one at the expense of the other, will lead to the demoralization of both. What we are trying to do is not to establish one kind of life in the Diaspora and another in Palestine. We are trying to establish a new type of Jewish life for Palestine and the Diaspora. The richness and the vitality of this new life will depend upon the extent to which both are interdependent, and sustain each other. Just as much as Palestine is the affair and the creation of the Diaspora, so Palestine must realize that the Diaspora is its affair too.” (The Reconstructionist 2.6, May 1, 1936, p. 13.)

Peaceful coexistence with the Arab population in Palestine was always a part of the Reconstructionist Zionist platform.

“We Jews have suffered sufficiently from fascist tyranny. We shall have suffered in vain unless that suffering shall have taught us to appreciate tolerance, democratic procedure, and civil liberty. Incidents ... will only tend to alienate the progressive elements of the world—and those of Jewry included—from the cause of Zionism.” (The Reconstructionist 3.6, April 30, 1937, p. 4.)

The Reconstructionist has repeatedly maintained that lasting peace in Palestine will not be realized until Zionists formulate a clear and unequivocal program of cooperation with the Arab people. The events of the last months have revealed that such a program is indispensable.” (The Reconstructionist 3.2 March 5, 1937, p. 3.)

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Reconstructionist Movement remained critical of the interweaving of state law and religion:

“Our own position on the religious issue in Israel has been frequently expressed. We are opposed to all forms of religious authoritarianism and clericalism. We believe that religion must operate thru persuasion and not by the police power of the state.” (The Reconstructionist 17.1, February 23, 1951, p. 8.)

The Reconstructionist Movement posited that the creation of a Jewish state was not the ultimate goal of Zionism, rather, that lived Jewish values were key:

“The State of Israel does not coincide with the Jewish People, neither is it co-extensive with the whole of Jewry. We Jews have to maintain our historic position that a state is not the supreme form of human association. Only those who are actively united for the furtherance of universal freedom, justice and peace, whether they be few or many, constitute the supreme form of human association.” (The Reconstructionist, 15.7, May 13, 1949.)

“World Jewry without Eretz Yisrael is like a soul without a body; Eretz Yisrael without World Jewry is like a body without a soul.” (Kaplan, “A New Zionism”)

While acknowledging Israel's security as a priority, the Reconstructionist Movement has maintained a position that Israel's security is dependent on negotiation for a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians:

“The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association expresses its support for those elements in the Israeli population and government which believe that direct negotiations with the representatives of the Palestinian people are imperative if the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states is to be resolved peacefully and justly.

We recognize that Israel has the ultimate responsibility to make decisions regarding her security. Yet we express our conviction that Israel's security is ultimately dependent on the achievement of a negotiated resolution rather than on perpetual control of the territories. We further believe that the unique partnership between Israel and the North American Jewish community mandates that we share our concerns with Israel, and that we do so out of love and respect for Israel as the Jewish homeland.” (RRA Resolution, 1988)

“At this time, we reaffirm the JRF Resolution on Israel, which states, in part: “We call for a just and lasting peace that will protect Israel's right to a secure existence and that will also fulfill the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. Such a peace will require Palestinian leaders and heads of Arab governments at long last to acknowledge Israel as a permanent state in the region and to renounce all violence directed against the Jewish homeland.” We therefore urge the Palestinian leadership to halt the violence and return to the negotiating table. We also urge Israel to address the legitimate social and economic grievances of its Arab citizens, as well as to pursue negotiations and an end to the cycle of violence with the Palestinian people. (JRF, 2000)

*(Source: “A History of Reconstructionist Zionism.” Rabbi David Teutsch PhD, 2016)*



## **Where We Stand:**

### **The Reconstructionist Movement, Israel and Zionism (2024)**

From our movement's beginnings in the 1920s, we have expressed a deep commitment to the flourishing of Jewish life in the Land of Israel based on principles of democracy, Jewish religious pluralism, Jewish cultural renewal and the pursuit of compromise and peace with the Palestinians. In the decades since 1967, when Israel began its military rule over the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza and began building Jewish settlements there, the central organizations of our movement have approved multiple resolutions and published substantive reports calling for an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the following five principles:

1. Securing Israel's place in the Middle East as a Jewish and democratic state according to the vision expressed in its Declaration of Independence;
2. Ending Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza;
3. Halting the expansion of settlements in those same territories;
4. Establishing a democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel within final borders to be agreed by both parties; and
5. Supporting Israeli and Palestinian negotiations seeking to achieve mutually agreed creative compromises to resolve the complex issues involving Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees.

*(Source: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/israel/>)*

**Looking for more details about the Reconstructionist movement and Zionism today? Check out Frequently Asked Questions: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/israel/frequently-asked-questions/>**

## Reconstructing Judaism is a member of the Progressive Israel Network (PIN).

“Grounded in our Jewish and democratic values, the Progressive Israel Network calls to action all those who are committed to Israel’s future as the national homeland of the Jewish people and as a democracy that lives in peace and security with its neighbors.”  
(<https://www.progressiveisraelnetwork.org>)

The Reconstructionist Movement identifies as Progressive Zionist.

Since 1980, the Reconstructionist Movement has published over 20 resolutions and reports focused on Israel

## The Joint Israel Commission

The Joint Israel Commission (JIC) is comprised of 11 lay people, 5 rabbis, 1 RRC faculty member, and 1 RRC student.

JIC members live all over the world. They represent a wide range of politics, personal experiences, and connections with Israeli society. One of their goals is to carry on civil and respectful discussion and debate even on difficult topics. The JIC also seeks to develop resources for Reconstructionist communities and rabbis that help them engage Israel discussions constructively and bring Reconstructionist values to bear on these matters.

(<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/israel/joint-israel-commission/>)

# Reconstructionist Ideology

Looking for more information about Reconstructionist Ideology?  
Check out these resources from Reconstructing Judaism:

**“Let’s Journey Together”**

<https://youtu.be/0sYI0EcpnLM>

**“Peoplehood Explained” (Rabbi Lina Zerbani)**

<https://youtu.be/h4aZ-l4qXgw>

**“Evolving Religious Civilization Explained” (Rabbi Sandra Lawson)**

<https://youtu.be/Bq0phEk6wiU>

**“How Prayer Lives Outside the Synagogue Walls” (Rabbi Koach Frazier, Au.D.)**

<https://youtu.be/SVtEgeB0WfU>

**“Inclusion is a Bagel” (Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari)**

<https://youtu.be/ZFWc03-zwZc>

**“What is the Center for Jewish Ethics?” (Rabbi Mira Wasserman, Ph.D.)**

<https://youtu.be/de2E6O6SXRY>

**“Shared Values and Multiple Opinions: Reconstructionist Congregations and the Israel-Hamas War.” (Rabbi Maurice Harris)**

<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/article/shared-values-and-multiple-opinions-in-reconstructionist-congregations/>

**Harmoniyah Music Collective Archive**

<https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/harmoniyah/>

# Differences in Movements

“How is Reconstructionist Judaism similar to or different from other denominations?”

Here are a few aspects that make Reconstructionist Judaism unique.

*It's important to remember that Reconstructionist Jews hold a diversity of beliefs and ideas, including some that differ from the official ideology of the Movement. Similarly, not all Conservative or Reform Jews believe or practice exactly the same way. The differences highlighted below are based on the official positions of the different denominations.*

## God & Theology

### Reconstructionist

- God is the sum of natural powers that push humanity towards living moral and just lives.
- Searching for meaning, study and ritual, ethics and social justice all help us to experience God

### Reform

- God and Israel are members of a holy Covenant expressed through the Torah and ever-evolving tradition.
- Acting ethically is a way of connecting to God.

### Conservative

- God is the Creator who spoke the word into being. The Torah is God's direct Revelation to humanity. God and Israel are members of a holy Covenant.

## Halakha (Jewish Law)

### Reconstructionist

- Performance of religious rituals by choice, not commandment
- Democratic decision making for community standards of practice

### Reform

- Performance of religious rituals based on person or communal choice
- Halakha is part of Jewish tradition, but holds an advisory (not authoritative) place

### Conservative

- Halakha is central to Jewish tradition and should be maintained by communities and individuals.
- Decisions are made by rabbis and carry authoritative weight<sup>36</sup>

## Decision Making

### Reconstructionist

- Communities engage in a process of inclusive and participatory learning in order to make democratic and informed decisions together.

### Reform

- Individuals & communities make religious decisions by accounting for all relevant factors and choosing accordingly.

### Conservative

- Rabbis are trained to be deciders for their communities, based on their knowledge of Jewish law and process.

## Chosenness

### Reconstructionist

- Jews not superior nor divinely set apart. Jews choose to engage with our tradition and living morally upright lives.
- Removed language of chosenness from the liturgy.

### Reform

- Jews are chosen to bear witness to the oneness of God and to serve as a light to the nations through ethical action.
- Maintained language of chosenness in the liturgy.

### Conservative

- Jews are chosen by God and honor the Covenant by adhering to the teachings of the Torah.
- Uses language of chosenness in the liturgy.

## Who is a Jew?

### Reconstructionist

- A person with a Jewish parent (of any gender) or who has undergone the conversion process is considered Jewish.

### Reform

- A person with a Jewish parent (of any gender) or who has undergone the conversion process is considered Jewish.

### Conservative

- A person with a Jewish mother or who has undergone the conversion process is considered Jewish.

# Reconstructionist Organizations

There are multiple organizations that support individuals, communities, and those who want to learn more about Reconstructionist Judaism.

## Camp Havaya

A summer camp based in Reconstructionist ideals, Havaya provides an opportunity for campers to discover how Jewish values are relevant to their own lives while exploring their own Jewish identities. Havaya's guiding values are: belonging, believing, derekh erez, and becoming. For more information, check out: <https://camphavaya.org>

## Reconstructing Judaism

The primary organization of the Reconstructionist Movement, Reconstructing Judaism cultivates, provokes and inspires a deeply rooted, boldly relevant and co-created Judaism that provides individuals and communities with tools to lead lives of meaning and joy. For more information, check out: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org>

## Reconstructionist Educators of North America (RENA)

RENA is a professional group for leaders of schools in Reconstructionist congregations. RENA provides educators with networking opportunities, professional development and peer support. For more information check out: <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/rena>



## **Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA)**

The RRA is the professional association of Reconstructionist rabbis. The RRA provides collegial support, represents the rabbinic voice of the movement, helps define the Reconstructionist position on Jewish issues today, and represents the Movement to the wider Jewish community. For more information, check out: <https://therra.org>

## **RitualWell**

RitualWell is an extensive online database that collects original Jewish rituals, ceremonies, prayers, poetry, and thoughtful writing. Topics range from Jewish holidays, Shabbat, holidays, life cycles, healing, everyday holiness, to current events. For more information, check out: <https://www.ritualwell.org>

# Reconstructionist Milestones

- 1922 Society for the Advancement of Judaism established in NYC as the first Reconstructionist synagogue
- 
- 1968 First Bat Mitzvah (Judith Kaplan Eisenstein)
- 1968 Reconstructionist Rabbinical College opens in Philadelphia
- 
- 1969 First women admitted to RRC
- 
- 1983 Symposium on interfaith marriage
- 
- 1984 Openly Gay and Lesbian students accepted at RRC
- 
- 2015 RRC opens doors to students with non-Jewish partners
- 
- 2017 Resolution Affirming Full Inclusion of Transgender, Non-Binary Jews
- 
- 2023 Resolution on Reparations
- 

# Activities

*Below are some suggested activities for teaching about Reconstructionist Judaism*

## **Reconstructionist History**

- Invite students to choose an event on the Reconstructionist timeline and explore it more deeply. Look at the historical context of these moments and ask students to figure out why and how this moment was pivotal for the American Jewish community.
- Do a deep dive into learning about Mordecai Kaplan, his writings, beliefs and ideas.
- Learn about Judith Kaplan Eisenstein and the first Bat Mitzvah. Students could stage a pretend interview with Judith or with other people who might have been present. Compare Judith's experience of becoming Bat Mitzvah with the ceremonies most students are familiar with today.

## **Exploring the Siddur**

- Invite students to explore Siddur Kol Haneshamah. How is it laid out? What commentaries or additional readings can they find? What spiritual language resonates with them and what feels hard to connect with? Ask students to choose a prayer and write their own commentary or poem to accompany it.

## **Personal Stories**

- Invite community members to share their own stories. If they grew up in the Reconstructionist movement, what was that like? What changes have they seen in their lifetime? If they came to the movement later as an adult, what drew them to Reconstructionist Judaism?
- Invite the rabbi and leaders in the community to share their stories and talk about it means to them to be a Reconstructionist leader.

## **Reconstructionist Values**

- Ask students what they personally think about a given topic, and to share the Jewish values and ideas that shape their understanding.
- Ask students to choose one of the Reconstructionist values and explore it more deeply. How does this value show up in your community? How could the community engage more with this value? What could students do to teach the community the importance of this value?
- Invite students to choose a topic of debate and have them engage in the VBDM process. With a larger class, split them into groups and encourage them to explore the topic and make a decision together (each group may come to their own conclusion). Example topics: should the synagogue kitchen be kosher or vegetarian or neither? Should we celebrate Purim on the actual day or on the closest weekend? Should our school/synagogue implement a rigorous recycling and composting program? If Hanukkah and Christmas fall on the same day, should the synagogue host an interfaith holiday party?
- Have students read one of Resolutions written by the RRA or the Movement. Ask them to identify and discuss the values at play (and possibly in tension) in the resolution. Students can decide as a group if they would come to a different conclusion and explain what values drive their decision.

## **Jewish Peoplehood**

- Explore the idea of Jewish Peoplehood. Encourage students to share their own Jewish journeys and articulate what is most important to them about Judaism, Jewish identity and Jewish community.
- Students could create a visual or performance art piece about Jewish Peoplehood.

# Classroom Reference Guides

The next few pages are intended for you to share with families, hang in your classrooms, or use for teaching about Reconstructionist Judaism.

- Big Ideas in Reconstructionist Judaism
- Timeline of Reconstructionist Judaism
- Who was Mordecai Kaplan?

# Big Ideas in Reconstructionist Judaism

## **Jewish Peoplehood**

Judaism is not merely a religion, but a civilization with culture, music, myth, values, and traditions. Peoplehood, and the importance of continued community connection, has helped maintain the Jewish People through the millenium and will continue to do so.

## **Rejecting “Chosenness”**

Kaplan rejected the traditional idea of “chosenness” that could be understood as Jewish superiority, and rather interpreted it as the Jewish obligation to God and the world. This led to liturgical changes in Kiddush and the Torah Blessings, away from language of chosenness.

## **Israel & Zionism**

Kaplan believed that establishing a Jewish state was key to Jewish survival. He was influenced by the cultural Zionism writing of Ahad HaAm, and believed that Jewish civilization needed a Jewish environment in order to become fully realized and flourish.



## **Judaism is an Evolving Civilization**

Jews are dispersed throughout the world and we are impacted by the local communities around us. As a civilization, Judaism continues to evolve to integrate modern ideas, values and technologies. Judaism is not stagnant, but constantly grows and changes.

## **Not a supernatural God**

Kaplan rejected the idea of a supernatural God, as previously understood in Jewish tradition. God is not “believed in”, but rather “experienced” in the blessings of daily life and through our actions. God is not an external, supernatural force, but is made manifest through us.

## **Jewish Innovation**

As Judaism continues to evolve, rituals may be adapted, updated, or even set aside if they no longer hold meaning. The ability to balance traditional practice with modernity is vital to the ever evolving story of Jewish Peoplehood.

## **A Vote, Not a Veto**

One of Kaplan's famous ideas, "the past has a vote but not a veto" is a Reconstructionist ideology that honors tradition and history, while simultaneously understanding that the wisdom of the past must be integrated with the wisdom of the present.

## **Democratic Judaism**

Kaplan promoted the idea that synagogues and Jewish communities should practice democratic leadership, instead of top-down legislation. He advocated for elected leadership, expansive membership and respecting individual religious opinions.





# Belonging

The idea of Jewish peoplehood is central to Reconstructionism. Jews share binding ties that cut across differing practice, beliefs, and national boundaries, binding us together through a common history and shared destiny. At the same time, Reconstructionists reject the traditional notion of Jews as the Chosen People: we take pride in our distinctiveness and sense of vocation at the same time as we affirm the dignity and potential sanctity of all faiths and peoples.

# Behaving

Judaism is an evolving religious civilization. For it to remain living, we must reach out and take hold of Jewish practice, reshape it, and make it new for each generation. Reconstructionist communities study our inherited traditions and shape their practices with the assumption that the past has a vote, but not a veto.

# Believing

Reconstructionists hold diverse ideas about God, but we share an emphasis on Godliness—those hopes, beliefs, and values within us that impel us to work for a better world, that give us strength and solace in times of need, that challenge us to grow, and that deepen our joy in moments of celebration. Recognizing that all descriptions of God are metaphor, our prayerbooks offer images of God that go far beyond “king of the universe.”



# Reconstructionist Judaism

## Timeline

**2024**

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association celebrates 50 years

**2022**

Reconstructing Judaism adopts Resolution on Reparations

SAJ celebrates 100th anniversary

**2017**

Rabbi Georgette Kennebrae graduates RRC as the first Reconstructionist trained Black rabbi

Reconstructionist movement adopts Resolution Affirming Full Inclusion of Transgender and Non-Binary Jews

Camp JRF becomes Camp Havaya

**2014**

Rabbi Deborah Waxman PhD becomes the President of RRC/RJ, and is the first woman and first out lesbian to head a rabbinical school and congregational union.

**2023**

Rabbis May Ye and Ash Sofman become first Reconstructionist trained Asian American rabbis

Reconstructionist Pilgrimage to the American South

**2018**

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College celebrates 50 years

**2015**

RRC opens its doors to rabbinical students with non-Jewish partners

**2011**

Unification of the Reconstructionist Movement (RRC and JRF merge to create Reconstructing Judaism)

**2002**

Camp JRF opened

**1996**

RRC approves rabbinic officiation for same-sex commitment ceremonies

**1983**

Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan dies

Symposium on Intermarriage

**1969**

First women admitted to RRC

**1954**

The Reconstructionist Federation of Congregations was formed with 5 congregations

**2001**

Rabbi Ira Eisenstein dies

RitualWell.org launches

**1984**

First openly gay and lesbian rabbinical students accepted to RRC

**1974**

Sandy Eisenberg Sasso is the first female rabbi to graduate from RRC

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association is formed

**1968**

Establishment of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) with Ira Eisenstein as president

**1953**

Women are granted equal status at SAJ

**1945**

The Sabbath Prayerbook published

The Sabbath Prayerbook is burned as heretical by Union of Orthodox Rabbis and Kaplan is "excommunicated"

**1941**

Formation of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation

The New Hagaddah published

**1922**

Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ) is founded in NYC

Judith Kaplan Eisenstein becomes first recorded Bat Mitzvah

**1910**

Rabbi Kaplan joined faculty of JTS, where he taught for 53 years

**1881**

Mordecai Kaplan born in Lithuania. His family moved to the United States in 1889

**1942**

Judith Kaplan Eisenstein first woman appointed to the editorial board of The Reconstructionist

**1934**

"Judaism as a Civilization" is published

**1915**

Kaplan's radical rethinking of Judaism first documented in articles

**1902**

Mordecai Kaplan is ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary





# Who was Mordecai Kaplan?

Rabbi Mordecai Menahem Kaplan  
(June 11, 1881 – November 8, 1983)

Hello! My name is Mordecai Kaplan. I was born in Sventzian, Lithuania in 1881.

My family moved to America in 1889, when I was just 8 years old. I went to school in New York City, and became a rabbi and teacher.



I founded the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in NYC and created the first Bat Mitzvah ceremony for my daughter, Judith.

I founded the Reconstructionist Movement.



I believed that Judaism needed to be reconstructed for the modern era. I taught that Judaism is an evolving civilization and that the key to Jewish survival is Jewish Peoplehood. I was a Zionist, and believed that the Jewish People needed a modern State where they could fully live their Jewish lives.

