

SESSION 3

The Need to Reconstruct Judaism Itself

Key ideas for discussion:

“My focus is on reconstructing the nature of Judaism itself.”

Rabbinic Judaism’s basic paradigm is a world divided into categories of opposites. That won’t work in this century. This era demands a radical reconstruction of Judaism.

“If the Torah of Sinai was understood by the rabbis as focused on distinction and separation, then we need a new Torah that suggests how we are to live in a world that seeks wholeness instead of division. We live in a world that strives to be more inclusive, rather than seeing boundaries as essential. Distinction too often leads to a sense that one group is better than another. Instead, we want to embrace diversity, and move to a paradigm of a spectrum, whether in regard to sexuality or gender, or more simply, one’s identity.”

Big question: Is it time to replace prayer, or replace the traditional prayer service?

“The purpose of Judaism isn’t Judaism.”



Rabbi Michael Strassfeld

Raised in an Orthodox Jewish household, Rabbi Michael Strassfeld was profoundly influenced by the burgeoning Jewish anti-establishment movement in the Boston area in the 1960s and early 1970s. He was active in the anti-poverty movement, anti-Vietnam War movement, and the fight for freedom for Soviet Jews. He was a co-founder of the first countercultural Havurah, Havurat Shalom, which is still an affiliated Reconstructionist community outside Boston. A pioneer in do-it-yourself Judaism, he is the co-author of the renowned book, *The Jewish Catalog*, a DIY manual on how to live and practice Judaism. Second only to the Hebrew Bible, it is the top selling Jewish book of the 20th century. Currently he is Rabbi Emeritus at SAJ, and he has a forthcoming book on reinventing Judaism for the 21st century.

Connected Resources

The First Jewish Catalog: A Do-It-Yourself Kit: [Amazon.com/First-Jewish-Catalog-Do-Yourself/dp/0827600429](https://www.amazon.com/First-Jewish-Catalog-Do-Yourself/dp/0827600429)

The University of Pennsylvania has a special collection of Rabbi Strassfeld’s papers, which include many artifacts from the Jewish countercultural movements of the 1960s-70s. You can browse some of the collection online at: PennRare.wordpress.com/2017/01/11/the-jewish-counterculture-in-the-michael-strassfeld-papers