RRA Resolution on Climate Crisis Action

Adopted March, 21, 2021

Preamble

As humans we are entering a critical era with respect to the warming of our planet. We have already caused an increase of 1 degree Celsius; warming will likely reach 1.5 degrees Celsius by mid-century, and may reach 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century in the absence of significant policy changes[1]. A robust scientific consensus suggests that any increase of that magnitude would cause catastrophic impacts on countless species, including our own.

Because greenhouse gases endure in the atmosphere for decades, devastating events which are exacerbated by climate warming (e.g. droughts, hurricanes, and wildfires) will worsen in the coming generation, long before they get better. These impacts are already being felt by the Global South, and disproportionately impacting Black, Brown and poor communities. Yet to paraphrase Rabbi Tarfon: it is not incumbent on us to finish the work of countering climate change, but it *is* our collective responsibility to engage in it[2]. And the Sunrise movement offers this succinct perush: "To change everything, we need everyone."

The world must move to a system with zero net carbon emissions, in the next 20 to 40 years, to mitigate the worst impacts of anthropogenic climate change. This ambitious goal is well within economic and technological reach, but requires political and social will, which we commit ourselves to help muster. In recent years we have seen an upswing in awareness of the challenge, and an expansion of what may be politically possible. In this resolution we affirm our place as Jewish leaders among the vanguards in facing this challenge; we intensify our long-standing collective commitments to *shmirat ha'tevah*[3]; and we commit to ever more ambitious action in countering the climate crisis.

Resolution

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[1] See, for example, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, "Global Warming of 1.5 C," October, 2018 on https://www.ipcc.ch

[2] Pirkei Avot, 2:16

[3] Shmirat Ha'Teva, protection of nature; see https://therra.org/resolutions/rra_resolution_climate_2008.pdf and other earlier resolutions which identify numerous specific steps we all can and should take

Whereas, Caring for the well-being of our planet is in clear alignment with Jewish values including *redifat tzedek* (pursuing justice), *l'dor vado*r (solidarity with future generations), and *shmirat ha'adamah* (guarding Creation);[4]

Whereas, Since similar values are found across faith communities, we wish to further raise the voice of faith leadership in response to the climate crisis, and tap the unique power and opportunity that inhere in multi-faith efforts on behalf of Earth and all it contains;

Whereas, Acknowledging current science, we recognize that humanity is in a monumental climate crisis of its own collective making, whose first and worst impacts fall disproportionately on BIPOC[5] and other communities left vulnerable by structural injustices[6], and on economically, politically and geographically vulnerable populations;

Whereas, Each arm and body of the Reconstructionist movement has previously affirmed its support for creation care, and has pointed the way toward constructive actions within and beyond our movement;[7]therefore be it

Resolved, That combating the climate crisis is, and must remain, an ongoing collective priority for the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association and for the broader movement for Reconstructing Judaism. The RRA, its staff and its members are encouraged to take concrete steps to further reduce their carbon footprint, and to join wholeheartedly in the larger political and economic effort toward climate sanity. Among actions to be taken by the movement and our congregations, we will: (a) encourage moving investment monies away from

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[4] *Tzedek chevrati,* social justice, iies front and center in 'just transition' efforts to combat climate change. *L'dor Vador*, or "intergenerational solidarity" as in Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*, connotes our efforts at "becoming good ancestors," by actively minimizing the negative impact of our actions on those who follow us. And Shomrei Adamah, the first modern Jewish environmental organization, was founded by Ellen Bernstein in 1988 in the basement of the RRC, with Reconstructionist movement blessing and support.

[5] BIPOC is an abbreviation for Black, Indigenous, [and/or] People of Color

[6] See, for example, "AR5 Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, Vulnerability," IPCC, 2014

[7] For examples of past movement support for creation care beyond the 2008 RRA resolution, see (a) 1980's Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot (FRCH) resolution on the environment https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/document/movement-resolution-environment; (b) Reconstructing Judaism's (RJ) 2020 letter in support of a "Just Green Recovery" https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/endorsement/jewish-just-green-recovery-lette ; (c) a 2019 RJ request to the United Nations for a "global ban on fracking" https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/endorsement/request-united-nations-call-global-ban-fracking; (d) a 2017 RJ letter of support for the transition in the U.S. to 100% clean energy by 2035 - https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/endorsement/letter-support-fossil-fuels-act; and (e) a strong 2017 RJ dissent against the U.S. decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord, https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/news/public-letter-withdrawal-paris-climate-accord

fossil fuels and towards regenerative, non-extractive, and community-controlled enterprises; (b) advocate to expand renewable energy in our communities, including through Solar United Neighbor's "Thirty Million Solar Roofs" initiative; and (c) continue and accelerate our coalitional advocacy work toward a sustainable future; and

Resolved, That the RRA commit, as leaders in multiple communities, to exhorting those communities (and the individuals in them) toward ever more ambitious climate action and activism. We affirm setting firmer green goals each year as a spiritual and moral practice, aligning our individual and communal efforts with those of the Paris Climate Accord, in which nations commit to regularly revisiting and ratcheting up their own sustainability endeavors; and

Resolved, That the RRA, hopefully in collaboration with Reconstructing Judaism, will disseminate useful tools to help communities measure and track their carbon footprints; create ongoing opportunities to report back; share successes; and spread best climate justice practices far and wide. We also understand personal actions as only a starting point. We must focus our best collective energies on building power, to change the very systems of our economy -- to shift to a just, green energy economy that addresses the interlocking challenges of climate change, racism, and economic injustice; and finally

Resolved, That the RRA acknowledges that our efforts are intertwined with the efforts of many others. We resolve to seek support, partnership, and alignment, where possible, with a host of Jewish, interfaith, communal, and civic organizations[8] making progress in this important work. We particularly acknowledge the importance of changing local, state, national and international policies so as to facilitate a just transition to a clean energy economy, and we commit to working with partner organizations to advocate for sustainability legislation. We also commit to working across multiple faith communities to build spiritual resources together, and to cultivate collective resilience for the many challenges ahead. *Hazak ve-ematz* -- may we be strong and of good courage.

[8] Leading Jewish groups include Dayenu.org, Hazon.org, COEJL.org, TheShalomCenter.org, and many other great organizations in the US, Israel, and elsewhere. The most widespread multi-faith effort, with affiliates in 40 states, is InterfaithPowerAndLight.org; see also GreenFaith.org, NRPE, and others. Communal and civic environmental opportunities abound, and this resolution charges rabbis to connect widely with them.