

Toward a Redefinition of Reconstructionism

By DANIEL GOLDMAN CEDARBAUM

“... at seventy to ripe old age, at eighty to remarkable strength. . .”

—*Pirke Avot* 5:21

The celebration of the 70th birthday of this great journal that so long served as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of Reconstructionism seems an appropriate moment to reflect on the current state and the future of our movement. On an institutional level, the central organizations of the movement — the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College — are all stronger than at any time in their respective histories. Precisely because of this institutional stability, we now have the luxury of looking seriously at what Reconstructionism, as a philosophical approach to Judaism, should mean as we begin our next 70 years.

Retaining Our Roots

All discussions of Reconstructionism should still begin with its founder, Mordecai M. Kaplan and his 1934 *magnum opus*, *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward A Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*.

Kaplan's program for a radically new approach to American Jewish life, as refined (and to some extent modified) in *The Future of The American Jew* (1948) and subsequent works over his long career, must remain the foundation of any edifice that can properly be called Reconstructionism. But the discussions certainly should not end with Kaplan.

Speaking as a “classical Kaplanian Reconstructionist,” I reject the charge leveled by some critics in the movement that people like me a) insist on treating all of Kaplan's ideas as sacrosanct, and b) refuse to allow for evolutionary change within the very school of thought that believes all healthy religious movements are marked by evolutionary change. Reconstructionism has evolved over the past seventy years, both within and beyond Kaplan's writings, and it should continue to evolve. But in this context I like to keep in mind Rabbi Emanuel Goldsmith's caveat that not all change is evolutionary; indeed, some change is devolutionary. Evolution implies progress, however unfashionable and indefinite the concept currently may be. Excluding women when determining the presence of a *minyan*, to cite one provocative hypothetical, would be a change, but it would certainly not be

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evolutionary.

Moreover, “change for change’s sake,” which seems to be the battle cry of many contemporary Reconstructionists, strikes me as a poor basis on which to make ideological decisions. Those who regard making changes to Kaplanian precepts as self-evidently beneficial remind me of the well-known talmudic story in which the majority of the rabbis present adhere to a particular halakhic conclusion even after they learn that God would have made the opposite decision. Some of our contemporary “change fanatics” seem to be recasting Kaplan in the role of God, and attributing to him what the Talmud purports to be God’s famous observation: “My children have defeated me, My children have defeated me.” That Kaplan may, through his own principles, have conferred on subsequent generations the right to change Reconstructionism tells us nothing about whether making any particular change is a wise thing to do.

Salvation as Central

How then should we decide which parts of Kaplan’s Reconstructionism to preserve, and which to change? Kaplan himself gives us a powerful answer: We should preserve those aspects of classical Reconstructionism that function effectively in promoting “salvation,” in Kaplan’s sense of the term: for the individual, fulfillment through the discovery of ultimate meaning in life; for the community, fulfillment through the realization of its highest ideals. If, after careful consideration, aspects of

classical Reconstructionism are found no longer to support “salvation,” they should be discarded.

Thus far my discussion of evolution within Reconstructionism has been abstract. Turning now to a consideration of paradoxes pertaining to Kaplan’s work and thought will provide a useful framework within which to make my arguments concrete and specific.

The Paradox of Kaplan’s Influence

In his essay, “Kaplan’s Judaism At Sixty: A Reappraisal,” Arnold Eisen provides the following pithy summary of Kaplan’s impact:

Kaplan’s successes were notable. Definition of Judaism as a “civilization” rather than a “religion” quickly became routine. Synagogues by the hundreds turned into community centers. Educators carried Kaplan’s method and his message to Jewish schools across America. And most important of all, perhaps, thousands of Jews who previously had no use for God or synagogues could now feel themselves good Jews, take part in the life of their people and attach themselves to Jewish tradition, thanks to Kaplan’s redefining Judaism in a way that included them.

In other respects Kaplan’s crusade failed dramatically to persuade. Closest to home, the Conservative leadership at the Seminary refused to go along with his reduction of God to an impersonal force and of

halakha (Jewish law) to “folkways.” In the sixties, Kaplan’s followers finally got the master’s blessing for secession from Conservatism and founded a fourth movement, Reconstructionism. It, too, failed to convert the vast majority of American Jews to Kaplan’s banner. Increasingly, it seems, those discontented with existing Jewish patterns have simply abandoned the community and its institutions altogether, while the affiliated have found satisfaction inside existing movements, even when their own personal beliefs and behavior resemble Kaplan’s.

The paradox is striking. Reconstructionism never won mass support and today attracts only about one percent of American Jewry — yet Kaplan’s achievement over the past fifty years has been immense. To a remarkable extent, the analysis and the program set forth in *Judaism as a Civilization* guided and even dominated the whole of American Jewish debate for the rest of its author’s long and active life.¹

Another way to frame Eisen’s paradox is to note that today a significant number of North American Jews outside of the Reconstructionist movement identify themselves as “Kaplanians” but not as “Reconstructionists.” (This group consists disproportionately of Jewish communal leaders, particularly Conservative and Reform rabbis.) Moreover, a significant number of North American Jews within the Reconstructionist move-

ment today claim that they are “Reconstructionists” but not “Kaplanians.” (This group seems to consist disproportionately of Jews under the age of 55.) These paradoxes can be resolved if we can come to understandings of the terms “Kaplanian” and “Reconstructionist” that turn the expressions “non-Kaplanian Reconstructionist” and “non-Reconstructionist Kaplanian” into oxymorons. Doing so is important for the health of the Reconstructionist movement.

In approaching these definitional problems, we should always be asking the question: What justifies our existence as a separate movement, when Kaplan’s commitment to *klal Yisrael* suggested the breaking down of boundaries between Jewish groups? If we cannot identify unique and important contributions that the Reconstructionist movement is making or can make to Jewish life, if all we are or were to become is a smaller version of the Conservative or the Reform movement, then I would want to begin merger discussions with one of those movements. Put bluntly, if Reconstructionism does not and cannot be made to have a unique function in promoting the salvation of the Jewish people, then it should cease to exist as a separate movement.

What is Unique to Reconstructionism?

Returning to foundational principles, we could claim that all Reconstructionists, and all Kaplanians, define Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. This is true, but it does not help us in identifying the

distinctive features of Reconstructionism. The problem, as Eisen points out, is that Kaplan's definition of Judaism has been so pervasive, reaching even into the realm of modern orthodoxy, that what was once viewed as a daring and even heretical innovation is now espoused by almost all Jews who think about such matters.

We could try again by claiming that all Reconstructionists, and all Kaplanians, view the creation and nurturing of "caring, participatory, inclusive, egalitarian religious communities committed to exploring Jewish life with dedication, warmth and enthusiasm" as fundamentally important tasks. The problem again is not with the validity of the proposition but with the fact that almost all non-orthodox Jews outside of the Reconstructionist movement embrace it as well.

Reaffirming the Importance of Reason

Is the Reconstructionist movement, then, left with any basic attributes or principles that are truly distinctive? Absolutely. First, we should proudly point to our passion for reason. This may at first sound almost trivial, but it is vitally important, particularly at this moment when the forces of religious irrationality both inside and outside of the United States are a serious and growing threat to many of the values that we cherish. Perhaps no teaching of Kaplan's is more important at this moment than his insistence that we not leave our minds at the door when we enter the synagogue. Kaplan's legacy of an unbending com-

mitment to intellectual honesty, a refusal to bring different standards of intellectual integrity to matters of religion than to other matters of human concern, is arguably the single fundamental defining attribute of Reconstructionism.

I recognize, of course, the central place that various forms of rationalism have had in Jewish intellectual history over the past two millennia. I do not mean to suggest that an awareness of the importance of reason is absent in the Reform, Conservative and modern Orthodox movements. But, at the risk of sounding chauvinistic, I have been in many non-Reconstructionist synagogues where, if minds were not exactly checked at the door, neither were they invited in to analyze what was being studied and prayed in the sanctuary. When rabbis in non-Reconstructionist synagogues do encourage critical analysis of central tenets of Judaism, they often encounter strong resistance. Not long ago, to cite one well-publicized example, a prominent Conservative rabbi shocked and angered much of his congregation by questioning in a sermon the historicity of the Exodus story.

Intellectual Scrutiny

At our best, Reconstructionists demand that all religious issues, extending even to the core categories of God, Torah and Israel, be subjected to rigorous rational scrutiny; the intensity of our rationalism is a unique characteristic of our movement. We refuse to exempt any religious practice from the test of pragmatism, in the philosophical sense of the term: if the practice does

not and cannot be reinterpreted so as to function effectively, then it should cease to be a communal norm (although wisely, a heavy burden of proof should be placed on those challenging a long-established practice).

Our profound commitment to rational analysis should entail a sharp distaste for irrational practices (as distinguished from non-rational practices). For example, although nothing is inherently objectionable about services for the healing of the sick that have become so popular in liberal Jewish circles, some Reconstructionists are concerned about claims that such prayers have actual theurgic power, claims made in the face of multiple scientific studies to the contrary. (The repeated chanting of a verse from a psalm, on the other hand, may produce a powerful emotional effect that, although non-rational, is entirely positive.)

Democratic Decision Making

Another powerfully distinctive characteristic of Kaplanians and Reconstructionists is a devotion to democratic decision making, even in matters of ritual practice. This broadly participatory approach to congregational and movement-wide governance, explicitly adapted from the American system of government, rests on a uniquely Reconstructionist understanding of the relationship between rabbis and congregants as a partnership. Although the conception of that partnership has evolved in recent years away from a strictly egalitarian model toward one of the rabbi as “managing partner,”

the Reconstructionist model remains strikingly different from the “governor/governed” conception of the rabbi/congregant relationship that prevails in other movements.

The most striking example of this partnership was the Reconstructionist prayer book commission that was composed almost equally of rabbis and lay people, the first time in modern Jewish history that lay people have played such a role. I argued in this journal several years ago that a commitment to community in a strong sense of the term requires a commitment to interpersonal obligation (*mitzva*) in a strong sense of the term.² By applying a democratic decision-making process to the creation of a social contract that would serve as the foundation for a reconstruction of Jewish law, the Reconstructionist movement could make another important contribution to the evolution of Jewish civilization. I continue to hope that the movement will move in that direction.

Two other fundamental principles, one theological and the other liturgical, should unite Kaplanians and Reconstructionists and in so doing help better to define our movement and its unique role in Jewish life. Those two principles, I believe, follow from the resolution of two other Kaplanian paradoxes.

The Paradox of Kaplan's Theology

Kaplan was not a good theologian, but he was a brilliant theologian. Kaplan could not accept the traditional supernatural conception of God as an external being outside of, and radically

separate from, the natural world. In its place, Kaplan offered what he came to call a “transnatural” conception of God. For Kaplan, God is a force, as opposed to a being, and a force that is neither purely natural (in the sense that gravitation and magnetism are natural forces) nor above the natural world.

For many Reconstructionists, Kaplan’s central theological formula that “God is the [transnatural] Power that makes for salvation” has become both a mantra and a cliché. But Kaplan’s purported distinction between the supernatural and the transnatural cannot survive close philosophical scrutiny, as Eliezer Berkovits argued in his 1959 essay, “Reconstructionist Theology: A Critical Evaluation.”³

Furthermore, as noted by Rabbi Alan W. Miller, Kaplan’s vacillation between “pure naturalism” and “transnaturalism” left Reconstructionism with a consensus on what it rejected but not on what it proposed in its place.⁴ The more one analyzes Kaplan’s “the power that . . .” formula, the less meaningful and the less compelling it appears to be.

Kaplan as Anti-Theologian

I want to suggest that Kaplan might better be viewed as an anti-theologian than as a theologian. One reading of Kaplan is that early in his adult life, in the midst of a personal crisis of faith, he developed a theology that allowed him to rationalize his passionate commitment to Judaism. He then proceeded to get on with his life, both professional and personal, without having to deal much with theology, at

least on a personal level. Kaplan “saved” many of us by teaching that we could do the same, regardless of whether we continue to find his version of theology compelling.

Based on the foregoing, I would certainly not argue that the Reconstructionist movement should attempt to make adherence to a Kaplanian theology a requirement for membership. Indeed, Kaplan himself never proposed such a requirement. But Rabbi Richard Hirsh has correctly observed that, for some significant number of Jews, a traditional conception of God is not the entry point into, but the exit point out of Judaism. And I am continually surprised by the amount of traditional God-talk that I hear coming from the pulpits of otherwise very progressive Reform and Conservative pulpits.

What I am advocating is that we continue to be the movement that provides a uniquely comfortable home for those thinking Jews who cannot espouse any sort of traditional God-belief and who are repelled by theological hypocrisy. That alone might justify our being a separate movement.

The Paradox of Kaplan’s Approach to Liturgy

The third paradox of Kaplan’s thought deals with liturgy. A knowledgeable Conservative Jew once chided me in a way that has troubled me ever since. “You Reconstructionists,” he said, “believe that you can distinguish a denomination on the basis of liturgical changes like substituting *mevi ge’ula* (bringing redemption) for *mevi go’el*

(bringing a redeemer/Messiah). Do you really think that more than a handful of people even notice these changes, much less think that they are important?" Allowing rhetorical license for hyperbole (as I have been arguing, our claims to denominational distinctiveness go far beyond these liturgical changes), he was making an important point.

Kaplan believed that his commitment to intellectual honesty required the reconstruction of Jewish liturgy, including Hebrew liturgy. He was famous at the Jewish Theological Seminary for telling his students, "If you don't believe it, don't say it." For Kaplan, this certainly meant rejecting the concept of the "chosenness" of the Jewish people, on both logical and ethical grounds: If God is a non-supernatural force, then God can hardly have chosen Israel from among the nations as a people with a unique status and mission; for that matter, such a God is not in the business of any sort of "choosing" at all. And even if one believes in a God who could have chosen Israel, the chauvinism entailed is ethically indefensible.

Intellectual honesty for Kaplan also meant not affirming, among other things, the concept of a personal Messiah, the notion of physical resurrection of the dead or the desirability of restoring the sacrificial service in the Temple. All of these redactions were made under Kaplan's aegis in the first series of Reconstructionist prayer books, published in the 1940s and 1950s, and almost all of them were incorporated into the current *Kol Haneshamah* series as well. (To give credit where it is due, many of the changes made by Kaplan were ad-

opted or adapted from the earlier work of liturgists of the Reform movement.) But almost from the beginning, a very different approach to liturgy has played an important part in Reconstructionist thinking.

Prayer, Action and Values

Seventy years ago, in the very first volume of this journal, an editorial appeared called "Praying for Peace." Signed on to if not written by Kaplan, that editorial contained the following provocative observation in response to a call to prayer "issued by the Pope and taken up by other religious denominations" in response to the German government's declaration that it would no longer be bound by the armaments clause of the Treaty of Versailles:

We should like . . . to submit that this emphasis laid upon prayer is an unfortunate one. Prayer, by itself, may do more harm than good, for the one who prays for a worthwhile ideal somehow gets the impression that he has done something positive to achieve that ideal. The psychological effect is a curious one; praying becomes a substitute for action. Religious leaders who have been interested in the whole problem of prayer have always maintained that people are reluctant to pray because the traditional prayers are couched in archaic language and express irrelevant aspirations. Modernize prayers, they said, make them relevant, and people will once again

take to praying. The fact is that the more relevant the prayer, the more likely is the worshipper to feel he has worked for the realization of those values which he affirms.⁵

Quotation, Not Affirmation

This language prefigures what would become a familiar Reconstructionist aphorism about prayer, that most or all of our praying (or davenning), at least of Hebrew liturgy, is (or should be) “quotation rather than affirmation.” This aphorism apparently first appeared in Rabbi Alan W. Miller’s excellent book, *God of Daniel S.: In Search Of The American Jew*. There Miller writes as follows:

A prime element in the act of worship is davenning, or the rote repetition of traditional prayers from the past. When these traditional prayers were first written they were meaningful affirmations for their authors. The author of the twenty-third Psalm, for example, if not a shepherd himself, lived in a culture where shepherds and sheep were as common a sight as cabs on Fifth Avenue are in New York today. In a prevailing idiom and metaphor culled from everyday life, he expressed his faith in God and the cosmos, in God conceived of as a Supreme Father. “He restoreth my soul.”

When the modern Jew recites the twenty-third Psalm, or any other Psalm or combination of verses

from the Psalms or from the Bible, he does not affirm at firsthand, but rather quotes at secondhand. All the Hebrew davenned, or prayed, in the modern synagogue, save in those rare instances where modern Hebrew prayers have been introduced into the act of worship, is quotation, not affirmation. The traditional Hebrew sections of the synagogue service are all in quotation marks, whether the praying Jew is aware of this or not.

Davenning is a basic element in Jewish worship because only by identifying with his past can the Jew gain strength in the present to strive toward the future. An awareness that countless generations expressed a basic faith in the cosmos, and strove to overcome the defects in themselves and in their society through an ongoing relationship with their ethnic group, is a source of strength in present trouble. The traditional prayer book reflects the three stages through which Jewish civilization has already passed, the biblical, the ecclesiastical and the rabbinic. Strength in an age of radical and often disturbing transition is gained from an awareness that the Jewish people has undergone metamorphosis in the past but still maintained its identity in change by reconstructing its sancta. Davenning is a prime sanctum of Jewish life.⁶

What seems to have gone largely unnoticed in the Reconstructionist ap-

proach to liturgy is the tension between “don’t say it if you don’t believe it” and “quotation rather than affirmation.” If we are (or should be) silently prefacing each traditional Hebrew prayer with words like “Our ancestors prayed as follows” and then placing quotation marks around the prayer text, then for us the truth, validity or believability of the words of that prayer text become essentially irrelevant.

Hebrew Literacy Lacking

Two generational changes have made grappling with this tension more pressing, and both changes seriously weaken the arguments of the “don’t say it if you don’t believe it” school.

First, almost all of Kaplan’s teachings, including those about liturgy, grew out of his experience with, and were originally directed to, immigrant and immediate post-immigrant generations of American Jews of Eastern European origin. Almost all of them were, if not Hebraically literate in an academic sense, extremely familiar with traditional Hebrew liturgy.

Those for whom the changes reflected in Reconstructionist liturgy were vitally important could still enter a traditional synagogue and participate easily (if not always emotionally comfortably) in the prayer service. Today, neither childhood immersion nor adult study has provided the great majority of Reconstructionists with the knowledge of traditional liturgy that the previous generations of Reconstructionists possessed. The level of Hebrew literacy among non-Orthodox Jews is probably at an all-time low.

Comfortable with Myth

The second generational change that has been noted and discussed far more than the first concerns our level of comfort with certain kinds of myths and metaphors. For Kaplan and his contemporaries, the term “myth” was essentially equivalent to “falsehood,” with a connotation as negative as “superstition” or “lie.” As we have moved from the modern into the post-modern age, our understanding of the meaning of “truth” has become different from, and frankly more subtle than, that of our Reconstructionist forebears.

For contemporary Reconstructionists, particularly the best educated and most knowledgeable, myths – particularly the foundational myths of a people – operate on an entirely different level than do, for example, the propositions of natural science. This opens up the possibility of finding a myth to be “truthful” in a powerful, if non-literal, sense. For example, the story of the Exodus from Egypt can be judged to be mythically “true” precisely because it has for thousands of years functioned effectively in providing the Jewish people with its sense of identity, regardless of the story’s historical veracity.⁷ As has been observed by many scholars, myths are neither true nor false; myths are either effective or ineffective.

Moreover, Reconstructionists today can (or should be able to) appreciate the metaphorical power of sympathetic invocations in the liturgy of such national archetypes as the Davidic monarchy or the Temple cult, despite the serious problems posed by those institutions

as historical realities, and having nothing to do with an actual desire for the restoration of those institutions. A Reconstructionist who is convinced that the Torah was written and edited by human beings several centuries after Moses lived (if in fact Moses is a historical figure), today can (or should be able to) recite, "This is the Torah that Moses placed before the Israelites, according to the command of Adonai, through the agency of Moses," without feeling hypocritical or uncomfortable: The words are being quoted rather than affirmed. To the extent that the content of the quotation is still of concern, those words can be understood as mythic imagery rather than as the assertion of historical facts.⁸

In short, a fervent commitment to intellectual honesty demands far less of us today with regard to liturgy than it did of Kaplan. To say that Kaplan had an insufficient appreciation of the power of myth and metaphor, however, would be unfair. Although many of his ideas were remarkably ahead of his time, Kaplan's fundamental intellectual framework could not transcend the socio-historical context of his formative years, which in his case might best be characterized as Victorian.

Why Reconstruct Liturgy ?

Taken together, these two generational changes give rise to a fundamental paradox of Hebrew liturgy for the Reconstructionist movement today. Most Reconstructionists do not know the differences between the Reconstructionist and traditional versions of

almost any of the modified prayer texts. Those Reconstructionists who do understand what changes have been made to the traditional liturgy and why are often precisely the ones who are most comfortable preserving the traditional versions for their poetic and mythic resonance as outlined above. For whom and for what purpose then is the liturgy being reconstructed?

I am not advocating for a wholesale undoing of Reconstructionist liturgical emendations. A compelling case can be made for continuing our practice of removing from the liturgy the most blatant public declarations of the chosenness of the Jewish people — in the first paragraph of *Aleynu*, in the blessing before the Torah reading and in the *kiddush* for Shabbat and holidays. I would not want to restore the traditional language in these instances. I am comfortable maintaining idiosyncratic Reconstructionist language in these three prayer texts because we can and should expect all Reconstructionists to be familiar with in the traditional versions of those prayers as well.

Additionally, most of the arguments for reversing previous deletions or rearrangements of traditional liturgical language have little or no applicability in the case of additions to traditional prayer texts. The most important are the inclusion of the biblical matriarchs in places where only the biblical patriarchs were traditionally mentioned, and the inclusion of "*kol yoshvei tevel* (all of the inhabitants of the earth)," together with the Jewish people specifically, as the desired beneficiaries of prayers for peace.

If I am correct that for the reasons suggested above we cannot expect Reconstructionists today to be familiar or comfortable with more than one form of Hebrew liturgy, that is another reason to make as few changes to traditional prayer texts as reasonably possible. Preserving the sense of unity of the Jewish people to the greatest extent possible is a central value of Reconstructionism. Having a common liturgical language is a powerful unifying force for Jews across both denominational and national boundaries, as well as throughout time.

Anyone who has had the uplifting experience of going to synagogue in a foreign country and being able to participate actively and comfortably in the service understands the importance of shared prayer texts in making one feel a part of *klal Yisrael*. Anyone who has had the depressing experience of being in such a synagogue with a child who is bewildered by the service because s/he is only familiar with Reconstructionist liturgy has learned the same lesson about shared language. (These experiences, both positive and negative, can, of course, take place much closer to home, such as at a friend's non-Reconstructionist *bat* or *bar mitzva* service.)

Emendations Not Enough

With regard to liturgy I have an important ally: My position is similar to the one advanced toward the end of his life by no less a figure than Rabbi Ira Eisenstein, z"l, the founder of the institutional Reconstructionist movement. Rarely does one encounter a

statement as startling and as powerful as this observation by Eric Caplan:

It is interesting to note that in later life, Ira Eisenstein no longer endorsed the concept of changing the traditional Hebrew text of prayers to reflect modern belief. [Caplan quotes Eisenstein as saying:] "I've become . . . less concerned with the actual language of prayer . . . For example, instead of saying 'Who has chosen us from among all of the nations,' you say 'Who has drawn us near . . . ' But in the meantime you say 'Blessed are You,' and you ask yourself who is the 'You'?

Well, it's really a metaphor. Well, if one's a metaphor, the other is a metaphor. Leave it alone . . . I would treat the traditional prayerbook as an exercise in reminiscence. We come together and for a few minutes we put ourselves into the world of our ancestors, the world of our fathers, and see how it feels, how it sounds, that's all. And now if you want to pray — there's a difference between davenning and praying, I make that distinction — pray from our own inside, how we feel, what we'd like to say. If we can use some traditional language, fine, otherwise make up your own prayers and they can be gender-free, and not supernatural and all the rest of it. But you can't make over a text like that. It was an awful decision that I came to after all these years."⁹

The Reconstructionist treatment of

traditional liturgy is a good example of a feature of Reconstructionism that, although certainly distinctive, may no longer serve the best interests of Reconstructionists. Eisenstein and I are both arguing that Kaplanian Hebrew liturgy may, to a greater or lesser extent, fail the fundamental Kaplanian test for determining whether a ritual practice should be maintained; that is, it may no longer function effectively in creating a meaningful Jewish life for the individual Reconstructionist or in helping the Reconstructionist community to realize its highest ideals. If such a determination were made (and I am intentionally sliding over the questions of who gets to decide that and how), then the next series of Reconstructionist prayer books not only could, but should, look very different from either of its predecessors.

Bedrock Principles

The Reconstructionist movement should continue to exist if and only if it has useful features that clearly distinguish it from all of the other streams of Judaism. A conservative emphasis on restoring the core Reconstructionist values of the past can in fact unleash remarkable progressive energy for the future. What I have tried to show throughout this essay is that a return to the strict application of Kaplan's bedrock principles, far from leading to the creation of a fossilized version of Reconstructionism, will in fact promote evolutionary change within Reconstructionism and help to ensure its future vitality. Those bedrock princi-

ples: eschewing supernatural God-talk; rejecting those religious practices that make no sense without a supernatural theology; an unbending commitment to shining the light of reason on religious questions; and a bold willingness to set aside those religious practices that do not pass Kaplan's pragmatic test, should never change. Almost every other aspect of Reconstructionism will evolve over time.

This article is dedicated, with much love, to the author's first teachers, his parents, Bernard Cedarbaum and Miriam Goldman Cedarbaum.

1. Arnold Eisen, "Kaplan's *Judaism* at Sixty: A Reappraisal," in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), xiii.

2. Daniel Goldman Cedarbaum, "The Role of *Halakha* in Reconstructionist Decision Making," *The Reconstructionist*, 65:2, Spring 2001.

3. "Reconstructionist Theology: A Critical Evaluation," in Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974; reprinted from *Tradition*, Fall 1959).

4. Alan W. Miller, "Reconstructionism and the Reconstructionist Rabbi," *The Reconstructionist*, September 1977.

5. *The Reconstructionist*, 1:9, 5.

6. Alan W. Miller, *The God Of Daniel S.: In Search of The American Jew* (London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd. 1969), 120-121.

7. See Richard Hirsh, "Four Questions to Ask Before the Seder Starts," in J. Levitt and M. Strassfeld, editors, *A Night of Questions* (Elkins Park, Pennsylvania: The Reconstructionist Press, 2002), 21-23.

8. Rabbi David Teutsch makes this point in his "Commentary" on this verse found on page 406 of *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, but he does not acknowledge its applicability to other liturgical formulas.

9. June 25, 1993 interview of Ira Eisenstein, quoted in Eric Caplan, *From Ideology To*

Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship And American Liberal Judaism (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Hebrew Union College Press 2002), 120-121. Eisenstein made similar comments in the Winter, 1994/95 issue of *Reconstructionism Today*, 9-10.