

## YIDDISH GUIDE TO RABBI DEBORAH WAXMAN, Ph.D.

By



Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe

Rabbi Deborah Waxman is the president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. She took office on Jan. 1, 2014. Waxman replaced Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, who has served as president since 2002.

Here's a Yiddish Guide to Rabbi Waxman:

“ersht” (first)

Rabbi Deborah Waxman is the first woman Rabbi and first lesbian to head the Jewish congregational union and lead a Jewish seminary.

“geboyrn” (born)

Waxman was born and raised in West Hartford, CT. She was raised a Conservative Jew and was one of the first girls in Connecticut to have a Conservative Bat Mitzvah on a Saturday (“shabes”) in 1979.

“Tate”/“Mame” (parents)

Her father was a traveling salesman and her mother was president of the Sisterhood of their synagogue in Bloomfield, CT.

“religye” (religion)

Waxman was an undergraduate religion (“religye”) major at Columbia College. She earned a Master of Hebrew Letters and was ordained as a rabbi by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in 1999. Waxman completed a Ph.D. in American Jewish History at Temple University.”

Waxman served as High Holy Day rabbi at Congregation Bet Havarim in Syracuse, NY, for 11 years.

“derveyln” (to elect)

Waxman was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Columbia University.

“heym” (home)

Waxman lives in suburban Philadelphia, with her partner, Christina Ager, a Jew by Choice.

“der tsol” (the number)

“idee” (idea)

“The Pew Research Center study on Jewish Americans showed that only 1% of Jews identified as Reconstructionist. There are about 100 member congregations. Waxman will face an uphill battle to not only spread ideas, but also to grow active membership.”

(Source: “Trailblazing Reconstructionist - Deborah Waxman Relishes Challenge of Judaism, Lesbian Is First Woman To Lead Denomination.” by Anne Cohen, The Jewish Daily Forward, Oct. 9, 2013)

“shidekh” (marriage match)

Waxman says [Reconstructionism] is a method. It’s how we make the marriage between the individual and the communal.”

Note: Reconstructionist Judaism is far smaller than Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism. It prides itself in being an incubator of Jewish innovation--from the first bat mitzvah in 1922 to the ordination of gay Jews in 1984. Reconstructionism was launched in the 1920s by Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan.

Reconstructionists are exploring how to better include non traditional families into their congregations--households that include same-sex or intermarried couples.

“shenken” (to donate)

Waxman is a strong fund-raiser. Her grant proposals have won support from the Kresge Foundation, Wexner Foundation and Cummings Foundation. She has stewarded major individual donors for Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC).

“glaykh” (equal)

Debra Waxman’s publications include “A Lady Sometimes Blows The Shofar: Women’s Religious Equality in a Postwar Reconstructionist Movement” (2010). Included in this publication is the following poem:

As I work in my modern white kitchen  
with touches of red (fleishig) and blue (milchig)

I think of morrow's aliyah  
And strive for a long long view.

The pike and the whitefish are chopped now,  
And cooking in Grandmother's pot....  
Was I right to vote for this Freedom,  
or as I not?

There's the wine and the chalah to get now,  
And the ancestral silver to polish....  
When I think of myself on the bima  
I cholish.

"We're told some traditions enrich us,  
But older traditions are chains;  
Is it Women's Dilemma that rends us  
Or Reconstructionist growing pains?

Oh, anthropological angels  
Fast becloud the sweet Sabbath creed  
When you look at licht-benching under the aspect  
Of Karen Horney and Margaret Mead.

The dominant male of our culture  
Can hug to himself in solace;  
He's no longer supreme on the bima,  
But only he wears the talis.

When my fears and my doubts come down to  
When all is done and said  
Is: Do schuls rush in where angels  
Fear to tread?  
Anon.

This poem anticipated future changes regarding the fragile nature of Jewish unity. It also anticipated future changes that a growing commitment to egalitarianism within the Reconstructionist movement and the emergence of the women's movement would generate.

"lektsye" (lecture)  
"koridor" (hall)

“di tfile” (the prayer)

Waxman said, “For me the intellectual is in the classroom, in the hallway, in conversations. But when I walk into a prayer space, I don’t want a lecture. I want a transformative prayer experience.”

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MARJORIE WOLFE loves Rabbi Jack Moline’s description of Reconstructionism and Orthodontism:

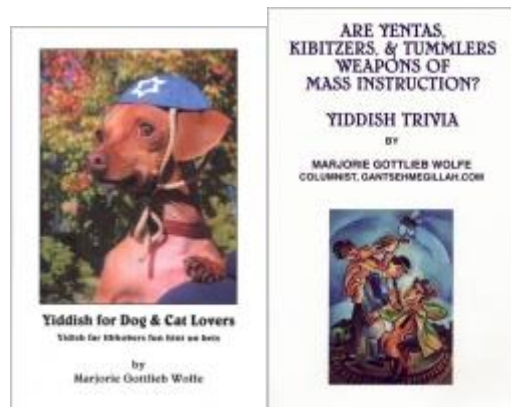
RECONSTRUCTIONISM: “Nobody really knows what Reconstructionism is except Mordecai Kaplan who invented it, and he died. Reconstructionist Jews don’t believe in a supernatural God. Instead, they believe God wears a three-piece suit and commutes to the city every day from Long Island, just like the rest of us. There. He holds a number of city contracts for renovating historical landmarks, hence the name Re-constructionist Judaism. That is why Reconstructionist Jews, who don’t really believe in prayer, can nonetheless pray for the rebuilding of the Temple, which they don’t really want rebuilt. They just have a bid on the project. Because Reconstructionism represents an unbroken chain with Judaism’s forebearers, it alone is authentic.”

Orthodontism: “This group believes that if tradition is to be preserved, enforcement of the Law must have some teeth, and those teeth might as well be straight.”

(Source: “Growing Up Jewish - Or, why is this book different from all other books?” by Rabbi Jack Moline)

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Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:



"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: [MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com](http://MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com)

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