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**A STUDY OF *TIKKUN OLAM* AND *MITZVAH*:
JEWISH TERMS WHOSE MEANINGS HAVE CHANGED**

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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Graduate Rabbinic Program
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A Study of *Tikkun Olam* and *Mitzvah*:

Jewish Terms Whose Meanings Have Changed

I have long been fascinated by the transformation in meaning words tend to have over time. My goal in selecting this topic for my thesis was to take two such terms, *tikkun olam* and *mitzvah*, and learn as much as possible about how and why these words evolved over the millennia. Hence, my paper has two main sections, with several subsections in each.

Toward this goal, I discovered citations of *tikkun olam* in the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, the *Aleinu*, the *Zohar*, and many contemporary sources, as well, being quite surprised that there was no mention of *tikkun olam* in the Bible. I found various forms of *mitzvah* in the Bible, the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, and the *Talmud Bavli*, as well as in current language.

The term *tikkun olam* has been understood as benefiting the Jewish people, a world betterment that Jews can only pray for, a partnership with God in repairing the entire cosmos, and a worthwhile endeavor for human beings to engage in with other human beings. The word *mitzvah* has had a full spectrum of meanings as well, ranging from God's command, to charitable acts, to good deeds.

The contribution I hope this paper has been able to achieve lies in making the connection between the two words, demonstrating how change and adaptation is good for a vital and dynamic Judaism, and gaining a greater awareness of the interdependence between *tikkun olam*, *mitzvah*, and the divine.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The road to my rabbinate has been a long and circuitous one. I am filled with **יראה** - the delicate balance between awe and fear - as I approach the final stages of fulfilling my childhood dream of becoming a rabbi. I want to thank my family, friends, teachers, rabbis, and classmates who have provided the support and encouragement to help me succeed, especially you, Mom, Dad, and Kathy.

Thank you Dr. Chernick for so many things – for sharing your love of the sacred texts so openly, for always speaking the truth from your heart, for your passionate expression of life, and for believing in me in the moments when I found it hard to believe in myself.

“Thank you” is not big enough for you, Rabbi Deborah Zecher. I was told early in my rabbinic education that it would serve me well to find a mentor rabbi to help me maneuver my way through rabbinical school. That would be you, Rabbi Zecher, my mentor, my teacher, my friend, my editor extraordinaire, my soon-to-be senior rabbi, my colleague.

I am beyond grateful for the abundant blessings and opportunities in my life.

A STUDY OF *TIKKUN OLAM* AND *MITZVAH*: JEWISH TERMS WHOSE MEANINGS HAVE CHANGED

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A STUDY OF *TIKKUN OLAM* AND *MITZVAH*: JEWISH TERMS WHOSE MEANINGS HAVE CHANGED

As a Reform Jew growing up in the '50's and '60's, the study of *Talmud* belonged in the mysterious realm of traditional Judaism. Knowing, however, that *Talmud* would be a significant part of my rabbinical school education, I began to study the *Talmud* in English translation with Rabbi Judith Abrams before my matriculation into HUC. Realizing that studying *Talmud* in its original Hebrew would present additional challenges, I approached Rabbi Benay Lappe, then a senior Teaching Fellow at CLAL, the National Center for Learning and Leadership, to help me begin to navigate my way through a page of *Talmud*. After approximately twenty-five hours of work, we had prepared the opening *sugya* for my first *Talmud* class with Dr. Chernick, a *sugya* which he covered in the first thirty minutes of the first class. During that semester, my love for *Talmud* was born.

Rabbi Lappe and I continued to study *Talmud* together on Shabbat afternoons. Among the texts we examined was *Masechet Gittin*. As we studied the Jewish laws of divorce and the passages which mentioned *tikkun olam*, it soon became clear to me that *tikkun olam* meant something very different in the *Mishnah* than is indicated by its use today. The evolution of this core value in the contemporary Jewish world intrigued me.

My interest in *Talmud* and my curiosity about *tikkun olam* led me to ask Dr. Chernick to serve as my thesis advisor. He suggested that I trace at least one more term, *mitzvah*, to form the basis for a rabbinic thesis, and thus my thesis proposal came to be.

The methodology employed in creating this paper will be to locate, translate, and interpret the terms *tikkun olam* and *mitzvah* in as many different Jewish sources as

possible. I will look for similarities and differences in their uses, search for trends in their changing interpretations over the passage of time, and offer a hypothesis about how the terms evolved to mean something different today. My goal is to trace the development of *tikkun olam* beginning with the *Mishnah* and continuing through the *Tosefta*, the *Aleinu*, and the *Zohar* all the way to its contemporary usage. For the term *mitzvah*, biblical sources will also be examined and then, I will continue to search through the *Mishnah*, *Tosefta*, *Talmud Bavli*, and contemporary uses as well. After discovering the interpretations of these terms at various stages, I will attempt to hypothesize about why and how these changes occurred, and why the later uses overrode the earlier definitions. My hope is to find some rationale for the changes in these terms and to discover a connection between the original definitions and their current interpretations. As a strong believer in the vital process which has always shaped and framed Jewish life, I believe that dynamic and evolutionary change adds vitality and longevity to the Jewish people, its language, and life.

TIKKUN OLAM

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE MISHNAH

The texts examined below comprise a representative sampling of the term *tikkun olam* and its various uses within the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*. Interestingly enough, *tikkun olam* is found more often in *Masekhet Gittin*, the tractate dealing with divorce and protection of women, than in any other tractate of the *Mishnah*. We will attempt to discover just what *tikkun olam* meant in the days of the *Mishnah*. Who actually benefited from rulings made for the sake of *tikkun olam*? Did the benefit extend more to the individual or to a larger group? In each case examined, I will offer a hypothesis regarding the definition and context of *tikkun olam* as it was understood and used in the third through fifth centuries.

TEXT # 1

Mishnah Gittin 4:2

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ב

Previously, one would make a court in another place (a different place than where the divorcing couple lived) and cancel it (the divorce decree.) Rabban Gamliel the Elder established a custom that they should not do so, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

Previously, a person would change his name and her name, the name of his city and the name of her city. Rabban Gamliel the Elder established a custom that he should write, "The man so-and-so and every name that he has, the woman so-and-so and every name that she has," for the sake of *tikkun olam*.¹

Mishnah Gittin 4:1 states that after sending a divorce decree to his wife, a man may change his mind and rescind the decree. He may do this, either by notifying the

¹ See Appendix IIA1 for Hebrew text

messenger who had been authorized to deliver the divorce decree to his wife or by notifying her directly as long as she has not already received the decree. Once the divorce decree has been delivered into her hands, the husband may no longer change his mind. The significance of this particular *Mishnah* is that it prohibits the husband's ability to change his mind and nullify the *get* from a different location.

The *Gemara* expresses a *mahloket* as to the kind of court required when a husband decides to nullify a *get* that he has already sent to his wife. Rav Nahman states that a court of two suffices, since the court is only hearing an announcement, rather than hearing testimony. Rav Sheshet, on the other hand, requires a court of three, so that the ruling will be publicized and the wife will have a better chance of learning about the nullification. It would appear that Rav Sheshet has the more compassionate approach concerning the wife in this matter. The *tikkun olam* in this case is that the wife has the right to be clear about her marital status. Confusion about the wife's marital status could lead to two problematic outcomes, both of which are discussed in the *Gemara*. The first difficulty concerns the birth of subsequent children who could be classified *mamzerim*; the other involves the painful and inhumane status of *igun*.

In the case of *mamzerim*, the problematic outcome relates to the woman's lack of awareness that her marital status never changed. If a woman thinks she is divorced and has not heard that her husband nullified the divorce decree in another location, she might remarry and give birth to children of the new marriage, not knowing that she was still legally married to her first husband. These children of her second adulterous marriage would be considered *mamzerim*.

According to Jewish law, a *mamzer* may only marry a *mamzeret* or a convert to Judaism; the offspring of such a union would produce more *mamzerim*. Considering the inferior status of a *mamzer*, the *tikkun olam* referred to in this Mishnah would benefit the individual *mamzer* as well ensure the future of the Jewish people. A community populated by individual Jews who were not free to marry other Jews would certainly pose a major threat to the survival of the Jewish people.

The *Gemara* then discusses the problem of *igun*. An *agunah* is a deserted (literally, tied) wife legally forbidden to remarry; she exists in a state of limbo. According to Jewish law, a woman is only free to remarry if she has proof that her husband has died or that she has received a *get*, a decree of divorce. The *Gemara* explains that if a woman has received a *get* and her husband lives in a different location, she might have no way of knowing whether or not he had nullified the *get* before it reached her hand. Perhaps he issued the divorce decree in a moment of rage and afterward changed his mind. She remains vulnerable if she lives in a different location and has to wonder whether or not he has nullified the *get*. But if the *get* must be issued in the same location where she resides, then she would know immediately and not be left in a state of uncertainty.

The purpose of the *tikkun olam* --that the woman would know her marital status definitively--was achieved by denying the husband an opportunity to rescind the divorce decree in any location other than the wife's home community. If the husband had moved away, he could only rescind the decree by travelling back to her home. This lessens the likelihood that the wife would become an *agunah*. Although this text would seem to apply to these two individuals, it seems clear that the *tikkun olam* discussed here affects

the general welfare of the whole Jewish people. In this, as in other cases, the entire Jewish community benefits from the clearly-defined status of all its members.

TEXT #2

Mishnah Gittin 4: 3

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ג

A widow may not collect property from orphans except with an oath. They refrained from imposing an oath on her. Rabban Gamliel the Elder established a custom that she would make a vow regarding anything that the orphans want and collect her marriage contract. The witnesses sign the divorce decree, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.
Hillel established the custom of the *prozbul*, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.²

In order to understand this *Mishnah*, the terms *sh'vu'ah* (oath,) *neder* (vow,) and *prozbul* need explication. An oath is a statement that either confirms the truth of something or commits a person to action. Taking an oath is an extremely serious matter, since it invokes the name of God. Breaking an oath is, obviously, equally serious since it desecrates God's name. A vow is a voluntary obligation to refrain from doing something. A *prozbul* refers to a legal fiction, instituted by Hillel the Elder, for people who were reluctant to offer loans in the year preceding a sabbatical year because they feared that they would never be repaid. The *prozbul* was the rabbinic enactment which formalized the transfer of authority to the court and made it possible for loans to be collected after the sabbatical year.

When a Jewish husband died, leaving a widow and orphans, confusion and disagreement often resulted about the settlement of his property. At the time of the marriage the wife had received her *ketubah*, the legal document stating her husband's

² See Appendix IIA2 for Hebrew text

obligations to her during and after the marriage. If the husband died before the wife, Jewish Law required a widow to take an oath that she had not already received the value of her *ketubah* while her husband was still living. Taking the oath would force the wife to decide whether the things she had received during the marriage were intended for the care of the home and children as opposed to fulfilling the obligations contained in her *ketubah*.

The *prozbul* enacted by Rabban Gamliel enabled the woman to take a vow rather than an oath. She would state that any objects of the orphans' choosing would be forbidden to her if she had received any of her *ketubah*. She would then be able to collect her *ketubah*.

There is a lack of clarity as to whether the *prozbul*, for the sake of *tikkun olam* refers back to the above section of the *Mishnah*, or only to the following section concerning the *get*.

It has already been established that the *get* becomes legally binding once placed in the wife's hands. The *hidush* gleaned from this section of the *Mishnah* contends that witnesses must sign the divorce decree. Previously, having the messenger deliver it was sufficient. Here, the *tikkun olam* affirms the additional protection provided for the wife. Should she later need proof regarding the existence of the document, she could call upon legal witnesses for verification.

This *Mishnah* then indicates that Hillel instituted the *prozbul*, for the sake of *tikkun olam*. The *prozbul* was enacted by Hillel to solve a problem caused by the *shevi'it*, the seventh and final year of the Sabbatical cycle. According to Deuteronomy 15:1-11, all loans still outstanding at the end of the seventh year were to be cancelled. Leaders of

the community noticed that toward the end of that cycle, people were not loaning money to those who needed it because they were afraid they might not get it back. In order to keep the economy alive and to make money available for those individuals who needed loans, Hillel overrode the Torah law of *shevi'it*. He changed the custom so that one could authorize the courts to collect all his debts for him. This way, one could still feel free to lend, and the borrowers were able to borrow money when they needed it. Again, with this particular *Mishnah*, we find that what is referred to as *tikkun olam* benefits the entire Jewish people.

TEXT#3

Mishnah Gittin 4:6

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ו

Captives must not be ransomed for more than the worth of their value, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

And the captives can not be helped to flee, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

But Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says, for the sake of the captives.

And scrolls of *tefilin* (the phylacteries tied on arm and head) and *mezuzot* (the inscription on the door posts) cannot be bought from the non-Jews for more than their worth, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.³

The ransom of captive Jews was a serious communal concern during this time. It was customary for the Jewish community to pay a ransom to get the captive back, but of equal concern, was the price to be paid. Community leaders feared that if the Gentile captors received a ransom greater than the "fair market price," then more Jews were apt to be captured and the community responsible for increasing amounts of ransom. Hence, the Sages ruled, for the sake of *tikkun olam*, that captives should not be ransomed if an exorbitant price had been demanded, even if it meant the sacrifice of a particular

³ See Appendix IIA3 for Hebrew text

individual captive. The *tikkun olam* here implies that fewer Jews would be taken captive if potential captors realized that there was a limit on what could be gained, and that, obviously, would benefit the Jewish people as a whole.

The text also deals with issues of escape. Members of the community were not permitted to help free captives. There was a *mahlaket*, however, about the reasoning for this particular ruling. The Sages said that captives could not be helped to escape for the sake of *tikkun olam*. They believed this would keep the captors from being extraordinarily cruel to subsequent captives. Rabban Shimon Gamliel, however, disagreed. He was not concerned with future captives but with those remaining at the time of an escape. He feared that the remaining prisoners currently being held would be treated more severely as a result of one or more other prisoners being helped to escape. For that reason, if there were only one prisoner left, Rabban Shimon Gamliel would have found it acceptable to help that person escape, because there would be no remaining prisoners to be treated harshly in the aftermath of that escape.

This *Mishnah* includes yet another case of ransom, in this case, the ransom of objects rather than people. If Gentiles stole ritual items, such as *tefilin* and *mezuzot*, the community would offer a ransom for their return out of fear that the gentiles would desecrate them. The concern was that if Jews ransomed them for more than their "fair market price," the non-Jews would have greater incentive to continue the theft and plunder of Jewish sacred objects. Therefore, excessive ransom for ritual items was ruled against for the sake of *tikkun olam*, again for the general welfare of the Jewish people.

TEXT#4

Mishnah Gittin 4:9

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ט

...If one (Israelite) sells his field to a non-Jew and an Israelite returns and buys it from him (the non-Jew), the (Israelite) purchaser brings the First Fruits, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.⁴

Again we have a *mahloket* as to the meaning of this particular *Mishnah*. One interpretation deals with the sanctity of the land itself. Some Sages advocated the consistent sacred status of the land of *Eretz Yisrael* even if purchased by a non-Jew; as such, the produce of the purchased land would still be liable to *bikkurim* once it had been repurchased by a new Jewish owner. Others thought that once the land was sold to non-Jews, it lost its sanctity, so that even when it again became available to Jews, they would no longer be inclined to buy it back. Once these Sages realized that many Jews were hesitant to buy back land from non-Jews, they enacted regulations which reinstated Torah Laws of *bikkurim* in an attempt to make buying the land more desirable to Jews.

Another interpretation, however, sees the issue of *bikkurim* differently. If a Jew sells his property to a non-Jew, he is still required to bring the *bikkurim* from that land each year to Jerusalem. This requirement would serve as a deterrent to selling off the land of Israel to non-Jews.

Regardless of which interpretation seems more persuasive, the Sages made their enactment in order to retain Jewish control over the Land of Israel for the sake of *tikkun olam*. The *tikkun olam* in this case assures the continued sanctity of the land of Israel and the certainty of Jewish ownership of that land.

⁴ See Appendix IIA4 for Hebrew text

TEXT#5

Mishnah Gittin 5:3

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ה משנה ג

And one who finds a lost object does not take an oath, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.⁵

Jewish law records numerous examples of cases regarding lost property and the consequences for those who find these objects. The case cited in this Mishnah deals with the effort required to declare that all the found property was returned to the rightful owner. If the one who finds the property must declare by an oath that he has returned everything he has found, it seems reasonable to expect that this person would be less likely to go to the trouble of trying to return it to its owner. If, on the other hand, a simple declaration that everything has been returned suffices, then he is more likely to fulfill his civic obligations and return lost objects. The *tikkun olam* in this case acknowledges that people are more likely to do the right thing if it is more convenient for them. This ruling enables the individual who has lost his property to retrieve it as well as allowing the individual who found it to return it without suspicion of liability. The benefit of this ruling extends beyond the two individuals involved, to the general welfare of the entire community.

Though the particular circumstances vary, the *tikkun olam* in all of these cases is that the entire Jewish community will benefit from the various laws.

⁵ See Appendix IIA5 for Hebrew text

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE TOSEFTA

TEXT#1

Tosefta Terumot 1:12-13

תוספתא מסכת תרומות פרק א הלכות יב"ג

R. Simeon b. Manasiah says, "Orphans who were supported by a householder, whether their father made them dependent on him, or a court made them dependent on him, he (the householder) tithes (for them) and provides food for them, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

And thus R. Simeon b. Manasiah would say, "An orphan, the son of a Levite, who was growing up under the care of a householder, he (the householder) tithes (for him) and provides food for him, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

If the son of his (the householder's) wife (whom the householder was not required to maintain,) was a priest or a Levite, behold, he (the householder) provides food for him from his portion.

A minor who said to someone in the marketplace, "Feed me with (the poor man's) tithe to eat, he (the householder) feeds him, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.⁶

These first examples from *Tosefta Terumot* include a confusing variety of concepts and customs which require some preliminary explanation. Jewish law requires each adult Jew to make a series of offerings from the produce of his land. The first offering was known as *ma'aser terumah* which went to the priests. The next offering, known as *ma'aser rishon*, was distributed to the Levites. Another tithe, *ma'aser ani*, was known as the poor man's tithe. Maintaining the distinction of each of these categories of offerings was crucial to the rabbis.

The *Tosefta* discussed here refers to *Mishnah Gittin 5:4*, which deals with a similar topic in a different context. That *Mishnah* states: "If orphans were supported by a householder, or their father appointed a guardian for them, he is obligated to tithe their

⁶ See Appendix IIB1 for Hebrew text

produce." Whereas the *Tosefta* merely refers to the guardian's tithe, the *Mishnah* introduces the concept that it was the orphan's produce from which the tithe is drawn. We further notice that while the *Mishnah* makes no reference to *tikkun olam*, this particular *Tosefta* does introduce this concept.

In the *Mishnah*, the statement and its purpose seem much clearer; the fundamental issue involves restricting access to forbidden food. If the *terumot* and the *ma'aser* are removed from the orphans' food before they have access to it, then they will not be in danger of eating food which had been dedicated for ritual purposes. Upon first glance at the *Tosefta* example, it seems as if the purpose of the *tikkun olam* would be to protect the orphans from eating untithed (forbidden) food. But the confusion certainly warrants further investigation.

Interestingly enough, both chapters four and five of *Mishnah Gittin* are filled with many examples of *tikkun olam*. As pointed out earlier in this paper, the term, *tikkun olam*, as applied in the *Mishnah*, seems to be leaning toward a definition of what is good for the Jewish community. In *Mishnah 5:4*, which is cited in the *Tosefta* now under consideration, for the sake of *tikkun olam* is not mentioned at all. Clearly, the example of tithing the orphan's food before it is given to them does not impact the welfare of the entire Jewish community. This ruling protects the individual orphans from violating Jewish law.

That distinction between protecting the individual orphan and ensuring the good of the entire community challenges us to consider all the more so what this *Tosefta* actually means by, for the sake of *tikkun olam*. The *Tosefta* deals with a similar topic with virtually identical wording, and then concludes that it is for the sake of *tikkun olam*,

while the *Mishnah* does not use the term at all. For the sake of *tikkun olam*, must therefore mean something different than simply tithing from the produce to prevent orphans from eating forbidden food.

To clarify the meaning of this seemingly paradoxical *Tosefta*, especially in comparison with the similar *Mishnah*, we look to Lieberman's commentary and interpretation. According to Lieberman, if a householder takes in destitute orphans, he might be tempted to use the funds dedicated for or *mu'aser ani* for *tzedakah* (donations beyond the obligations of the various tithes) so that he does not have to delve into his own money to feed them. This would have the potential of creating a financial liability for himself and his own family. A technical reading of the *halakhah* suggests that once poor orphans have been taken in and are provided for, the householder is forbidden to use the tithings meant for the poor to feed these particular orphans. The householder has become the orphans' benefactor; due to his generosity and commitment to them, they can no longer be considered destitute.

The compassionate response from Rabban Shimon ben Menasseh goes even further to affirm the commitment of the householder, who has become responsible for these orphans. He states that the householder should take out the tithes as required by Jewish law, but he should then be able to include them with the rest of his usable food to feed his family, which now includes the orphans. The reason Rabban Shimon ben Menasseh cites for his decision is, for the sake of *tikkun olam*. In this case, the *tikkun olam* confirms that even if a householder has taken in a poor orphan and technically raised him above the poverty line, he should still be able to use his tithings for the poor to feed the orphan. This interpretation of for the sake of *tikkun olam* encourages people to

be more likely to take in a poor orphan who needs a home. If everyone thought that they had to provide tithes for the destitute of the community in addition to supporting individual orphans in their own homes, they might be less likely to take on the responsibility of bringing these children into their homes.

In this same *Tosefta*, the *halakhah* describes another situation where the orphan is a Levite. An Israelite would normally be required to offer a special tithe for the Levites, known as *ma'aser rishon*. In this case, if the householder has taken in an orphan who is a Levite, is he still required to offer *ma'aser rishon* when he is already supporting a Levite in his own home? The text suggests that he is exempt from offering *ma'aser rishon* under these circumstances for the sake of *tikkun olam*. Being absolved of the responsibility to offer *ma'aser rishon* benefits the community because it encourages the support of these orphans. Still, it is important to note that the householder does fulfill his obligation to make this offering. It is simply the circumstances of using it for a member of his own household that differs from the normal practice. This ruling assures the community that more people will be willing to take in orphans and help rear them. It is interesting to note that in this case, Lieberman's commentary understands the Levite orphan to be indigent. The *baraita* never explicitly states that he is poor, but Lieberman infers it from the context. And even though the householder would never be allowed to forget about his *ma'aser ani* and neglect his responsibility to the poor altogether, here he can use *ma'aser ani* to feed the child, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

The second part of this *baraita* simply states that one should feed a *katan* who might approach him in the marketplace asking for food; nothing is said about whether this child is needy or not. Lieberman's commentary explains that normally one does not

give out *ma'aser ani* in the marketplace. *Ma'aser ani* is much too specific a measure to distribute randomly in the tumult of the marketplace. Instead, one would give out *tzedakah* in the marketplace. However, in this case, for the sake of *tikkun olam*, an individual is allowed to feed hungry children and not be judged as if he gave *tzedakah* out of his *ma'aser ani*, even if the child asks for food as *tzedakah*. The *tikkun olam* here is that hungry children must be fed, and fulfilling that need takes precedence over the details of the food's source. The intention of this text is to affirm a community which sustains all of its members and encourages those with resources to assume the responsibility of feeding those without adequate resources.

With the help of Lieberman's commentaries, we find that our original hypothesis, that these *halakhot* were intended to prevent the orphans from eating forbidden food, is wrong. We now understand that the general benefit to the Jewish community would be giving people financial incentives to do the right thing in bringing orphans into their homes and rearing them; taking care of indigent orphans from the tribe of *Levi*; and encouraging people to give food to any minor who asks for it, regardless of the child's status.

TEXT#2

Tosefta Ketubot 12:2

תוספתא מסכת כתובות פרק יב הלכה ב

They do not make a marriage contract for a woman from movable goods, for the sake of *tikkun olam*. Rabbi Yosi said, "What is the *tikkun olam* in this (ruling), but that according to it (the ruling), there is no limit (or measurement) to it."⁷

⁷ See Appendix IIB2 for Hebrew text

This *Tosefta* challenges us to first define the meaning of the term “movable property.” Unfortunately, the commentaries in the *Tosefta* and the *Tosefta Kef shuta* do not offer much clarity. Rabbi Yosi’s question regarding the *tikkun olam* in this ruling intrigues us because it is so unusual. The sages rarely ask this question which is, after all, fundamental to the outcome of this study. As opposed to many of the other cited texts which include a clear meaning of the term *tikkun olam*, Rabbi Yosi seems perplexed by invoking *tikkun olam* here with regard to property with such transitory value and unclear meaning. Therefore, Rabbi Yosi must ask the very real, as opposed to rhetorical, question: what is the *tikkun olam* in that?

We begin with understanding the meaning of the term, movable property. The *Tosefta Kef shuta* makes reference to the *Talmud Bavli*, where Rashi explains movable property and its changing value more clearly. First of all, movable property is just that; it can be moved and therefore, sold or lost much more easily than permanent property, such as land. Moreover, movable property can change in value more easily, often depreciating rather than appreciating, and its value is far more unpredictable than that of land. In fact, Rashi says that in general, all movable goods have a value that can never be set. The capricious nature of these goods makes it much harder to assess the proper amount of their true value. Rashi understands that if a woman feels more secure financially, she will be more apt to enter into marriage and family life. According to Rashi, we might therefore, conclude that the *tikkun olam* is offered for the sake of the woman.

After gleaning an initial understanding from Rashi as to the meaning of movable property, Lieberman’s commentaries are then more helpful regarding his view of the nature of the *tikkun olam*. Contrary to Rashi, Lieberman explains that the *tikkun olam*

does not benefit the woman, but rather assures the purchaser of the land that he is secure in his ownership of the property. The following scenario clarifies the situation: A husband has set aside movable goods for his wife's *ketubah*. He then sells his land to a neighbor. Sometime later, he either divorces his wife, or he dies, and the woman comes forward to collect her *ketubah*. If the movable goods previously set aside for her, have either been lost or depreciated in value, she then has the right to come forward and claim the land that her husband had previously sold to the neighbor because she is first in line to collect from his estate.

Lieberman says that it is better to avoid this kind of scenario from the beginning by not using movable property in the woman's *ketubah*. This situation can be avoided by not creating a *ketubah* which gives the impression that the value of the movable goods remains fixed and will always be available to the wife. In this case, the *tikkun olam* gives the new owner of the land the security of knowing that his property cannot be claimed by the ex-wife or widow and taken away from him. Without the conditions set forth in this ruling, a new owner of land could not enjoy the security of knowing that his property cannot be taken away from him to fulfil the terms of a *ketubah*.

Whether we follow Rashi's explanation that the ruling benefits the woman, or Lieberman's interpretation that it protects the purchaser, the ruling clearly benefits the Jewish community. We can now move to Rabbi Yosi's question, "What is the *tikkun olam* in this (ruling)?" Rabbi Yosi argues that no matter which view we take as to the nature of the of the *tikkun olam*, no one should ever rely on movable goods as security. According to Rabbi Yosi, anyone in a position to buy land would know this, and

therefore, this enactment is unnecessary. Rabbi Yosi concludes that this ruling is not for the sake of *tikkun olam*, but rather a matter of common sense.

TEXT#3

Tosefta Gittin 3:8-9

תוספתא מסכת גיטין פרק ג הלכות ח-ט

Priests who invalidated (a sacrifice) through improper mental disposal,
if they (did so) by mistake, they are exempt
if they (did so) in full consciousness of doing wrong, they are guilty and
bound (to repay), for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

A messenger of the court who gives stripes by the authority of the court
and caused injury,

if he (did so) by mistake, he is exempt

if he (did so) in full consciousness of doing wrong, he is guilty and bound
(to repay), for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

A doctor, who with skill arranged (the cure for someone ill), by the
authority of the court and caused injury,

if he (did so) by mistake, he is exempt

if he (did so) in full consciousness of doing wrong, he is guilty and bound
(to repay), for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

A doctor, who performed an embryotomy, by the authority of the court
and caused injury,

if he (did so) by mistake, he is exempt

if he (did so) in full consciousness of doing wrong, he is guilty and bound
(to repay), for the sake of *tikkun olam*.⁸

The first example described in this text from *Masekhet Gittin* concerns the manner in which a priest carries out his sacrificial obligations. If, when preparing an animal for sacrifice, a priest performed the procedure improperly, he might thereby render the sacrifice invalid. It would be easy to envision a scenario where an Israelite had gone to great personal sacrifice to make the trip to the Temple in order to offer the animal for sacrifice, only to learn that his sacrifice was now invalidated by a mistake in ritual practice. What recourse did the Israelite have? If the priest had willfully damaged the

⁸ See Appendix IIB3 for Hebrew text

sacrifice, he would be required to compensate the Israelite for the invalidated offering. If, however, damaging the animal had been accidental, then the priest was exempt from making monetary restitution to the Israelite, for the sake of *tikkun olam*.

Even more important than determining the priest's liability and responsibility in this particular case is recognizing that the priest was acting in a position of authority when he made the mistake. He was not simply fulfilling this obligation out of personal desire but rather in his capacity as a public servant. As an official representative of the community, the priest was held to a different standard from individuals engaged in private enterprise. At first glance, it would appear that the *Tosefta* is trying to tell us that for the sake of *tikkun olam* is concerned with requiring the priest to offer compensation to the Israelite if he intentionally invalidates the sacrifice. Upon close examination of Lieberman's commentary to the *Tosefta* in *Tosefta Kef shuta*, we discover another possible explanation.

The real *tikkun olam* occurs not when the priest compensates the Israelite for his mistake, but rather, when the priest is exempt from having to pay when the mistake is unintentional. If he knew that he were indeed liable for any mistake he might commit unintentionally, he might be more reluctant to serve the community in that capacity. Since all Israelites were unable to offer sacrifices on their own, they needed the priest to be there and to perform his job to the best of his ability without fear of the consequences should he make an innocent mistake. Clearly it would be for the good of the local Jewish community to have such an enactment, as a protection for the preservation of its sacrificial system.

The four examples cited in this *halakhah* appear to be unrelated with regard to their content, yet the similarities in format and intended purpose bear further investigation. Just as the priest acted on the authority of God, the community, and the individual Israelite, so the messenger acts as a *shaliach* on behalf of the court while carrying out the mandated punishment. If he accidentally causes excessive injury to the person while acting in this official capacity, he is exempt from liability. Again, the *tikkun olam* seems to be for the good of the local Jewish community. If any person fulfilling a civic duty feared the consequences of making a mistake while performing his assigned task, he would be less willing to carry out that responsibility.

Next we encounter two interesting medical cases. The case presented in *halakhah* 8 describes a physician who tries to cure a patient and instead, causes injury to that person. If the injury occurred by accident, the physician was not held liable, for the sake of *tikkun olam*. We see that the *tikkun olam* protects the community because, if the doctor knew that he were personally liable for causing injury, even accidentally, he would be less likely to accept the cases assigned by the court. The resulting situation in this case would leave the community particularly vulnerable if no one were willing to accept the pro bono court assigned cases out of fear of personal liability. Similarly, the doctor ordered by the court to perform an embryotomy might be reluctant to accept this assignment for fear of personal liability, even if performing the procedure might save the mother's life.

The four examples contained in this text reiterate the principle that for the sake of *tikkun olam* refers to anything that benefits the local Jewish community by encouraging some of its members to act on everyone's behalf without fear of personal liability. The

cases described in *halakhot* 8 & 9 deal with three different matters, but they all convey the same basic idea. All of these cases focus on the area of liability. If the person causing injury makes a mistake, then he is not held liable. If he causes injury intentionally, however, he is liable. It is not enough to assert that he is only carrying out the orders of the court or priesthood. No one is protected from intentional wrongdoing. The unifying principle in all of these cases holds that the *sh'lichim* were all doing what they were assigned to do by a public institution.

The structure of the community is strengthened if various *sh'lichim* are empowered to act without paying for the damages caused by unintentional mistakes. The absence of a safeguard protecting the priests from liability for damaged offerings, for example, threatens the continuity of the sacrificial cult and undermines the very structure of Israelite society. Each action described in the text was mandated by some kind of communal authority, such as the court, or the Temple cult, or even by God. Since the *shaliach* acts on behalf of others and not for his own personal benefit, he is exempt from liability for mistakes made during this communal service.

The text implies the obverse as well. In the case of an individual who acts on his own personal behalf, such as a businessman, he knows that whatever risks he incurs in pursuing his own profit are his responsibility. He is free to make those decisions and take those risks in pursuit of his livelihood.

Conclusion for *Tikkun Olam* in the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta*

From the examples we have studied from both the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta*, we can make a further assumption that the *tikkun olam*, in addition to making society run

more smoothly and helping people make decisions that benefit the less fortunate, also serves the purpose of insuring that children are brought up with a clear sense of what the *mitzvot* are and how to apply them to real life situations. If orphans and indigent children are taken care of by the members of society, there is more likelihood that they will grow up to have those values in their adult lives and instill them in their children. By living this kind of life, they will also serve the Jewish society better.

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE ALEINU

TEXT #1

Aleinu

עלינו

It is upon us to praise the Master of All,
To give greatness to the One Who created in the beginning,
Who did not make us like the nations of the lands,
And did not place us like the families of the earth.
He has not assigned our portion like theirs,
Nor our lot like all their multitudes.
For they bow down to vanity and emptiness and pray to a god who does
not help.
But we bend our knees, bow, and give thanks
Before the King who reigns over kings,
The Holy One, blessed be He.
He stretches out the Heavens and supports the Earth,
His essence is established in the Heavens above,
His strength dwells in heights above.
He is our God; there is none other.
True is our King. There is nothing beside Him,
As it is written in His Torah,
"You are to know this day and take it to heart
That *Adonai* is the only God
In the Heavens above and on the Earth below, there is none other.

Therefore we hope, because of You, *Adonai* our God,
To see quickly the beauty of Your strength
To destroy all idols from the Earth,

And false gods will be utterly cut down,
 To perfect the universe through the kingdom of the God Who said,
 "Dai."
 Then all humanity will call on Your name,
 To turn all the earth's wicked toward You.
 All the inhabitants of the world will recognize and know
 That it is to You every knee will bend
 Every tongue will swear.
 Before You, *Adonai* our God, every knee will bend,
 And they will cast themselves down,
 And to the glory of Your name they will give honor.
 And all will accept upon themselves the obligation of Your kingship
 That You will rule over them soon and forever.
 For the Kingdom is Yours and You will reign forever in glory,
 As it is written: God will reign forever.
 As it is said: *Adonai* will be King over all the earth.
 On that day *Adonai* will be one, and His name will be one.⁹

The next significant change in the use of *l'taken olam* can be found in the *Aleinu*.

Contained within its two paragraph structure is the phrase, *l'taken olam b'malkhut*

Shadai. In the contemporary period, the *Aleinu* is found in the concluding portion of all statutory services, but originally it was only found in the *Musaf Rosh Hashanah* service before the *shofar* was blown, where it opened the *Malkhuyot* section. Therefore, the *Aleinu* is also known as *Tekiat d'Rav*, the "The *Shofar* Service of Rav." This designation leads many scholars to ascribe its composition to the third century Babylonian teacher, Rav, although many others disagree about its origin. One popular tradition ascribes the *Aleinu* to Joshua, while another traces its authorship to the Men of the Great Assembly during the period of the Second Temple. A reasonable explanation for placing it in the time period of the Second Temple is that while it makes reference to the Temple practice of prostration, this text does not include any mention of the restoration of the Temple. A

⁹ See Appendix IIC1 for Hebrew text

version of the *Aleinu* has also been found among the hymns used by the early *merkavah* mystics, suggesting that its use might be possibly even older.

Regardless of when the *Aleinu* actually was written and placed in a worship service, the earliest written version that remains today appears in *Mahzor Vitry*, a compendium of prayers and seasonal services, their sources, and the laws surrounding them. *Mahzor Vitry*, one of the works produced by the school of Rashi, contains his *halakhic* rulings, which were later expanded and organized by Rashi's student, Simcha, or perhaps one of Simcha's colleagues. The commentary in *Mahzor Vitry* uses many Biblical quotations to explain exactly what Simcha thought the meaning of the *Aleinu* was. In Simcha's commentary, he uses Biblical quotations from the fuller text of the *Aleinu* in order to explain its meaning. It is in this more complete text which includes these Biblical quotations that a greater understanding of *l'taken olam* can be found. In *The Complete Festival Prayers According to the Ritual of the German and Polish Jews*, the first paragraph of the *Aleinu* (on page 205) and the second paragraph (on page 215) are separated by almost ten pages of additional liturgical material. What comes to us as a two paragraph prayer today was then a much longer text. All of the Biblical citations used in the *Mahzor Vitry* commentary are from the additional internal paragraphs of the *Aleinu*. In the translation below of the *Mahzor Vitry* commentary, we notice the intricate weaving together of the author's comments and the Biblical citations from the subsequent paragraphs of the *Aleinu*.

... to repair the world in the kingdom of *Shadai* - in the kingdom of the One who said, (in creating) the world, "enough." And thus He said, "I appeared to Abraham and others (Isaac and Jacob) by the name of *Shadai* (Exodus 6:3). (The world) was widening at the beginning very much, until God said to it, "Enough." And that all human beings will call Your name, and this is as it is said, in Scripture, "All who call the name of

Adonai will be delivered," (Joel 3:5). Then I will make the peoples pure of speech, so that all will call the name of *Adonai* (Zephaniah 3:9) so that all the inhabitants of the earth will recognize and know that You are the true God.

"He saw no evil in Israel" relates to (the idea) that they caused idols to pass from the land. In Scriptures (it is also written): I will remove the heart of stone from your body and I will put a new spirit within you (Ezekiel 36:26).

For the kingdom is God's relates to we bend the knee and bow. And Lift up your Gates (Psalms 24:7) relates to **repairing the world**, that is to say, your many heads will lift up the gate so that the glory of the King will come in here, that for Him, Heaven is not enough. As it says in I Kings 8:27, "Behold, the Heavens and the Heavens of the Heavens cannot contain You." And this is why it says in the text above, *Shadai*. That it is enough.¹⁰

An examination of the term *l'taken olam* as it appears in *Avodat Yisrael*, considered to be the standard prayer book text, with a scholarly commentary by Seligman Isaac Baer also adds to our understanding of its meaning. Below is a translation of his commentary on *malkhut Shadai* found on p. 132.

In the Kingdom of *Shadai* - After all the impure things in the world will be removed, and all the people will worship the name of *Adonai*, then the **world will be repaired**. And that time is called the Kingdom of *Shadai* because everyone will make *Shadai* the King over them.¹¹

Several theological concepts become clear from studying the *Aleinu*, the *Mahzor Vitry* commentary, and the *Avodat Yisrael* commentary. According to all three texts, at some point during the creation of the world, God said, "Enough." After creating the physical world, God pulled back and left the rest of the work--the completion of the spiritual world--to human hands. To aid humanity in completing this task, God revealed the Torah to Israel. The entire Israelite community was chosen to receive God's spiritual truth and was therefore obligated to praise and thank God for receiving the Truth of

¹⁰ See Appendix IIC2 for Hebrew text

¹¹ See Appendix IIC3 for Hebrew text

Torah. They were also obligated to pray for God to finish the work of creation by revealing the same truth to the other peoples of the world. In the first paragraph of the *Aleinu*, we see the unique and special relationship Jews have with God, which is a significant part of being God's chosen people. In the second paragraph, we see Israel praying for God to finish the work of revelation to all humankind.

This understanding of the *Aleinu* assumes that only God could bring *tikkun olam* to the world; the authors of this prayer would never have presumed that they could make God's word known to the rest of humanity without divine intervention. It was incumbent upon them to pray to God, the same God Who had said *dai* while creating the world, so that revelation could be completed according to the divine will.

The definition of *tikkun olam* as manifest in *Aleinu* stresses God's role in the perfection of the world; we will not complete the work of creation, rather God will repair the world by finishing the process of creation, which had been stopped before it had been completed. Humanity fulfills its obligation by praying that God will be merciful enough to perfect the world. If God would make manifest the divine presence to the idolators of the world, then all peoples would work together toward a common understanding of God's presence in the universe. They would know God, and the entire world would be perfected under the Kingdom of the Almighty.

Herein lies the tension between the first paragraph of the *Aleinu*, which describes the special and unique relationship Jews have with God and the second paragraph, which emphasizes the universal goal of a united world under the rule of God. This central theological statement asserts that Jews are God's chosen people--chosen to perfect

humanity under the rule of God by teaching the world community what they knew God's presence to represent.

Amoraic period Jews believed they were doing their part. In a time of tremendous suffering and turmoil, the certainty that God could perfect the world must have been very comforting. A world with God's manifest presence to all the peoples of the earth would confirm what the Jewish people already believed would bring about a world with less suffering and disharmony.

Conclusion for *Tikkun Olam* in the *Aleinu*

We see that the communal understanding of *tikkun olam* during this time had clearly shifted away from the Mishnaic interpretation of the term. There we found that *tikkun olam* concerned the welfare of individual Jewish communities. The *Mishnah* reflected a world-view that stressed how the Jewish community could function as a separate entity unto itself. By Rav's time in the third century, the Jewish community had begun to be aware of a world beyond itself. They had begun to realize that they were not untouched by the rest of the world, nor was the rest of the world unaffected by Jewish belief and behavior. The *Aleinu* invokes the hope that God's wisdom will be revealed to all the other people of the world through an acknowledgement of the Jewish belief system.

Interestingly enough, the *tikkun olam* here is presented as an act of theological perfection alone. No mention of what actions the nations will take with this new world vision or what their behaviors will look like appears in this prayer. Perhaps they

expected that if they were able to achieve the proper intention and comprehension, then the appropriate behavior would follow.

We can only speculate what led to this shift toward a more universal type of thinking. No matter whether the Jews enjoyed peace and calm or struggle and turmoil, they still saw themselves as quite distinctive and the world as still being unperfected.

In addition to the shift in thinking from the days of the *Mishnah*, we also notice a shift in the style of writing. In the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta* examples examined here, the language was in the form of legal prose, terse and concrete. Several hundred years later in the Amoraic period, we see a poetic style developing in the liturgy. There is a flow to the language; the ideas are presented repeatedly in language that is highly spiritual and idealistic. The thoughts are noble and poetic. We see the difference between liturgy and law, though the same words are used.

In the end, the *Aleinu* provides us with a theological mission statement for the Jewish people but no plan for implementation of *tikkun olam* is presented.

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE ZOHAR

TEXT # 1

Zohar, Vol. 3, p.239:1

זוהר כרך ג פרשת פנחס דף רלט עמוד א

Anything that God makes is forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken from it," (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Solomon the King, whose wisdom was greater than anyone's, did he not know that everything God would make would be forever? He said of himself, "I know things that other people do not know." But certainly Solomon, whose wisdom surpassed that of anyone else, what he knew, other people did not know. The wise men of other nations, when they would make something, they would look at it one time, or two times, and then they would do it. And

after (having made it) they would add to it or they would take away from it (to make it the way they wanted it.) This is not the way God works – making something out of nothing that had no reality to it at all. And it came out perfectly as it was supposed to without any need for changes. Because of that, it is written, “And God saw everything He made, and it was very good,” (Genesis 1:31). Whatever He had made for the perfection of the world would, of course, be forever.¹²

This first *Zohar* text speaks of a world whose cosmic order needs no changing or perfecting at all. The world was perfect when God created it, remaining that way to this day. Furthermore, this text brings God’s perfectly ordered world into the realm of the future by saying that it will stay perfect forever. This passage praises God for making the cosmos exactly as it is and gives praise for the world to come, as well. In this *Zohar* piece, *tikkun olam* describes that perfectly ordered world and cosmos, as they were originally created. They came from God, they were put together by God, and they go on forever.

This particular *Zohar* text contrasts the way God made this world with the Gentile artisans who would put something together, stand back, look more closely, redesign, and then put it together again differently. They continue to perfect their creations in an ongoing fashion. God, on the other hand, made the world and saw that it was very good immediately. Before there was any reality or physicality in the world, God took the *tohu v’vohu* and formed the perfect world of beauty from it. Hence there was never a need for change in God’s properly ordered world. In this passage from the *Zohar*, the term *tikkun olam* describes God’s perfect world.

¹²See Appendix IID1 for Hebrew text

TEXT #2

Zohar, Vol. 1, p.163:2

זוהר כרך א פרשת ויצא דף קסג עמוד ב

R. Abba says, "Meritorious is the portion of Israel who are above the idolatrous nations because their status is above, and the status of the idolatrous nations is below. The Israelites are on the side of holiness. Those gentiles are on the side of impurity. The Israelites are to the right, and the idolatrous nations are to the left." When the Holy Temple was destroyed, "God pulled back His right hand in the presence of the enemy," (Lamentations 2:3). Therefore it reads, "Deliver with Your right hand and answer me," (Psalm 60:7). The left side has become stronger, and impurity has greater force. It will continue until God rebuilds the Holy Temple and **perfects the cosmic order**. When He restores it to the way it should be, the side of impurity will pass out of the world, and thus it is written, "(I will make) the unclean spirit vanish from the land," (Zechariah 13:2).¹³

In the first *Zohar* text, we learned that God put the world in its proper order from the beginning and that it would stay that way forever. In this text, however, we learn that it is possible for the universe to get out of order when gentiles and their impure acts transform the world into a state of disarray. The people Israel and their sanctified acts will be able to bring the world back into perfect order because they have a higher status in the cosmos. Both the higher status of the Israelites and their ability to perfect the world are inextricably connected to the existence of the Holy Temple. This *Zohar* text pleads with God to rebuild the Temple so that the Israelites can restore the proper order of the world. Only if the Holy Temple exists can there be the proper ordering of the world, and only God can restore the Holy Temple in order to set the world straight when the cosmos goes awry.

This *Zohar* text presents a different twist on the definition of *tikkun olam*. In the first text, *tikkun olam* was the world exactly as God had created it. In this second *Zohar* text we learn that the world can go awry, and the *tikkun olam* here occurs when God fixes

the world and sets it back in its proper order. It should be noted that, according to this text, human beings are not involved in *tikkun olam* at all. They do not initiate it, they do not pray for it, and they certainly do not actively set the world into proper order themselves. It is God and God alone who is able to create *tikkun olam*, and God will do so by restoring the Holy Temple to the Israelite people.

TEXT #3

Zohar, Vol. 3, p. 112:1

זוהר כרך ג פרשת בהר דף קיב עמוד א

The worship that a person carries out in relationship to God contains two aspects within it – to be both a slave and a son, whereby God can crown Himself. And what are these? (They are) the worship of prayer, in which one acts both as slave and son in order to be connected to those higher levels of worship and to perfect prayer. In the hidden places of being a slave, one worships in such a way as to **perfect the worlds** in order to bring all the worlds into proper order so that God's will connects to the secrets of His wisdom, and those properly connect to the master Himself in the high hidden places. A son is always attached to his father without any separation; nobody can prevent this. A slave has to do the work of his Master, and so he **puts the world into proper order**.¹⁴

This *Zohar* text differs from the others, both in regard to defining *tikkun olam* and how to bring it about. In this third *Zohar* piece, *tikkun olam* encompasses neither the world nor the cosmos, which are already in perfect order, nor does it describe putting them back in perfect order through the power of the Holy Temple. This text teaches that the proper worship by human beings restores the perfect order of God's very existence. This piece uses the metaphor of a slave and a son to explain that two different ways exist to approach God and that both are necessary for God to reach God's complete perfection.

The text assumes the close and intimate relationship that should exist between a

¹³ See Appendix IID2 for Hebrew text

¹⁴ See Appendix IID3 for Hebrew text

father and a son. When the son desires to communicate with his father, he should be able to do so directly with no intermediary needed to facilitate the closeness. A slave, on the other hand, is more removed from his master and needs help in communicating and expressing himself to his superior. The *Zohar* continues by applying this metaphor to the profound connection between human beings and God. In order for a person to have a full and complete relationship with God, he or she must communicate with God on both levels. When human beings pray to God hoping to reach the highest and loftiest recesses of the Divine, they do so with the intimacy of a child approaching a parent feeling secure and knowing that they are deeply connected to God. Their prayer feels neither forced nor uncomfortable. This close and comfortable aspect of the worshiping relationship evokes the powerful image of the father and son.

The slave, on the other hand, has a more distant connection to the master and must therefore work much harder to create and maintain that relationship. The separation in status is indeed impenetrable. No matter how much effort the slave exerts in an attempt to connect with his master, a deep chasm remains forever. So too, the metaphor extends to the relationship between human beings and God. Some aspects of our relationship to God will never be bridged. There will always be a separation between the plane of humanity and the plane of Godliness. By working diligently to be closer to God, the slave brings various aspects of God into alignment with each other, thus uniting God into One.

In this particular case, it is human beings who effect *tikkun olam*; rather than ordering the world or the cosmos, they are properly ordering God through their appropriate forms of worship. They do not pray to God specifically for God to perfect

the world, and they are not perfecting the world themselves through their actions. They unite God's being into One through their sincere worship to and praise for God. It is with this *Zohar* text that we begin to see human beings become a part of making *tikkun olam* happen, even though at this stage, their involvement is quite minimal.

TEXT #4

Zohar, Vol. 3, p. 21:1

וזהר כרך ג פרשת ויקרא דף כא עמוד א

They (the saints) stayed in the cave that day. When night came, the moon shone into the cave. Two merchants passed by with donkeys loaded up with wine and food for them (the merchants). One said to the other, "Why don't we stop here, give some food and water to the donkeys, and go into the cave?"

Said the other, "Before we go in, you explain this verse that makes no sense."

He (the first) said, "Which verse?"

He (the second) said, "I refer to the verse, 'I will praise You forever for what You have done....' (Psalm 52:11). What is 'What You have done;' it does not say what (has been done)? It is also written, '(I will hope that Your name is) good in the presence of Your saints.' Is He not good to others?"

The other merchant could not answer. He said, "Woe to me. For the sake of business I have left God. (I am not a student, and I am not a saint, and therefore, I have not studied enough to answer this question)."

R. Hiya and R. Yosi heard this while they were sitting in the cave and they rejoiced.

R. Hiya said to R. Yosi, "Did I not tell you that when God does a miracle, He does it completely?"

They went out of the cave and R. Hiya opened with the following words, "'Peace Peace – with the far and the near,' (Isaiah 57:19). The two peaces here are one for the far and one for the near, and they are both the same. One who was far away and came near, that is the penitent. First he was far, and now he is near. Another meaning of far is that when a person is far away from Torah, he is far away from God (like the merchant). And when he draws near to Torah, God draws him near to Himself. Now therefore join us and come into the cave."

So the merchants joined them after first tying their donkeys and giving them food. Then they all went into the cave.

One of the merchants said, "Since you are scholars, explain this verse, 'I thank you God for what You have done, and I will hope in

You... It doesn't tell you what He did. It tells you He is good to His saints. Is He not good to anybody else?"

R. Hiya said, "It means exactly as it says, that God made the world. Because of this **world that God made and perfected**, people are required to thank God each day. So now, as far as, 'I will hope in Your name because you were good to your saints,' that is also true. Those who are righteous will receive the name of God, which is Good. But not the people who are guilty and who transgress daily and do not study Torah.¹⁵

This particular narrative from the *Zohar* includes two different stories, one involving two merchants and the other concerning two saints. The story weaves the two strands of narrative together at the end. In the first story, one of the merchants feels distant from God. Long ago he had left the study of Torah to pursue his business career, and he laments his inability to no longer discuss Torah intelligently. He and his fellow merchant come upon two scholars through whom the second story is revealed.

Both narratives stress the value of studying Torah, but the second employs a different twist on this value. According to R. Hiya, the cosmos functions the way it does because God created the world and perfected the order, *etaken olam*, of everything in it. This text seems unclear as to whether the world was perfect from its creation, or whether God perfected the world after its completion, in contrast to the previous texts which emphasized how the world was perfected. Regardless of the timing of perfecting the world, the cosmos now exists in its proper order. The saints, who see and appreciate the world in its proper order, praise God and want to draw close to God through the study of Torah. These righteous men recognize the goodness of God, and they receive God's name as Good.

Those who do not see the world as properly and perfectly ordered by God, do not see God's name as Good. They denigrate the world as a bad place, failing to see its

¹⁵ See Appendix IID4 for Hebrew text

beauty and perfect construction. Therefore, they do not study Torah, one of the primary ways to draw close to God. They are totally disinterested in having any relationship with God and therefore do not receive God's name into their lives.

The two stories come together at the end when R. Hiya and the merchant discuss the verse that the two merchants had pondered in the beginning of the story. With the help of the scholars, the merchant realizes that the rewards of being faithful to God and studying Torah include being closer to God and leading a fuller and happier life. The merchant then studies Torah, he becomes closer to God, and therefore he is more able to appreciate the perfect world that God has created. This also answers the merchant's original question, "What has God done that we should praise Him?" The saint responds that God has created a perfect world in perfect order. Human beings then have a choice as to whether or not they acknowledge God's perfect creation. The merchant's other question receives an answer as well. Is this perfectly ordered world for everyone, or is it just for the saints? The saint answers that God's perfectly ordered world exists to benefit everyone, even those who have strayed from the path of Torah. They simply need to become penitent, return to the ways of studying Torah, and they will be able to receive God's Oneness.

In this particular *Zohar* text, we see that *tikkun olam* emanates from God alone. The world functions better when people recognize God's power in creation and they come close to God through studying Torah, but no mention exists of any partnership between God and human beings in terms of working together toward the perfection of the world or the cosmos. The story does, however, mention that human beings are able to

respond to God's perfect world and have the choice of whether or not to appreciate God's creation. But God alone retains control over *tikkun olam*.

TEXT # 5

Zohar, Vol. 1, p. 102:2

זוהר כרך א פרשת וירא דף קב עמוד ב

When the first man sinned, he sinned with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as it is written, "...from the tree of knowledge of good and evil," (Genesis 2:17). And by sinning with it, he brought death to the world. What is written? "Lest he stick out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life," (Genesis 3:22) because it thereby brought death to all the people in the world. And when Abraham comes, he **perfects the world** with another tree, and that is the Tree of Life. And he makes his faith known to all peoples of the world.¹⁶

This *Zohar* text begins with Adam's sin of disobeying the command of God. The first verse quoted in the passage (Genesis 2:17) reads as follows in its entirety: "But from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, you shall die." This verse makes it clear that if Adam disobeyed God's command, he would die. The text then expands on the promise of Adam's individual's death to include death as a part of every life.

The text then discusses how Abraham repaired the world, *etkin alma*, and reversed Adam's sin by eating from another tree, the Tree of Life. Abraham's Tree of Life was the Tree of Faithfulness, his belief in Torah. Including *Eytz Chaim Hi* in the text immediately draws an association to the conclusion of the Torah service where the quote from Proverbs 3:18 can be found: "It is a Tree of Life to those who grasp her, and whoever holds onto her is happy." Clearly Abraham had no control over who lived and who died, but through his perfect faith in the Torah, Abraham taught perfect faith to all

¹⁶ See Appendix IID5 for Hebrew text

people of the world. For Abraham, eternal life referred to a place in the world to come, *olam ha'ba*, and he believed that the way to get there was through the love and study of Torah.

This text bridges one concept of *tikkun olam* where the world is perfected solely by the work of God, to the contemporary usage of *tikkun olam*, which involves the partnership between human beings and God. *Tikkun olam*, perfecting the world, occurs when God makes a Tree of Life for Abraham. As opposed to Adam who could not understand what he should do or not do with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Abraham does use the tree properly and, through it, he actually teaches proper faith to the entire world. This is only possible because Abraham is not tainted with the residual sin of Adam's improper use of the tree.

The Tree of Life gave a second chance to the world. God perfected the world and put it into its proper order with the gift of the Tree of Life, that is, Torah. The gift came from God, but it came to humanity through Abraham. Here, *tikkun olam* begins to include an aspect of partnership between God and humanity.

TEXT #6

Zohar, Vol. I, p. 35:1

זוהר כרך א פרשת בראשית דף לה עמוד א

The upper and lower world mutually support one another until the lower world was completed and the other world of which we have spoken was not completed. ... And this lower world was turned face to face to the upper to **become perfected**. It became support for the upper. Previously, the world had been defective because, "God had not caused rain to fall on the earth," (Genesis 2:5).

It is written after (the last quote), "A mist went up from the earth," (Genesis 2:6). This (mist coming up from the earth) was **the proper fixing of the lower world** because after it went up, it "wetted the face of the earth," (Genesis 2:6). The mist going up from the earth is the desire of

the female for the male. Another thing – why didn't God cause the rain to fall? Because **the perfection (of the earth)** that had to arise from the earth in the form of the mist hadn't occurred. This rose from the lower world, and then it awakened action on the part of the upper world. (So the holy community put this together and said,) first a kind of smoke went up from the earth and then a cloud formed. After that, they connected one to the other, just like the smoke of the offering goes up from below and creates a perfect completion above. And the upper and lower worlds are connected to one another, and **they become perfected**. Similarly, in relationship to the upper world, that awakening starts from below. And afterwards they connect and **everything is perfected**. If it were not for the people of Israel starting an awakening first, then there would be no response coming from above. And by the desire of the forces that are below, that's how **the upper world is perfected**.¹⁷

In the *Zohar* version of the creation story, God did not cause it to rain. Instead, a mist came up from the ground in order to awaken the powers above and to perfect those powers so they could then rain down on earth. If it were not for *Keneset Yisrael* awakening and starting the process of perfection from below, then there would have been no perfection coming down from above. According to this piece from the *Zohar*, the impulse had to emanate from below to stimulate God into bringing about the proper ordering of the cosmos. The people below needed to yearn deeply for this partnership with God in order for God to respond. This marks a dramatic shift in the *Zohar* as to the meaning of *tikkun olam* and how the perfect order of the world comes about. This text furthers the image of human beings in partnership with God to complete the task of *tikkun olam* begun with Abraham by the previous text.

This *Zohar* piece uses the offering of the *korban* as an example of how humans affect this perfection from below. The smoke from the offering rises, like the mist from the earth. It creates an upper cloud which arouses the heavens and completes the forces of the upper world. In this way, the heavens respond to the smoke of the *korban*, and the

¹⁷ See Appendix IID6 for Hebrew text

perfection of God then showers down upon the earth like rain and manifests itself through the completion of a perfected world. Without this awakening from below, the One who inhabits the upper world would not respond, and there would be no completion.

Here, the language of completion and perfection refers to more than just the earth itself. This perfection, like that found in the other *Zohar* texts already examined, earns the perfection of the entire cosmos; it includes human beings in this process of perfection for the first time. They complete what is lacking in the world, and they participate in the *tikkun olam* of the world. In this world, the lower world, the world of humankind affects and changes the reaction of God and the future of mankind. We see the reference to the world to come when the text uses the word forever to describe God's perfect creation. The act of *tikkun olam* is the connection between humans and God in the world of this particular piece of *Zohar* text.

Conclusion for *Tikkun Olam* in the *Zohar*

The centrality of human beings to the process of *tikkun olam* represents a new concept. We have traced its evolution through the writings of the *Zohar*, but this particular piece demonstrates a new level of human involvement. In the period of the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta*, the term *tikkun olam* referred to the welfare of the Jewish people. In the period of the *Aleinu*, we saw the term *tikkun olam* extend beyond just the Jewish people; it encompassed the general welfare and well being of all the people in the world. Previously, the only task required of the Jewish people in the work of *tikkun olam* was to pray that God would fix the world in order that all people would have the same true understanding of God as did the Jewish people. In the *Zohar*, we have seen an

evolution of the term *tikkun olam* which involves several different aspects of its meaning. The passages from the *Zohar* pick up where the other texts left off with little or no human involvement in the work of *tikkun olam* and move on to a partnership between God and humanity. All the *Zohar* pieces characterize *tikkun olam* as being a perfect and proper ordering of the world at a very high cosmic level. They do not refer simply to peace on earth, much less so the welfare of the small Jewish community alone. In the *Zohar* texts, *tikkun olam* is an elaborate ordering of all that is contained in the cosmos. God brings about this perfect ordering, sometimes alone and occasionally with help from the Jewish people.

With this new meaning of *tikkun olam*, the perfection of the world is now carried out by *Keneset Yisrael* in partnership with God. And the benefit to Israel is twofold: 1) Israel receives its redemption from suffering during difficult times, and 2) the whole world moves closer to perfection, leading to a better life for everyone, not just the Jews. The shift here depends upon appropriate behavior by *Keneset Yisrael* so that the world might be properly ordered. This human involvement can be seen as a bridge to the more modern notion of *tikkun olam*, which connects to the work of social justice here on earth. In the *Zohar*, *tikkun olam* is Jewish behavior setting the cosmic order in collaboration with God. Even though its benefit extends beyond the Jewish community, we can infer that the underlying focus of *tikkun olam* remains the Jewish community. Moreover, all humanity benefits from a more universal redemption spread out through the entire cosmos.

As we saw in the *Aleinu*, this shift in thinking maintains the Jewish position as unique and special. We have seen a variety of ways that the Jewish people can be

involved in this process, if only to recognize that in the magnitude of God's proper ordering of the cosmos, the Jewish people retain a special role in the world. Their fervent prayers and intentional actions do even more to perfect the world. What the Jews do counts, and that makes the Jews not only special but chosen. The distinction here lies in their more active role in the process of *tikkun olam*, rather than the less active role of simply praying for God to make the changes happen as we saw in the *Aleinu*.

What prompted the change to a more active role for the Jewish people in the work of *tikkun olam* as represented by these selections from the *Zohar*? We might speculate about this shift in thinking. The *Zohar* is believed to have been composed in Spain around the twelfth century. As opposed to the tremendous difficulties inherent in living in Crusade-torn Western Europe, Jews of the Iberian Peninsula under Arab rule enjoyed a relatively benign existence. This was a period of tremendous intellectual creativity and artistic expression, perhaps prompting an almost unprecedented sense of security and control within the Jewish community. Such an attitude could have evoked the feeling that the Jewish people themselves could play a significant role in the perfecting of this world. This sense of empowerment might have led to a new twist in their understanding of *tikkun olam*, that they could influence God. This idea of partnership in working toward a perfected world still depended upon performance of the *mitzvot*. By meticulously observing the *mitzvot*, the Jews would then begin to work together with God toward the perfection of the world.

TIKKUN OLAM IN CONTEMPORARY USAGE

Use of the term *tikkun olam* in contemporary American Judaism usually evokes powerful images of involvement in the work of social justice. Like spirituality, *tikkun olam* had become one of the Jewish buzzwords of the late 20th century. Indeed, we may safely assert that *tikkun olam* has become a conduit back to identifying oneself as a Jew for countless people who were alienated by the Jewish ritual and tradition of their youth. The term *tikkun olam* has become one of those Hebrew words like Torah or Shabbat whose meaning is so universally understood, that many Jews use it without even thinking that it needs to be defined. Moreover, this phrase has gained widespread recognition in the secular community, as well. Interestingly, although it may connote different kinds of activities to different people, *tikkun olam* enjoys an almost universally understood definition among American Jews. However, it is crucial to note that this term is virtually unheard of in Israel.¹⁸ Its use represents one of those areas where defining characteristics of American Judaism and Israeli Judaism sharply diverge. In an attempt to understand the contemporary American uses of the term *tikkun olam*, we will examine its use as found in a variety of current sources.

TEXT #1

The Wall Street Journal, Monday, February 5, 2001

Tikkun Olam

Bush Should Depoliticize the Holocaust Museum

In the Jewish tradition, *tikkun olam* means 'to act, Godlike, to improve the world.' We have that on the authority of Rabbi Irving Greenberg,

¹⁸ Saperstein, Rabbi David, Personal Interview with, February 8, 2001 at HUC-JIR

Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, which runs the Washington-based museum.¹⁹

This article about depoliticizing the Holocaust Museum uses the term *tikkun olam* as if every reader would understand its meaning. It is astonishing to consider that in the year 2001, *tikkun olam* has become a phrase so commonly understood by society in general, that a secular newspaper like The Wall Street Journal would use it in this way. Even though the article provides the reader with Rabbi Greenberg's definition, the authors presume that its meaning will be clearly understood. Ultimately, this article does not concern itself with any further discussion of *tikkun olam*, but the bold face headline reminds us of the pervasive use of this term.

TEXT #2

Jewish Literacy by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

As one of the books listed by the Reform Movement as part of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Significant Jewish Books program, *Jewish Literacy* enjoys a reputation in the entire Jewish community today as being an important basic source of Jewish knowledge and information. In *Jewish Literacy*, Telushkin defines *tikkun olam* as "the ethical bettering of the world."²⁰ He goes on to explain that, "Hillel's willingness to base Jewish law on *tikkun olam*, not just on tradition, established a precedent that enabled later rabbis to meet many new ethical challenges."²¹

¹⁹ Wall Street Journal, The, Monday, (February 5, 2000)

²⁰ Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph, *Jewish Literacy*. (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1991), p.121.

²¹ Telushkin, p.122.

Telushkin uses the terms Ethical Monotheism, Perfection of the World, and *tikkun olam* as synonyms. From a Reform perspective this usage is remarkable as these terms clearly represent different concepts.

"The principle of ethical monotheism, the obligation to try to 'perfect the world under the rule of God,' is repeated three times a day in the Aleinu prayer, which closes the morning, afternoon, and evening prayer services. The term 'ethical monotheism' itself is generally credited to nineteenth-century Reform Judaism, and remains nineteenth-century Reform's most enduring contribution to Jewish thought."²²

The principle of ethical monotheism states that there is a single God in the Universe whose command challenges us to behave in a certain ethical way. That behavior can include *tikkun olam* but is certainly not limited to it. Telushkin credits ethical monotheism, or *tikkun olam* (which he sees as being one and the same,) to the Reform Movement and sees it as being one of Reform's more valuable innovations.

TEXT #3

ZIV Tzedakah Fund, Inc.

Fifteen years ago, American Jewish poet Danny Siegel, began to distribute *tzedakah* while serving as a tour leader for USY teens in Israel. As the amount of monies grew, Siegel began to seek out different organizations in Israel doing *tikkun olam* in a manner that Americans would want to support. He created ZIV, a *tzedakah* collective which identifies the organizations and coordinates the disbursement of the funds. Today ZIV's list of charitable organizations has become much broader; its recommendations are no longer limited to institutions in Israel, nor are they all Jewish.

²² Telushkin, p.285.

The ZIV website defines itself as follows, "The ZIV Tzedakah Fund is about Mitzvahs – Doing Good Things and about Tikkun Olam - Fixing Up the World with whatever talents and resources we have as individuals."²³

The ZIV annual report includes the following categories in their list of projects focusing on what they call, "Global Tikkun Olam:" Relief on a Global Scale; An End to Worldwide Poverty; Natural Disasters and War; The Jews in Cuba; Jews in the Former Soviet Union; Haitian Children.²⁴ Its back cover contains a logo with a picture of a globe, and the title over it reads, "To Fix The World." Around the globe is printed, "You are not obliged to complete the task. However, you are not allowed to step away from it."²⁵ As evidenced by the logo, Siegel has fused two different but complementary concepts. He borrows the text from Pirke Avot which refers to *malakhah*, meaning labor or work, and joins that with the concept of *tikkun olam* suggesting that every person is obligated to take part in the work of *tikkun olam*.

TEXT #4

Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC)

Religious Action Center (RAC)

UAHC is the umbrella organization of the Reform Movement founded in 1873 serving over 900 American Reform congregations. The RAC is a subsidiary of The Commission on Social Action of the UAHC. The following statement which appears on the UAHC website was adapted from the pamphlet entitled, 'What We Believe... What We Do...' prepared in 1993 by then CCAR President Rabbi Simeon J. Maslin.

²³ ZIV Tzedakah Fund, Inc. website <www.ziv.org>

²⁴ ZIV Tzedakah Fund, Inc. Annual Report, April 1, 2000, p. 22.

What do Reform Jews believe?

What do Reform Jews do?

If anyone were to attempt to answer these two questions authoritatively for all Reform Jews, that person's answers would have to be false. Why?

Because **one of the guiding principles of Reform Judaism is the autonomy of the individual**. A Reform Jew has the right to decide whether to subscribe to this particular belief or to that particular practice. But there is a historic body of beliefs and practices that is recognized as Jewish. We Jews have survived centuries of exile and persecution as well as centuries of unparalleled spiritual and intellectual creativity because we have always thought of ourselves as a **people created 'in the image of God,' dedicated to tikkun olam -- the improvement of the world**. And the particular beliefs and practices that have traditionally identified us as Jews have enabled us not only to survive creatively but to connect with the God 'who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.'²⁶

The statement by Rabbi Maslin is but one of many which places *tikkun olam* as the centerpiece of Reform belief and practice. Emphasis on *tikkun olam* was born of a desire to define Judaism in a way that both included and transcended traditional Judaism's reliance on performance of *mitzvot*. For many Reform Jews, the mandate to perform acts of *tikkun olam* has provided a point of entry into Jewish life for those who otherwise might have rejected identification as Jews.

TEXT #5

Personal Interview with Rabbi David Saperstein, February 8, 2001 at HUC-JIR

Rabbi David Saperstein is the Director and Counsel for the Religious Action Center. The following explanation of the RAC's purpose and activities can be found on its web site.

The RAC pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the American Jewish community and serving as its advocate in the capital of the United States.

²⁵ ZIV Tzedakah Fund, Inc. Annual Report April 1, 2000, back cover.

²⁶ Union of American Hebrew Congregations website <<http://uahc.org/>>

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) has been the hub of Jewish social justice and legislative activity in the nation's capital for over 35 years. It has educated and mobilized the American Jewish community on legislative and social concerns as an advocate in the Congress of the United States on issues ranging from Israel and Soviet Jewry to economic justice and civil rights, to international peace and religious liberty. The RAC is the Washington office of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation (UAHC) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), representing 1.5 million Reform Jews and 1,800 Reform rabbis in 870 congregations throughout North America.²⁷

On Thursday, February 8, 2001, I interviewed Rabbi Saperstein to gain some insight into his perspective on the origins and use of the term *tikkun olam*. Rabbi Saperstein recalled that the term *tikkun olam*, as it is used today, was first heard in the Reform Movement in the 1960's, perhaps some Reform Jews had begun to use the term in the previous decade, but its use was by no means wide spread. By the late 1970's, however, the term *tikkun olam* had become interchangeable with social action and social justice. Rabbi Saperstein suggested that as the term "social action" began to take on more pejorative connotations during the tumultuous '70's, the terms social justice and *tikkun olam* became the more preferable phrases. They were less controversial than the term "social action," which had come to represent too intense a degree of activism and was placed too far to the political left. The term *tikkun olam*, more conceptual and more Jewish sounding, soon became the favored phrase of the Reform Movement.

Rabbi Saperstein's understanding of *tikkun olam* as it was used in Mishnaic times, to make society function better, is not substantially different from its contemporary use. According to Saperstein, the fragility of life in the Mishnaic period often meant that societies could fall apart suddenly following attacks from the outside. It was therefore crucial to maintain a society cohesive and strong enough to withstand harsh external

²⁷ Religious Action website <www.rj.org/rac>

forces. So, for Saperstein, *tikkun olam* in the Mishnaic period connected these Jews to the real live implementation of Jewish values. In that sense, Rabbi Saperstein saw a complete resonance between their understanding of *tikkun olam* with our use of the term today. He also acknowledged the more subtle changes in its use occurring slowly and gradually over time rather than in distinct stages described above.

TEXT #6

Platforms of American Reform Judaism

Over the one hundred twenty five year history of the Reform Movement in the United States, four different platform positions have been adopted. The Pittsburgh Platform, adopted in 1885 makes no mention of Social Action, Social Justice, or *tikkun olam*. The following statement is the closest approximation of the contemporary emphasis on working to make the world a better place,

...we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.²⁸

The Columbus Platform: "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism," adopted in 1937, includes an entire section entitled, "Social Justice," which begins, "Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs."²⁹ The San Francisco Platform: "Reform Judaism – A Centenary perspective," adopted in 1976 does not specifically refer to Social Justice, Social Action, or *tikkun olam*, though it does include the following paragraph,

²⁸ Meyer, Michael A., *Response to Modernity, A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 388.

Early Reform Jews, newly admitted to general society and seeing in this the evidence of a growing universalism, regularly spoke of purpose in terms of Jewry's service to humanity. In recent years we have become freshly conscious of the virtues of pluralism and the values of particularism. The Jewish people in its unique way of life validates its own worth while working toward the fulfillment of its messianic expectations.²⁹

"A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism" was adopted at the May 1999 Pittsburgh Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR). Below are two excerpts from the Statement, one from the Preamble and one from the section on Torah. The preamble is included to define the framework for the Statement of Principles, and the statement from the section devoted to Torah includes the term *tikkun olam*.

Preamble

On three occasions during the last century and a half, the Reform rabbinate has adopted comprehensive statements to help guide the thought and practice of our movement. In 1885, fifteen rabbis issued the Pittsburgh Platform, a set of guidelines that defined Reform Judaism for the next fifty years. A revised statement of principles, the Columbus Platform, was adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1937. A third set of rabbinic guidelines, the Centenary Perspective, appeared in 1976 on the occasion of the centenary of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Today, when so many individuals are striving for religious meaning, moral purpose and a sense of community, we believe it is our obligation as rabbis once again to state a set of principles that define Reform Judaism in our own time.

Throughout our history, we Jews have remained firmly rooted in Jewish tradition, even as we have learned much from our encounters with other cultures. The great contribution of Reform Judaism is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition, to embrace diversity while asserting commonality, to affirm beliefs without rejecting those who doubt, and to bring faith to sacred texts without sacrificing critical scholarship.

This "Statement of Principles" affirms the central tenets of Judaism - God, Torah and Israel - even as it acknowledges the diversity of Reform Jewish beliefs and practices. It also invites all Reform Jews to engage in a dialogue with the sources of our tradition, responding out of our knowledge, our experience and our faith. Thus we hope to transform our lives through קדושה (*kedusha*), holiness.

²⁹ Meyer, p. 390.

³⁰ Meyer, p. 393.

Torah

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God's creation. Partners with God in **תיקון עולם** (*tikkun olam*), repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age....

In all these ways and more, Torah gives meaning and purpose to our lives.³¹

The 1999 Statement of Principles was the first Reform platform to specifically use the term *tikkun olam* describing its work to make the world a better place. The twenty three intervening years between it and the previous statement clearly saw a change in the Movement's attitude toward and affinity for the term *tikkun olam*. The fact that *tikkun olam* is included in the section on Torah also highlight the significance of this concept in the lives of Reform Jews.

TEXT # 7

Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law, edited by David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament

Finally, we turn to the Orthodox community's understanding of *tikkun olam*, as reflected in *Tikkun Olam, Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, published by the Orthodox Forum in 1997. The following explanation and identification of the Orthodox Forum can be found both inside the book and on its back cover as well.

The Orthodox Forum, convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, *rashei yeshiva*, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the

³¹ Central Conference of American Rabbis website <<ccarnet.org>>

Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.³²

Tikkun Olam is a compilation of essays on the topic of *tikkun olam* from a variety of Orthodox viewpoints, including *halakhic*, theological, philosophical, legal, political, sociological, and economic. An overall conclusion of the conference follows.

In the most general sense, *tikkun olam* is associated with the thesis that Jews bear responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual, and material welfare, but for the moral, spiritual, and material welfare of society at large.³³

Among the theoretical dimensions of *tikkun olam* considered by the Forum, were the following topics: Is *tikkun olam* an antidote to religious isolationism? Do Jews have an obligation to gentiles? Do Jews have an obligation to do *tikkun olam*? If so, are the obligations textual, moral, *halakhic*, theological, pragmatic? And are they also practical? How can Jewish principles be applied to a capitalistic economy? What does Jewish law have to say about health care in a capitalistic society?

Among the conclusions reached by The Forum were the following: Jews have an obligation to convey our message to our host societies and the outside world at large relying on a variety of proof texts, including, "a light unto the nations," (Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6).³⁴ Rav Soloveitchik's essay states, "Jews are duty bound to join forces with all other human beings to advance the welfare of civilization."³⁵ Jeffrey Ballabon, in his essay, "A View of *Tikkun Olam* from Capitol Hill," concludes that while *tikkun olam* and social action projects are positive and worthwhile endeavors, they do not fall under the

³² Shatz, David; Waxman, Chaim I.; Diamant, Nathan J., ed., *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997), p.v.

³³ Shatz, p.1.

³⁴ Shatz, p.3.

³⁵ Shatz, p.4.

title of obligations deserving extensive programs based on textual sources. In the Introduction, the editors conclude:

Blending theory and practice, examinations of texts with assessments of tactics, the essays that follow should stimulate a dialogue within the Orthodox community over the power of Judaism to transform a morally tenuous world. But for all their diversity and scope, they are only a beginning.³⁶

According to Rabbi Saperstien, the Orthodox Movement has rarely agreed with the Reform Movement's emphasis on social justice. However, it is clear to see from this brief overview of *Tikkun Olam* that by 1997 some of their major scholars not only acknowledged the synonymous use of the terms *tikkun olam* and social justice, but they also affirmed the concept for Jewish values.

Conclusion for *Tikkun Olam* in Contemporary Usage

Analysis of the contemporary uses of the term *tikkun olam* indicates that with varying degrees of interpretation, there is a generally accepted meaning of *tikkun olam* by the secular community as well as by the various denominations within Judaism. At the present time, the meaning of *tikkun olam*, doing any kind of productive work to make the world a better place, is universally understood in a substantially different way from its use even twenty five years ago, much less two thousand years ago. Using the Hebrew term *tikkun olam* brings the work of social justice out of the purely secular world and gives it a religious context.

³⁶ Shatz, p.15.

TIKKUN OLAM CONCLUSION

An examination of primary and secondary texts from different periods of Jewish history has shown that the term *tikkun olam* has had various meanings throughout the ages. In both the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* in the Tannaitic period, *tikkun olam* was understood to mean the laws and rules enacted for the general welfare of the Jewish people. The *Aleinu* as we know it today dates back to at least the eleventh century, perhaps even as far back as the Second Temple period. The text of the *Aleinu* uses the term *tikkun olam* in the context of God's repairing the entire world, an act which would be brought about by the fervent prayers of the Jews. With the widespread use of the *Zohar* in the Middle Ages, the term *tikkun olam* came to indicate the partnership between human beings and God in repairing the entire cosmos.

The complete phrase found in the *Aleinu* is *l'taken olam b'malkhut Shadai*. Whatever happened to the *malkhut Shadai*? Somehow, "repairing the world through the kingdom of God" has become simply "repairing the world." The contemporary meaning of the term *tikkun olam*, to many Jews, has actually usurped God's power from the human-divine partnership in repairing the world, placing it totally in the hands of human beings and equating it with the term social action. We can hypothesize as to how *tikkun olam* has come to mean human initiated social justice.

Up to the period of the Emancipation in the late eighteenth century, affairs of the non-Jewish world certainly affected Jews as they lived within their self-contained communities, but the Jews were generally powerless to affect any positive change over their host societies. They controlled virtually nothing outside the parameters of their own world, and they had no equal rights in the larger cultures surrounding them. The only

place Jews could make their world better was within their own walls; hence, *tikkun olam* became the way to maintain their own individual communities. This feeling of powerlessness over the external world might explain why they invoked God's power and mercy to make the world a better place for them. Over time, as their opportunities to affect the world increased, their definition of how they could influence it also expanded.

With the advent of the Emancipation of the late eighteenth century, the world over which Jews had some level of control expanded exponentially. Many Jews found that the religious beliefs guiding every aspect of their lives began to diminish dramatically, even including the belief in a personal Messiah which had existed since the time of the prophets. Maimonides' Thirteen Principles indicates that the concept of a personal Messiah held an extremely important position in the Jewish faith even as late as the twelfth century. This concept maintained its prominence in the Jewish psyche until the German Reformers of the early nineteenth century discarded it and needed something to fill that void. The combination of that emptiness coupled with the exuberance of new-found power and status in the outside world led to the astonishing realization that the Jews' own personal behavior might be able to affect positive change in the world. The only thing remaining was to give this belief in personal human responsibility and Jewish communal responsibility a Hebrew name that would endow it with the weight of Jewish tradition. Today, even many Orthodox Jews who still believe in the concept of a personal Messiah and who are reluctantly moving outward into the bigger world are able to endorse the concept of *tikkun olam*, a belief that combines a social conscience with Jewish values.

In previous ages, ritual behavior alone was sufficient to fulfill the desire of most

Jews for an ethnic identity. Many modern Jews, however, regardless of their level of observance, find that no longer to be the case. As they continue to find Jewish rituals lacking in a sense of religious and spiritual meaning, they find themselves more and more alienated from Judaism. Even many Orthodox Jews, as evidenced by the existence of The Orthodox Forum, want their cycle of ritual behavior to have an impact in the world around them. By combining the appeal of a call to social justice with the authenticity of a Hebrew name and a concept rooted in ancient texts, the term *tikkun olam* has provided the entire contemporary Jewish community with a worthy cause. The universal appeal of *tikkun olam* has provided all movements within Judaism with a meaningful strategy to attract more Jews who otherwise might feel no connection to Judaism. Moreover, the common issues evoked in the name of *tikkun olam* have served as a useful meeting place for liberal and traditional Jews when other issues have threatened to divide them. Perhaps here, too, *tikkun olam* will benefit the Jewish people and by extension the entire world.

MITZVAH

MITZVAH IN THE BIBLE

The common definition for the term *mitzvah*, in its ancient biblical context refers to a precept or religious duty commanded by God. However, *mitzvah* takes on a variety of other meanings as well. We will first cite several examples of the term *mitzvah* with these alternate interpretations, followed by several examples of *mitzvah* with its more commonly understood meaning, God's command. Additionally, we will search for a single theme which unites the broad range of meanings.

Varied Meanings of the Term *Mitzvah* in the Bible

TEXT #1

Jeremiah 32:11

ירמיה לביא

I took the document of purchase, the sealed **title of property**, the conditions of the document of purchase, and the revealed things....³⁷

The term *mitzvah* in this passage from Jeremiah refers to a title of property. The prophet Jeremiah describes one of his visions in which he had bought a piece of land from his cousin, Hanamel. He gave the deed of purchase to his assistant Baruch and instructed him to bury it in an earthen jar. In this context, the term *mitzvah* is used as a noun and refers to a legal document indicating the right of possession to a piece of land. The word *mitzvah*, used in conjunction with the word *huk*, in this case, implies the conditions of the deed of purchase. This is one example of the judicial origins of the word *mitzvah*, connecting it to legal authority.

Curious to see what the Rabbis would have to say about the usage of *mitzvah* in a context other than that of divine authority, we turn to *Mikraot Gedolot*. Radak comments, "*she'hi mitzvah Torah*," "That this is a mitzvah of the Torah." For Radak, the term *mitzvah* does not refer to a legal document at all; it refers, instead, to matters prescribed in the Torah. The *Targum*, on the other hand, defines *mitzvah* as a piece of legislation. The Rabbis seem not to have been able to tolerate a meaning of the word which deviated from their understanding of *mitzvah* as seen through the eyes of *halakhah*.

Perhaps, the term *mitzvah* can also be understood as a word whose meaning has changed over time, only ultimately coming to mean a divine commandment. It is feasible to conjecture that the term *mitzvah* had a meaning related to a title of land ownership and therefore could assume almost sacred significance to a people who were dependent on agriculture for their very survival. With that understanding, the word *mitzvah* still falls in the broad range of sanctity we have assumed *mitzvah* to mean. If indeed, the term *mitzvah* eventually refers to acts which manifest the covenantal relationship between God and humanity, representing that concept with a clearly understood term from daily life, in this case, the title to a piece of property, would be helpful. It would also add credence to the notion that the power behind this meaning of a legal document could eventually have extended to the power of God, the ultimate authority.

TEXT #2

Nehemiah 10:33

נחמיה י"ג

We have laid upon ourselves **obligations**: to give ourselves one-third of a *shekel* per year for service to the House of our God....³⁸

³⁷ See Appendix IIIA1 for Hebrew text

³⁸ See Appendix IIIA2 for Hebrew text

In this passage from Nehemiah, the Hebrew, *v'he'emadnu aleinu mitzvot*, clearly states that the people placed the obligation to donate to the Temple upon themselves, rather than the obligation coming from an external source. In the commentary found in *Mikraot Gedolot*, we find verification that the people indeed established this donation as an obligation upon themselves. In this example, the term *mitzvah* therefore indicates an obligation with the force of command, but not a divine command.

As in any parent – child relationship, as parents rear their children, the children grow, mature, and learn to apply the teachings they learned in their youth to their own adult life situations. In this text, we see that after God has set the rules and obligations in motion, the people are then able to further their holy relationship with God by motivating themselves to uphold God's sacred teachings. Even though parents cannot be present in every situation for their children, their teachings stay with them, even in the parents' absence. As a parent to a child, God's work was giving the framework to the Israelites, and, as this passage indicates, the Israelites have learned their lesson well. Once again, we see that the term *mitzvah* connects to the realm of the sacred.

TEXT #3

Isaiah 29:13

ישעיה כט:יג

Adonai said: Because that people has approached (Me) with its mouth and honored Me with its lips, but has kept its heart far from Me, and its fear of Me has been a learned **commandment** of men, learned by rote³⁹

This text uses the phrase, *mitzvat anashim m'lumdah*, a commandment of men learned by rote, in a way that clearly shows that a commandment which ultimately had

come from God now appears to emanate from human beings, in the way that it is passed from one human being to another. In addition to describing the commandment as coming from human beings, this passage condemns their actions, even though they fulfilled the *mitzvah*, because they lacked the proper intention. In this text, we see the term *mitzvah* representing commandments from human beings in an extremely negative light.

Perhaps the original students of this passage knew that the term *mitzvah* implied something sacred from the realm of God and that the human beings in the story had done something wrong. Whereas the previous passage provides us with an example of human beings having learned the lessons of God and instilling them into their own behavior, this text implies that often human beings miss that mark. This use of the term *mitzvah* also implies the sacred nature of the covenant with God, but in a context where the human beings have failed to uphold their end of the covenant.

TEXT #4

Jeremiah 35:14

ירמיה להייד

The commands of Jonadab, son of Rechab, who **commanded** his children not to drink wine, have been fulfilled.⁴⁰

In this passage from Jeremiah, the term *tzivah* is used as the verb, commanded. The command, however, passes from a father to his son even though, in this case, the father is deceased. The context of *tzivah* implies the directive of a last will and testament issued by the father before his death, providing yet another example of holiness associated with the root *tzivah*. Again, we find *mitzvah* as a bridge between the level of

³⁹ See Appendix IIIA3 for Hebrew text

⁴⁰ See Appendix IIIA4 for Hebrew text

having been commanded in the human realm and the ultimate understanding of *mitzvah* implying divine authority and obligation.

TEXT #5

Nehemiah 13:5

נחמיה יג:ה

...and there were given before them (the priests) the meal offering, the frankincense, the vessels, the tithes of grain, the wine, the fresh oil, the dues of the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions set aside for the priests.⁴¹

In this passage from Nehemiah, we find the term, *mitzvat ha'Levi'im* used in a rather ambiguous fashion. *The JPS Tanakh* translates the phrase as, "the dues of the Levites." *The Jerusalem Bible*, however, translates it differently, "...which were given by commandment to the Levites...." Regardless of the interpretation, the construct form, *mitzvah*, implies that a variety of items were given with sacred intent to the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers. The construction of the phrase literally brackets the common singers and gatekeepers in between the Levites and the priests. The text implies that the term *mitzvah* does not refer only to those involved in Temple service, but rather extends to all Israelites, even those who open and close the gates. With this use of the term *mitzvah*, the entire people of Israel are invited to be a holy community together in God's service.

⁴¹ See Appendix IIIA5 for Hebrew text

TEXT # 6

II Kings 18:36

מלכים ב יח:לו

The people were silent and did not answer a word to him, for the King's command was: Do not answer him.⁴²

In this passage from II Kings, we find the story of King Hezekiah, who served the people for twenty-nine years. We read of Samaria being captured by the Assyrians and the Israelites being exiled to Assyria as punishment for not following the laws that God had commanded, (II Kings 18:12). King Hezekiah stood firm in his beliefs in and devotion to *Adonai*, the God of the Israelites. He issued a command, a *mitzvah*, telling the people not to answer the emissary of the king of Assyria. Here the term *mitzvah* indicates a royal decree. While the royal imagery in this example clearly brings the use of *mitzvah* closer to the realm of divine authority and command, it is still used as a directive coming from one human being to another. Again, we have an example where it is easy to imagine the term *mitzvah* having another level of meaning for the Israelites. King Hezekiah issues the command, but God is clearly the source of the command. The listener is aware enough to recognize the word *mitzvah* and know of its connections to the God of Israel.

Mitzvah As Commandment in the Bible

The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament concludes that the use of the term *mitzvah* as an expression of divine authority emerged later than the other uses of *mitzvah* found in the Bible. It further declares that having laws emanate directly from God was a unique development of the Israelite people. Oftentimes the language and

grammar of biblical Hebrew closely resembles that of other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, but with this particular concept, the Israelites were completely unique. For example, ancient Mesopotamian tradition shows that even ethical and righteous laws came from the king, who was only influenced by their god of righteousness.⁴³ The Israelite's Hebrew Bible, however, developed the notion that God actually formulated and revealed the laws and legal norms. With this understanding of the term *mitzvah* and its background, we can now further explore its development as a term that ultimately came to mean divine authority and command from God.

TEXT #7

Genesis 6:22

כְּרָאשִׁית וַיַּכֵּב

Noah did so, just as God had commanded him, so he did.⁴⁴

This text, appearing in the second *sidra* of the Torah, provides an example of the term *mitzvah* as most often used in the Hebrew Bible, a commandment from God. God has told Noah of the intention to destroy all humanity and the earth (Genesis 6:13) and has solicited Noah's help in implementing this divine plan. In this passage, God gives a very specific command to Noah, and Noah builds the ark, carrying out God's order. As specific as it is, however, this commandment does not stop with Noah. Within this commandment which dedicates Noah's actions to God, also lies the basis for a covenantal relationship between God and the rest of humanity. By saving his family and the animals from extinction, Noah saves all of humanity and participates actively in the creation of a

⁴² See Appendix IIIA6 for Hebrew text

⁴³ Botterweck, G. Johannes; Ringgren, Helmer; Fabry, Heinz-Josef, ed., translated by Douglas W. Scott, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdsman Publishing Co., 1997), pp. 508-509.

whole new world. Herein lies the hope of redemption for the future of humanity. We find therefore, that the root *tzivah* conveys tremendous power in both its meaning and implications. The commandment alludes to the beginning of a not yet articulated covenant between God and humanity, thereby conveying a hint of the sacred.

TEXT #8

Exodus 24:12

שמות כד:יב

God said to Moses, "Go up to Me on the mountain, and remain there, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the Teaching and the Command that I have written down, to instruct them."⁴⁵

In this text, Moses and his attendant, Joshua, are called up to Mt. Sinai to receive God's law. We find the term *mitzvah* referring to God's commandments, but in a much more global context than in the previous example. In the first text of this section, the commandment of God was very specific in nature, and it was directed only to Noah, even though it had much broader implications. In this case, the term *mitzvah* refers to all of God's teaching. God's message is much more multi-dimensional because it encompasses the entire Jewish educational process within the single word *mitzvah*. With this commandment, the whole Jewish people will ultimately learn how to be God's people. The word *mitzvah* implies a multitude of lessons intended for untold generations, even though the noun appears in the singular. Perhaps the audience for whom this text was intended knew that one singular word implied so much more, an entire way of living commanded by God for countless generations of Jews.

⁴⁴ See Appendix IIIA7 for Hebrew text

TEXT #9

Leviticus 7:37-38

ויקרא ז:לז-לח

This is the instruction concerning the offering up, concerning the grain-gift, concerning the sin offering, concerning the guilt offering, concerning the mandate offering, and concerning the sacrifice of well being, that God **commanded** Moses on Mt. Sinai, on the day of His **commanding** the children of Israel to bring near their offerings to God, in the wilderness of Sinai.⁴⁶

An example from Leviticus must be included in this overview for several reasons.

The placement of the Book of Leviticus in the middle of the Five Books of Moses suggests its centrality and importance to the Jewish people. Leviticus forms the heart of the Torah and focuses entirely on the laws received at Mt. Sinai, providing the basis for what later becomes the Jewish legal system of *halakhah*. It therefore seems quite natural to find many examples in Leviticus where the term *nitzvah* refers to the specific acts the Israelites must perform in order to demonstrate their loyalty to God.

The offering of these sacrifices provides human beings with a way to communicate with God. Therefore, in commanding the Israelites to make animal sacrifices, God directs the people to communicate with the divine and to participate actively in a relationship of mutuality. As in the first two biblical examples, we again find the root *tzivah* describing a holy action. Here too, the commanded nature of the sacrificial system can be seen as an attempt on God's part to draw the Israelites into the covenantal relationship and to participate in the contract being established between God and humanity. Being able to participate in this sacred relationship with God forms part of God's gift to humanity.

⁴⁵ See Appendix IIIA8 for Hebrew text

⁴⁶ See Appendix IIIA9 for Hebrew text

TEXT #10

II Chronicles 7:17-20

דברי הימים ב ז:יז-כ

And you (the people Israel), if you walk before Me, as your father David walked before Me, and you do all that I have **commanded** you, keeping My laws and My rules, then I will establish your royal throne in accordance with (the Covenant) that I cut with David your father saying, "A descendant of yours will never be cut off from ruling over Israel." But if you turn from Me and forsake My laws and My **commandments** that I gave to you and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot you from the land that I gave you, and I will send out from before Me this House that I consecrated to My name, and I will make it a parable and a sharp word among all peoples.⁴⁷

In this example from II Chronicles, the concluding Book of the Bible, we find that not only does the term *mitzvah* refer to the broader aspects of God's Teaching and Torah, but it also encompasses rewards for following God's Laws as well as punishments for not following them. This meaning of the term *mitzvah* has nothing to do with a meritorious act, a chosen behavior, or a voluntary deed, meanings we will discover in the next section. This definition of *mitzvah* indicates an absolute command from God regarding the Israelite community's expected behavior. It represents a further development of the concept of reward and punishment related to following God's commands. Furthermore, this text explains that both parties are responsible for upholding their end of this contractual relationship. The Noah text represents an early stage in the relationship between God and humanity; God commanded Noah to build an ark, and he did. The text from II Chronicles, however, describes a later development of this covenantal relationship.

⁴⁷ See Appendix IIIA10 for Hebrew text

Conclusion for *Mitzvah* in the Bible

Upon examining the different uses of the term *mitzvah* in these ten examples, the most obvious conclusion to be drawn is an affirmation of the wide range of meanings for *mitzvah* in the Hebrew Bible. The term *mitzvah* can refer to a legal document, the dues of the priests, or the legal obligations one takes upon oneself. *Mitzvah* describes commands from one human being to another, from God to one specific human being, or from God to all humanity. The Rabbis believe that the term *mitzvah* always describes divine authority and command. The non-Jewish sources, such as *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, seem to find an evolving development in the use of the term *mitzvah*, which comes to mean God's command at a later date.

As for the commonality found in the various meanings of the term *mitzvah*, they all seem to relate to legal matters and/or authority, and they all indicate a sacred aspect of the word *mitzvah* as it relates to the contractual relationship between God and the Jewish people. The text clearly defines the expectation that while God plays an active role in this covenantal relationship, so, too does humanity. Human beings may manifest their part of the relationship through sacrifices, deeds, worship, or dues. Whatever the manifestation, the intent behind the action is crucial. The term *mitzvah*, in all its uses and meanings, implies a holy covenantal relationship, either between human beings or between God and human beings.

MITZVAH IN THE FORMATIVE RABBINIC SOURCES

In texts from the Formative Rabbinic Sources of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, the following citations contain the term *mitzvah* used both in the sense of command and meritorious act. We will take a look at examples representing both meanings, first, as command from God.

Use of *Mitzvah* as Command

TEXT #1

Mishnah Pesachim 10:3

משנה מסכת פסחים פרק י משנה ג

When they had brought (food) before him, he dips lettuce (into the salt water) until he reaches the bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8). They brought unleavened bread before him, and lettuce, and *haroset*, and two cooked dishes, even though the *haroset* is not obligatory (*mitzvah*). R. Eliezer bar Zadok says, "It is obligatory (*mitzvah*).". And when the Temple used to exist, they brought him the Passover offering.⁴⁸

This first *Mishnah* text discusses specific details pertaining to the Passover ritual, focusing on some of the foods required to fulfill the obligation of participating in the Seder. The text states that *haroset* is not required, while R. Eliezer bar Zadok opposes that opinion, saying that the *haroset* is obligatory as a reminder of the mortar the Israelites used for building in Egypt. We know that the use of the term *mitzvah* in this *Mishnah* refers to an absolute obligation for several reasons. The *Mishnah* lists other items that are required and then mentions the *haroset*, which is not required. R. Eliezer bar Zadok contradicts the initial opinion by saying that *haroset* is required, placing it in opposition to the commanded nature of the previous phrase. On both sides of the debate, the term *mitzvah* carries the weight of a direct command.

⁴⁸ See Appendix IIIB1 for Hebrew text

TEXT #2

Mishnah Yebamot 4:5

משנה מסכת יבמות פרק ד משנה ה

It is an **obligation (mitzvah)** of the oldest brother to perform the levirate marriage. If he does not want (to do it), they go to all the (other) brothers. If they did not want (to do it), they returned to the oldest brother and said to him, "The **obligation (mitzvah)** is upon you. Either submit to *halitzah* or perform the levirate marriage."⁴⁹

This second example of *Mishnah* deals with the laws pertaining to a levirate marriage, a marriage whereby a man was obligated to marry his deceased brother's childless widow (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The purpose of a levirate marriage was to prevent a family line from ending without an heir. A man's refusal to fulfill this duty which was considered disgraceful in ancient times, was carried out through a symbolic act of renunciation known as *halitza*, a process whereby the refused widow would remove the man's sandal in public view and throws it down.⁵⁰

This *Mishnah* text clearly uses the word *mitzvah* to refer to an obligation commanded in the Torah, at least as the Rabbis understood it. There is no doubt that the use of *mitzvah* refers to a direct command from God; it is not a voluntary act.

TEXT #3

Mishnah Kiddushin 1:9

משנה מסכת קדושין פרק א משנה ט

Any **commandment (mitzvah)** that is dependent on the Land of Israel, is observed only in the Land. And (any **commandment (mitzvah)** that is) not dependent on the Land, must be observed, whether (one is) in the Land or outside the Land, except for (the ordinances of) *orlah* (the fruit of trees of the first three years), and *kilayim* (forbidden junction - mixed crops in a single field). R. Eliezer says, "*hadash* – (Even the law of new produce)."⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Appendix IIIB2 for Hebrew text

⁵⁰ Birnbaum, Philip, *A Book of Jewish Concepts*. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1964), pp.215-216.

⁵¹ See Appendix IIIB3 for Hebrew text

This *Mishnah* presents us with a variety of commandments where the performance of the described acts depends upon whether or not one is living in the land of Israel. Commandments which can only be fulfilled in Israel such as tithing for the priest and observance of the Sabbatical year, are non-obligatory when one lives in the Diaspora, while commandments unrelated to the land are incumbent upon Jews regardless of where they live. The text then provides three examples of exceptions to this principle, commandments which are related to the land and yet, required to be observed wherever a Jew happens to live: *orlah*, *kilayim*, and *hadash*.

The biblical prohibition of *orlah*, forbidding the use of a tree's fruit for three years after its planting, can be found in Leviticus 19:23-25. The biblical injunction against *kilayim*, found in Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:9, forbids the sowing of two types of grain or vegetables in a vineyard. The biblical laws of *hadash*, prohibiting eating from the new harvest before offering the *omer* sacrifice, are found in Leviticus 23:9-14. These biblical examples of *mitzvah* as command indicate that they carry the full weight of obligation and in no way represent voluntary acts. They further reinforce the idea that the biblical meaning of command often carried over into the Mishnaic period.

TEXT #4

Talmud Bavli Sukkah 37b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף לו עמוד ב

And Rabbah said, "(Concerning) the *hadas* which is for the *mitzvah* (of the Four Species of Sukkot), it is forbidden to smell it (on Sukkot). But the *etrog* which is for the *mitzvah* (of the Four Species of Sukkot), it is permitted to smell it (on Sukkot). What is the reason? The *hadas*, normally used for smelling, when one set it aside for the *mitzvah* (of the Four Species of Sukkot), he set it aside from smelling. But the *etrog*, which normally is used for eating, when one set it aside, he set it

aside from the use of eating (only – not from the use of smelling.)”⁵²

This *sugya* found in the *Talmud Bavli* focuses on two of the items used in the Four Species to celebrate Sukkot, one of the three Pilgrimage Festivals whose biblical sources are found in Leviticus 23:33-44. Verse 40 refers specifically to the Four Species, calling for the use of the fruit of the *hadar* tree, which the Rabbis later called *etrog*, and the use of boughs of leafy trees, which the Rabbis later called *hadas*. Even though the Rabbis changed the names of the plants to those that were more commonly used in their times, it is clear that they viewed the laws of the Four Species as law emanating from Torah.

The items for the Four Species were set aside specifically for their commanded use, and therefore, it was prohibited to enjoy them for their primary purposes. The *hadas*, known and used for its pleasing fragrance, could therefore not be smelled while it functioned in the Four Species. The *etrog* on the other hand, was used primarily for eating. Therefore on Sukkot, when it was included in the Four Species, even though one was not allowed to eat the *etrog*, it was permissible to derive benefit from its fragrance. For the Rabbis, fulfilling a *mitzvah*, a command from the Bible, was so important that any object used to fulfill that *mitzvah* had to be dedicated to its intended purpose.

TEXT #5

Talmud Bavli Berachot 47b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מז עמוד ב

(If) a Cuthean (one who is not definitively Jew or non-Jew) (were to eat with Jews), we join in *zimun* on account of him. (The Gemara asks) Why? He (the Cuthean) is only an unlearned person (even if he is a Jew).

It was taught in a *baraita*: We do not join in *zimun* on account of an unlearned person. Abaye said, “(This *Mishnah* is referring to) a

⁵² See Appendix IIIB4 for Hebrew text

Cuthean (who is) a colleague (a Torah scholar)." Rava said, "You can even say that the Cuthean is an unlearned person. But here (in this *baraita* we are dealing with) an unlearned person according to the Rabbis who dispute the words of R. Meir."

As it was taught in (another) *baraita*: Who is (considered) an unlearned person? Anyone who does not eat his *hulin* (only) in a ritually pure state. These are the words of R. Meir. But the Sages say, "Anyone who does not tithe his produce properly." And behold, these Cutheans do tithe their produce properly, for they carefully guard that which is written in the Torah (Deuteronomy 14:22).

For the Master said in a *baraita*, "Any commandment (*mitzvah*) that the Cutheans do observe, they are more exact in (guarding) than Jews are."⁵³

This text from the Talmud discusses the conditions under which it is and is not appropriate to say *Birkat Hamazon*. The text discusses whether or not a Cuthean, one whose Jewish status is uncertain, should count in the *minyan* required for the blessing after a meal. Our focus in this text, however, is not the Jewish status of the Cutheans, the requirements of *Birkat Hamazon*, or the laws of *ma'aser*, proper tithing found in Deuteronomy 14:22 which are only alluded to in the text. Rather, our attention is drawn to the use of the term *mitzvah* in this *sugya*. The *Talmud* states that not only do Cutheans carefully guard that which is written in the Torah, but their observance of any *mitzvah* is more meticulous than that of the Jews. There would be no reason for the Rabbis to discuss the proper observance of a voluntary act. Here the *Talmud* clearly refers to a commanded act with the use of the term *mitzvah*.

⁵³ See Appendix IIIB5 for Hebrew text

Use of *Mitzvah* as Meritorious Act or Good Deed

TEXT #6

Tosefta Sotah 7:24

תוספתא מסכת סוטה פרק ז הלכה כד

They (the Sages) said these people do not go out to war at all. For instance, one who builds a house and dedicates it but has not been living in it for a year's time, or one who planted a vineyard and did reap from it but he did not own it for a whole twelve month period, or he was engaged to a woman and married her but did not live with her for a twelve month period. (Those people) do not contribute to the *eruv* of the city, nor do they provide water and food in case of war, and they do not go out to fix up the roads. (They are freed from these things because of their specific situations.)

Rabbi Yehuda said, (all the exemptions) were for an optional war. (But Rabbi Yehuda extended those exemptions to) a *meritorious (mitzvah)* war. (It's honorable to go to this kind of war, but it is not commanded.) But a true obligatory war – everyone goes out – even a groom out of his wedding room and a bride from her *hupa*.⁵⁴

This particular text from the *Tosefta*, representing the Tannaitic period, discusses various types of war as well as several of the categories of exemptions from participation in warfare. The text mentions three types of war. A *milchemet hova* is an obligatory war, a *milchemet reshut* is an optional war, and a *milchemet mitzvah* is a meritorious war. In this passage, R. Yehuda equates a non-obligatory war with a meritorious war. With this example, we can see that the Tannaim sometimes used the word *mitzvah*, to refer to a meritorious act as opposed to a circumstance involving required service.

⁵⁴ See Appendix IIIB6 for Hebrew text

TEXT # 7

Talmud Bavli Hulin 106a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חולין דף קו עמוד א

R. Eliezer said in the name of R. Oshayah, They (the sages) did not declare that washing the hands (had to be done) for fruit except for cleanliness. One could imagine that meant, there was no obligation to do that; rather, it was a **meritorious act** (*mitzvah*) to do it. Said Rabbah to them, it is not an obligation, nor a **meritorious act** (*mitzvah*), but it is optional.⁵⁵

While washing the hands before eating bread is commonly understood to be a rabbinic obligation, a *mitzvah*, the Rabbis wonder whether or not washing the hands before eating fruit falls into the same category. The *sugya*'s final decision that washing the hands for fruit is optional and therefore left totally up to the discretion of the individual, is not our primary concern with this example. Of significance to our investigation of the term *mitzvah* is the fact that this *sugya* mentions the possibility that washing the hands before eating fruit is not a command, labeling the non-commanded behavior as a *mitzvah*. Clearly, this particular use of the term *mitzvah* refers to something other than an act commanded by the Torah. The context of the *sugya* implies that this particular act, although not required, is still of a meritorious nature, and still it is called a *mitzvah*. We shall see that the term *mitzvah* is used in both contexts, either as a command or as something worthwhile. As a result of the determination that this behavior is optional, there is no doubt that this particular text uses the word *mitzvah* in reference to a meritorious act.

⁵⁵ See Appendix IIIB7 for Hebrew text

TEXT # 8

Talmud Bavli Gittin 14b-15a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת גיטין דף יד' ב-טו' א

We have learned in a *Mishnah*, If one distributes his property (by means of an (oral declaration,) R. Elazar says, whether he is a healthy person or a dangerously ill person, (his oral declaration is invalid.) Immovable property may be acquired by (means of) money, a document, or a proprietary act. And (movable) property may be acquired only by (the act of) drawing it near. But the Sages say, both these (immovable property) and those (movable property) are acquired through oral declaration (if he is dangerously ill.) The sages said to R. Elazar, (There was a case) with the mother of the sons of Rocheil, who was (dangerously) ill and said, my brooch should be given to my daughter. (The brooch) was worth twelve *maneh*. And the mother died (without having transferred the brooch to her daughter).... The Sages upheld the mother's words.... Where (one has) died, we say that it is a meritorious act (*mitzvah*) to uphold the words of the deceased.⁵⁶

This *sugya* discusses the detailed manner with which Jewish law prescribes the transfer of various types of property from one person to another. The Sages, contradicting the position of R. Elazar, declared that people could make an oral last will and testament to designate the recipients of both their real property (land, buildings, etc.) and their movable property (jewelry, dishes, etc.). To explain their position, the Sages described the case of Rocheil, a dying woman who clearly stated that she wanted her daughter to have her brooch after her death. When she died, the Sages upheld her words, calling it a *mitzvah* to uphold the wishes of a dying person.

Generally speaking, we do not find evidence in Torah that daughters inherit property when a parent dies. In other words, Rocheil's dying wish to give her brooch to her daughter would have had no consequence. In this case, however, the Sages did not follow the laws of inheritance found in the Torah which would have favored Rocheil's sons (Numbers 27:8-11). Instead, they held that it was a *mitzvah* for Rocheil's children

⁵⁶ See Appendix IIIB8 for Hebrew text

to uphold her dying wish and give the brooch to her daughter. Clearly, this use of the term *mitzvah* refers to a meritorious act rather than to a biblical command.

TEXT #9

Leviticus Rabbah 34:14

וִיקְרָא רַבָּה פְּרָשָׁה לְד' ה' י"ד

In the days of R. Tanhuma, Israel needed rain. They came to him and said, Master, decree a fast in order for the rain to fall. He did it one time, two times, and still no rain fell. The third time he rose up and sermonized and said, "Everybody go out and distribute **charity (mitzvot)**. One man got up and took everything that was in his house and he went out to distribute it (on the basis of what had just been said.) He met his divorced wife, who said, "Give me charity. Ever since I left your house, no good has happened to me." Once he saw that she was naked and in great distress; he had compassion for her and gave charity to her, on the basis of the verse, "From your own flesh you should not hide." ... (So they go on talking about the situation.) A person saw him and said he was fooling around with the same person he had previously divorced, which he should not have been doing. Therefore, he became suspect of doing the wrong thing. When he was taken to task for it, he said, "Didn't you say that all the people should go out and give **charity (mitzvah)**? I did that, and the first person I happened to meet was my ex-wife." At that moment, R. Tanhuma lifted his face before God and said, "Sovereign of the Universe, this man is flesh and blood and (he was even) cruel (to this woman at one time), and is no longer obligated to her (since he divorced her). If he had mercy on her and he did give to her, how much more should You be filled with compassion for us who are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and we are dependent on you to provide us with food." At that moment the rains fell, and the world was relieved.⁵⁷

This passage from *Leviticus Rabbah* describes a season when Israel needed rain desperately and the people went to R. Tanhuma for help. When his decrees for rain brought no results, he told the people to go out and distribute charity (*mitzvah*) in order to bring the rainfall. The story describes one particular man who gave charity to his ex-wife; he was able to overcome his past history of being cruel to her when he realized her tremendous distress and need.

⁵⁷ See Appendix IIIB9 for Hebrew text

R. Tanhuma used the man as an example in his plea to God for rain. He said that if the man could overcome his past cruelty to his wife and feel compassion for her difficult situation, surely God could feel compassion for the people of Israel and bring them rain. R. Tanhuma argued that while the divorced man was no longer connected to his ex-wife, he was still able to feel compassion for her and help her. Surely then, God who was still very connected to the people of Israel through their lineage from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, could feel compassion for them and bring rain. At that point, God had mercy on them and provided rain.

In this story, charity, under the name of *mitzvah*, suggests a meritorious act rather than a commandment or an obligation. Surely the man was under no obligation to help his ex-wife; he was divorced from her. Furthermore, his act of human charity provided a model for God to be charitable.

TEXT #10

Leviticus Rabbah 37:2

ויקרא רבה פרשה לו ד'ה ב

Another interpretation of "When anyone explicitly vows to give his worth to the Temple," (Leviticus 27:2): That is what it says in Job 34:11, "For he pays a man according to his actions, and He provides for him according to his conduct."

There was a case of a certain person. He had two sons. One of them did **charity** (*mitzvah*). And one of them did not do any **charity** (*mitzvah*). The one who did charity, sold his home, and he sold everything he had and spent the proceeds on *mitzvah*.

One time on the day of Hoshana (the seventh day of Sukkot), his wife gave him ten coins. She said to him, "Go out and buy something for your kids in the market." As soon as he went to the market, the collectors of charity came. They said, "Here comes the Master of charity." They said to him, "Give your share to this charity because we are buying a wedding dress for an orphan girl." He took out the ten coins and gave them to the men.

He was embarrassed to go home, so he went to the synagogue. There he saw some of the citrons that the children throw on Hoshana Rabbah. He had heard that the *Mishnah* taught that after the last use of the

lulav and *etrog*, it was permitted for the children to take their palm branches and eat the worshiper's citrons. He took the citrons and filled a sack with them, and he went out on a voyage to sea, until he came to the King's great place.

When he got there, the King felt a pain in his stomach and he had been told in a dream, "Eat of those citrons that those Jews pray with on Hoshana Rabbah, and you will feel better." So he sent people to search in all the places, but they could not find any (citrons), but they did find a guy sitting on his sack. They said to him, "Do you have anything?" He said to them, "I am a very poor man, and I have nothing to sell." They looked in his sack, and they found some citrons. They asked him where they were from. He said, "From those that the Jews use to pray on Hoshana Rabbah."

They brought them to the King, he ate them, and he felt better. They emptied the sack and filled it with *dinarim*. The King said to him, "Ask anything else of me, and I will give it to you." He said to him, "I beg that my property be returned to me and that all the people shall come out to meet me." This was done for him. When he arrived at his own province, a herald preceded him, and all the people came out to meet him.

His brother also came out with his children to meet him. As they were crossing a river, the current of the river caught his brother and his brother's children and carried them off. Thus it turned out that he entered into his house and inherited his brother's property. Thus the text (from Job,) "For he pays a man according to his actions," was fulfilled.⁵⁸

This *Midrash* from *Leviticus Rabbah* provides another example where *mitzvah* means charity. One of two brothers was generous and gave *tzedakah* freely; rather than buying toys for his own children, he gave his money to people in need. In the end he was rewarded for his charitable acts and profited greatly. The other brother was not generous, did not give *tzedakah*, and lost all that he had in the end, including his life. Just as in the previous example from *Leviticus Rabbah*, in this text, the term *mitzvah* comes much closer to meaning good deed and charity than a biblical commandment from God.

⁵⁸ See Appendix IIIB10 for Hebrew text

Conclusion for *Mitzvah* in Formative Rabbinic Sources

There was a consistent use within the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods which included the *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, and early *Midrashim*, of using the term *mitzvah* to mean a command coming from God as expressed in the Torah; that was the standard meaning. But there were also times when *mitzvah* meant meritorious act both in the *Mishnah* and in the *Talmud*. Finally by the time of *Leviticus Rabbah*, *mitzvah* also refers to giving charity. These examples represent the full spectrum of meaning for the term *mitzvah*.

MITZVAH IN CONTEMPORARY USAGE

As we have learned from our textual sources, the term *mitzvah* has a variety of meanings in Formative Rabbinic Sources ranging from God's direct command to voluntary meritorious acts. We find a similar range in the meaning of *mitzvah* in contemporary usage as well, some of which are cited below.

Source # 1

Platforms of American Reform Judaism

Included here are excerpts from each of the four platforms the Reform Movement has adopted over the last 115 years in an attempt to trace the use of the word *mitzvah* and its meaning within the Reform Movement. We are looking for interpretations of *mitzvah* regarding ritual observance as well as doing praiseworthy acts in the world.

The Pittsburgh Platform (1885)

We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance

in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.⁵⁹

The complete absence of the terms *mitzvah* and *mitzvot* from the text of the 1885 Platform is remarkable, yet the tension inherent in the lack of reference to ritual observance is felt throughout the document. Though the words *mitzvah* and *mitzvot* are never mentioned, it is clear that the early Reformers were making a strong stand against the observance of ritual *mitzvot*, even to the point of declaring that observing some of the Jewish rituals would detract from a spiritually uplifting experience. This trend away from particular religious observance among Jews who wished to be fully acculturated as Americans was consonant with the prevailing spirit of the times.

The Columbus Platform: "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism" (1937)

(The Torah) ... preserves the historical precedents, sanctions and norms of Jewish life, and seeks to mold it in the patterns of goodness and of holiness. Being products of historical processes, certain of its laws have lost their binding force with the passing of the conditions that called them forth. But as a depository of permanent spiritual ideals, the Torah remains the dynamic force of the life of Israel. Each age has the obligation to adapt the teachings of the Torah to its basic needs in consonance with the genius of Judaism.⁶⁰

Fifty two years later, the Columbus Platform still makes no direct reference to either the term *mitzvah* or *mitzvot*. While the authors of the platform continued to avoid the use of the terms, there is not quite as strong a stand against ritual observance as was noticed in the original document. This platform simply makes reference to certain rituals which are no longer binding on modern Jews; the language appears less inflammatory and polemical.

⁵⁹ Meyer, p.388.

⁶⁰ Meyer, p. 389.

The San Francisco Platform: "Reform Judaism – A Centenary perspective" (1976)

Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of a religious life, the means by which we strive to achieve universal justice and peace. Reform Judaism shares this emphasis on duty and obligation. Our founders stressed that the Jew's ethical responsibilities, personal and social, are enjoined by God. The past century has taught us that the claims made upon us may begin with our ethical obligations but they extend to many other aspects of Jewish living, including: creating a Jewish home centered on family devotion; life-long study; private prayer and public worship; daily religious observance; keeping the Sabbath and the holy days; celebrating the major events of life; involvement with the synagogue and community; and other activities which promote the survival of the Jewish people and enhance its existence. Within each area of Jewish observance Reform Jews are called upon to confront the claims of Jewish tradition, however differently perceived, and to exercise their individual autonomy, choosing and creating on the basis of commitment and knowledge.⁶¹

Again, no mention is made of the terms *mitzvah* or *mitzvot*, either in the context of ritual commands or of doing good deeds. However, some of the language used in this text indicates a cautious move toward embracing ritual observance, as in "Reform Judaism shares this emphasis on duty and obligation." Even though the text does not indicate what duty and obligation actually signify, the inclusion of this phrase seems to be a tremendous leap from the earlier platforms' avoidance of anything resembling ritual observance. Advocating individual choice of observance under the heading of individual autonomy also marks another dramatic change from the first platform in 1885.

A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism

Adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention

God

We respond to God daily: through public and private prayer, through study and the performance of other מצוות (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations –

בין אדם למקום (*bein adam la Makom*), to God, and בין אדם לחבירו (*bein adam la-chaveiro*), to other human beings.

⁶¹ Meyer, p. 393.

Torah

Through Torah study we are called to מצוות (*mitzvot*), the means by which we make our lives holy.

We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of מצוות (*mitzvot*) and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these מצוות (*mitzvot*), sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times.⁶²

This most current statement marks a dramatic change in both language and content from that of the earlier platforms regarding the significance of *mitzvah* in the lives of Reform Jews. Clearly the leadership of the Reform Movement has made a seismic shift in its approach to ritual *mitzvot*, no longer finding them necessarily antithetical to modern Jewish life. This renewed emphasis on the performance of ritual *mitzvot* was not intended to disenfranchise those Jews whose self-definition does not include ritual observance. The clear intent was to encourage those liberal Jews hoping to enhance the texture of their Jewish lives with a wider range of Jewish observance under the auspices of the Reform Movement.

Source # 2

Jewish Literacy by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin

To gain an insight into one Orthodox interpretation of the term *mitzvah*, we turn once again to *Jewish Literacy* where Telushkin specifically defines *mitzvah* as a commandment rather than as a good deed.⁶³ Telushkin explains that in biblical times, a commanded act existed on a higher level than a voluntary act; the addition of obligation ensured that the act would be engaged in more regularly and with a more enduring

⁶² Union of American Hebrew Congregations website <<http://uahc.org/>>

quality than that of a voluntary act. Telushkin comments that the biblical *mitzvot* included ethical/social issues as well as ritual concerns and at times, the distinction between the two was far from absolute.⁶⁴

Source # 3

Personal Interview with Rabbi David Saperstein, February 8, 2001 at HUC-JIR

Rabbi David Saperstein reflected on the contemporary use of the term *mitzvah* in the Orthodox community. He has observed that while the Orthodox community would readily use the term *mitzvah* to mean a good deed, they would never use the term *mitzvot* to indicate the plural, good deeds. In the plural form, the term *mitzvot* refers to the commandments from God, the 613 obligations that an Orthodox Jew strives to fulfill.

Rabbi Saperstein speculated that perhaps the use of *mitzvah* to indicate a good deed might have originated in the Yiddish use of the term.⁶⁵

Source # 4

HUC-ALUM

In the fall of 1998, the Reform rabbinate entered the world of high technology with a moderated list-serv for the graduates of the HUC-JIR. Questions and responses ranging from theology to practical rabbinics appear each day on the computers of close to 1000 HUC graduates. In the fall of 2000, one rabbi requested personal definitions of the term *mitzvah* from other Reform rabbis, cantors, and educators. He received an

⁶³ Telushkin, p.495.

⁶⁴ Telushkin, p.496.

⁶⁵ Confirmed in a conversation with Dr. Michael Chernick on February 20, 2001.

astonishing number of responses which indicated extraordinary diversity of meaning associated with the word *mitzvah*. Among the responses were the following:

Jewish imperative, Essential Jewish act, Opportunity
Ethical precept, An awareness tool, A call to integrity
The opportunities God gives us to be partner's with the Divine
Life-sanctifying act, Meritorious action
Divine obligation, Religious obligation, Commandment accountable
A deliberate act which brings us closer to the presence of God
Response, A friendly act, Doing the right thing
Urge of the *yetzer ha-tov*, Function of the compassionate aspect of God
Opportunity for holiness, A sacred Jewish practice
A prayer in the form of a deed, An enjoinder, Motivation
Response to Divine will, A deed for God, Do a Jewish ought
Sustaining acts, Connecting with the Divine
To make a deposit in the bank of Jewish continuity by either performing or
avoiding a deed

MITZVAH CONCLUSION

The word *mitzvah* has encompassed a full range of meaning within the Jewish world from the biblical period through the present time. In the Bible, the word *mitzvah* meant a title of property, dues, a parent's directives, a king's ruling, and one's own self-imposed obligations. More common, however, was the biblical understanding of the

word *mitzvah* specifying a command coming directly from God; both the command and the commanded could be identified in particular or left general in nature.

The formative Rabbinic sources examined in this paper, the *Mishnah*, the *Tosefta*, and the early *Midrashim*, all expressed the full spectrum of possibilities in their use of the word *mitzvah*, ranging from God's commandments to meritorious voluntary acts to charity. The contemporary uses of *mitzvah*, almost too wide-ranged to categorize, include all of these same interpretations plus the concept of doing good deeds.

Though the word *mitzvah* included the same range of meaning in ancient days as today, its primary meaning has shifted dramatically from obligated command to voluntary act. We can imagine how the Rabbis made the connection between the commands and meritorious acts which inspired this shift. Perhaps, in reflecting on the nature of God's commands, the Rabbis assumed that God would only command people to perform acts which would gain them merit in the context of their particular world view.

Quoting Deuteronomy 6:18, "ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני יהוה," "*V'asita hayashar v'hatov b'einei Adonai*," "Do what is right and good in the sight of *Adonai*," the Rabbis could almost equate doing good deeds with following Torah. The preceding verse to this open-ended statement in verse 18 contains the directive to keep all of God's laws and commands. The Torah, which could not possibly contain every conceivable law that would ever be required by the Israelites, therefore offered a general command to do good. This bridge between God-specified commands and human-directed good deeds allows for the possibility of human imagination to decide which things are right and then do them; it also connects doing good deeds with the biblical term *mitzvah*.

Prior to modernity, Jewish life was controlled by Jewish law and Jewish courts. These courts had the power to fine people, imprison them, and control all aspects of their lives. As Jews moved into the modern era and embraced the secular world, these courts lost their stronghold over people and ultimately ceased to function; modern Jewish expression became even more complicated than it had previously been. With the Emancipation and the subsequent dispersion of the Jewish world, Jews were required to follow the laws of their host countries. Religiously speaking, they had more freedom and more choices than ever before; much of Jewish practice became optional and affiliation with the Jewish community became voluntary, including the command to do specific good acts. Voluntary acts of merit differed greatly from acts based upon a divinely ordained obligation. These voluntary acts were defined as good deeds and were called *mitzvot* because that had always been one of its meanings. The term *mitzvah* connected the Jews living in the modern world with one aspect of their Jewish tradition.

TIKKUN OLAM AND MITZVAH CONCLUSION

I began this study, already clear that the terms *tikkun olam* and *mitzvah* have great meaning for contemporary Jews, no matter their denominational label. I was curious to discover what changes in the definition of these significant Jewish words had taken place over the last two millennia, especially after my accidental discovery of an original and different interpretation of *tikkun olam* in *Masekhet Gittin*. Months of delving deeply into the changing meanings of the terms *tikkun olam* and *mitzvah* have confirmed my initial curiosity about these two terms, and my study has affirmed my belief that context in text study is crucial to understanding the real lives of Jews over the centuries. As this study comes to an end, I will review the findings, first for *tikkun olam* and then *mitzvah*, which sources I located and translated, how I interpreted them, and finally offer some synthesis of the research on these two terms.

I had originally assumed that *tikkun olam* was a term which could be found in all Jewish literature, so it surprised me to find that there was no mention of *tikkun olam* in the Bible. The phrase *tikkun olam* first appears in the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta* where it was understood to refer to laws and rules enacted for the general welfare of the Jewish people. The references to *tikkun olam* in the *Talmud* were so similar to those in the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta*, they were not included in this paper.

As used in the *Aleinu*, first found in its present form in the *Mahzor Vitry*, the term *tikkun olam* refers to God's repairing the entire world, an act which would be brought about by the fervent prayers of the Jewish people. By the Middle Ages, the *Zohar* uses the term *tikkun olam* to indicate the partnership between human beings and God in repairing the entire cosmos. And by the present day, many references to *tikkun olam*

have dropped God from the partnership and equated the term with acts of social justice or good deeds done by human beings alone.

The various sources studied suggest several possible reasons for the change in definition. In the Mishnaic period the world seemed more confined to the life of the Jewish community; it made sense to believe that positive change should primarily benefit one's own society. This awareness was matched by the certainty that Jews had no real power over the broader world. By the Middle Ages, this sense of powerlessness may have evoked the need for the development of the concept that God and humanity exist in partnership to affect change in the world.

The evolving theology of the early Reform Movement replaced the traditional concept of a personal Messiah with the notion of a Messianic Age. A Messianic Age wherein people, not a particular individual born of the House of David, bring about perfection on Earth makes sense to a community which has embraced the concept of an interactive relationship with God marked by acts of goodness. Finally, the contemporary definition of *tikkun olam* offers a compelling reason for identification with the Jewish people to Jews who had already replaced Jewish theology with universalism. The power of this contemporary definition is not limited to non-Orthodox Jews. Even those Jews who maintain their relationship with tradition find this interpretation of *tikkun olam* convincing. It is important to note, however, that the modern understanding of the term *tikkun olam* is strictly American, one which is completely foreign to Israelis. In part this is because Israel is a country too young and too concerned with its own daily survival to focus on ideas of repairing the larger world. In part, the Jewish American phenomenon of *tikkun olam* was able to flourish because it fits in nicely with the American self-

concept of being overseers of the world and because Jewish Americans have more power to affect the larger world than ever before as members of the American democratic polity.

Unlike *tikkun olam*, the word *mitzvah* is found all over the Bible with meanings ranging from a title of property, dues, and a parent's directives, to the more common usage of God's commands. These seemingly disparate uses are linked by the sacred nature of each subject. The importance of land to an agriculturally dependent people, the tithes that reassured the people of their relationship to the divine, the parent-child connection which evoked the paradigm of God and humanity, and the authority resting in the king which reminded the people of their divine sovereign, all pointed to the later meaning of God's command to the people. The Rabbinic literature examined uses the term *mitzvah* with a similar spectrum of meaning ranging from God's command to meritorious acts to charity. The command found in Deuteronomy 6:18, "Do what is right and good in the sight of *Adonai*," can be seen as the bridge which allowed the Rabbis to equate doing good deeds with following Torah. With Jewish law maintaining less impact on the lives of most contemporary Jews, this became a way to connect Jews with their Jewish past. Contemporary usage of the term *mitzvah* alludes to all the prior definitions but emphasizes the concept of doing good deeds. These good deeds are defined and chosen by the doer, and are therefore consonant with modern voluntarism.

The concepts of *tikkun olam* and *mitzvah* have much in common with each other at many levels: they have been affected by history in similar ways. Both terms have survived their original intended uses because they have been adapted to change with the times and the needs of the Jewish people. They both retain a core meaning of their original usage which allows the modern Jewish community to feel more connected to its

past by using these terms. In many ways, this adaptability has been good for keeping the Jewish community alive and enabling more disenfranchised Jews to stay connected to the Jewish people. In other ways, perhaps, it has not been beneficial to the Jewish people. To have God even remotely removed from bettering the world, much less totally removed from the process of *tikkun olam* as perceived by many modern Jews, cannot be good for individual Jews or the Jewish people.

A tension has always existed within Judaism about whether to emphasize the particular or the universal, how much Jews want to assimilate, and the best method of expression of core Jewish values. I see the interplay between *mitzvah* and *tikkun olam* providing a way for Jews to resolve some of these tensions.

The individual acts that each Jew performs include his or her hopes and dreams about how to lead a better life, how to make a stronger community, and how to bring about the betterment of the world. One Jew's command is another Jew's good deed is another Jew's voluntary meritorious act. By giving each of our deeds the name of *mitzvah*, we connect that act to the realm of the sacred and bring God into the daily texture of our lives. By adding one *mitzvah* to another, we are doing our share in fulfilling the Jewish dream of *tikkun olam*.

One *mitzvah* follows another... מצוה גוררת מצוה

The reward for a *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*... שכר מצוה מצוה

Pirke Avot 4:2... פרקי אבות ד"ב

Appendix IIA - Tikkun Olam in the Mishnah

IIA1 - TEXT # 1

Mishnah Gittin 4:2

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ב

בראשונה הנה עושה בית דין במקום אחר ומכטלו. התקין רבן גמליאל הנקן שלא יהו עושין כן. מפני תקון העולם. בראשונה הנה משנה שמו ושמה. שם עירו ושם עירתה. והתקין רבן גמליאל הנקן שיהא כותב: איש פלוני וכל שם שיש לו. אשה פלונית וכל שם שיש לה. מפני תקון העולם.

IIA2 - TEXT # 2

Mishnah Gittin 4: 3

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ג

אין אלקנה נפרעת מנכסי יתומים אלא בשביעה. נמנעו מלקטביעה. התקין רבן גמליאל הנקן שתהא נודדת ליתומים כל מה שירצו. וגובה כתבתה. העדים חותמין על הגט. מפני תקון העולם. הלל התקין פרוזבול. מפני תקון העולם.

IIA3 - TEXT # 3

Mishnah Gittin 4:6

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ו

אין פודין את השבויים יותר על כדי דמיהן. מפני תקון העולם. ואין מבריחין את השבויין. מפני תקון העולם. רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: מפני תקנת השבויין. ואין לוקחים ספרים תפלין ומיזרות מן הגוים יותר על כדי דמיהן. מפני תקון העולם.

IIA4 - TEXT # 4

Mishnah Gittin 4:9

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ד משנה ט

המוכר את שדהו לגוי וחזר ולקחה ממנו ישראל — הלוקח מביא בכורים. מפני תקון העולם.

IIA5 - TEXT # 5

Mishnah Gittin 5:3

משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ה משנה ג

והמוצא מציאה. לא ישיב. מפני תקון העולם.

Appendix IIB - *Tikkun Olam* in the *Tosefta*

IIB1 - TEXT # 1

Tosefta Terumot 1:12-13

תוספתא מסכת תרומות פרק א הלכות יב"ג

12. ר' שמעון בן מנסיא אומר יחוסין שסמכו אצל בעל הבית, או שסמכן אביהם, או שסמכן בית דין, מעשר ומאכילין, מפני תיקון העולם. וכן היה ר' שמעון בן מנסיא או יחוס בן לוי שהיה נדל אצל בעל הבית, מעשר ומאכילו, מפני תיקון העולם. אם היה בן אשתו בהן או לוי, הרי זה מאכילו. 13. קטן שאם' לאחד בשוק האכילני כעשר, כאכילו מפני תיקון העולם.

IIB2 - TEXT # 2

Tosefta Ketubot 12:2

תוספתא מסכת כתובות פרק יב הלכה ב

2. אין עושין כתובת אשה מן המטלטלין, מפני תיקון העולם. אמר ר' יוסי וכי מה תיקון העולם יש בזו, אלא לפי שאין לה קצבה.

IIB3 - TEXT # 3

Tosefta Gittin 3:8-9

תוספתא מסכת גיטין פרק ג הלכות ח-ט

8. כהנים שפגלו במקדש שוגגין, פטורין, מזידין, חייבין. מפני תיקון העולם. שלוח בית דין שהכה ^{ss} ברשות בית דין והזיק, בשוגג, פטור, במזיד, חייב, מפני תיקון העולם. רופא אומן שריפא ברשות בית דין והזיק, בשוגג, פטור, במזיד, חייב, מפני תיקון העולם. 9. המחית את העובר במעי אשה והזיק, ברשות בית דין, בשוגג, פטור, במזיד, חייב, מפני תיקון העולם.

IIC1 - TEXT # 1

Aleinu

עלינו

עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל. לתת נדלה ליוצר בראשית.
 שלא עשנו כגוי הארצות. ולא עבדנו כמשפחות האנדה.
 שלא שם חלקנו בהם ועדנו ככל המונגם. ואלהינו
 בורעים ומשתתפים ומוזים לפני מלך מלכי המלכים
 הקדוש ברוך הוא. שהוא נוטרי שמים ויסד ארץ. ומשכן
 יקרו בשמים ממעל. ושבירת עזו בגבוי מרומים: הוה
 אלהינו אין עוד. אמר מלפני אפס זולתו. בברזב
 בחרותו וידעת דיוו ודשבת אל לבבך כי יהיה
 הוה האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת
 אין עוד:

עלכן נקנה לה יי אלהינו לראות מהרה בתפארת
 עזך להעביר גלולים מן הארץ והאלילים ברוח יברתון.
 לתקן עולם במלכות שדי וברבני בשר יקראו בשמך.
 להפנות אלה בירשעי ארץ. יבירו וידעו כל יושבי
 חבל כי לה חכמה בל ברך תשבע כל לשון: לפניה
 יי אלהינו יכרעו ויפולו. ורובוד שמך יקר יתנו. ויקבלו
 כלם ארזעל מלכותך. ותמלוך עליהם. מהרה לעולם
 ועד. כי המלכות שלך הוה ולעולם עד תמלוך בברבור.
 בברזב בחרותך יהיה ימך לעלם ועד: ונאמר
 יהיה יי למלך על הארץ ביום ההוה יהיה יי
 אחר ושמו אחד:

IIC2 - TEXT # 2

Mahzor Vitry

מחזור וטרי

לתקן עולם במלכות שדי.
 במלכות פ' מי שאמי לעולם די'. וכן הוא אומ' וארא אל אברהם ונ'. באל שדי (שמות ו').
 שהיה מרחיב בתחילה עד מאד. עד שאמר לו הק' די'. וכל בני בשר יקראו לשמך.
 וזה שאמי הכתי כל אשר יקרא בשם יי' ימלא (זאל ג'). או אהסך אל עמים שמה
 ברורה לקרא כלם בשם יי' (צטניה ג'). יכירו וידעו כל יושבי תבל. שאתה אלהים אמת:
 לא הביס און ביעקב. כנגד להעביר נילולים סן הארץ. ובתי והמרת את לב האבן
 מבשרכם. ורוח חדשה אתן בקרבכם (יחזקאל לו). כי ליי' המלוכה. כנגד ואנו כורעים
 ומשתחיים. שאנו שערים. כנגד לתקן עולם. כלום' שאנו שערים ראשיכם ודרכה שטלך הכבוד
 בא לכאן. שלו אין מססיקן שבים. כדא הנה השמים ושמי שמים לא יכלכלך (מלכים א ח).
 וזהו שאמי למעלה שדי. שדי'

IIC3 - TEXT # 3

Avodat Yisrael

עבודת ישראל

במלכות שדי, אחרי שנכרתו כל כחותיו סן בעולם וכל בני פנים יעמדו חת
 כסם כיה לו יספ' העולם מתוקן. ובעת ההיא נקראה על בות שדי בעבוד כי הכל עתידים עליכם חת שדי
 כיה

IID1 - TEXT # 1

Zohar, Vol. 3, p.239:1

זוהר כרך ג פרשת פנחס דף רלט עמוד א

(קבלת ג) ידעתי כי כל אשר יעשה האלהים הוא יהיה לעולם עליו אין להוסיף וממנו אין לגרוע וגו'. שלמה מלכא דחכמתיה יתיר על כל בני עלמא לא ידענא כי כל אשר יעשה האלהים הוא יהיה לעולם ואיהו אמר ידעתי מה דלא ידע ב"נ אחרא אלא ודאי שלמה מלכא חכמתיה סלקא על כל בני עלמא ומה דאיהו ידע לא ידעי כל שאר בני עלמא. ה"ח שאר אומני דעלמא כד איהו עביר עבירא אשגח ביה ואסתכל זמנא ותרין זמנין ועביר ליה ולבתר אוסיף עליה או גרע מניה וקודשא בריך הוא לאו הכי אפיק עבירא לאמתו מתחו דלית בה ממשות כלל ואיהו ממש אתתקן כדקא יאות ולא אצטריך לאוכפא ולאגרעא מניה בגין כך כתיב (בראשית א) וירא אלהים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד. * הו כל אשר יעשה האלהים לתקונא דעלמא ודאי הוא יהיה לעולם

IID2 - TEXT # 2

Zohar, Vol. 1, p.163:2

זוהר כרך א פרשת ויצא דף קסג עמוד ב

רבי אבא אמר זכאה חולקהון דישראל דאינון עלאין על עמין עבר"ם בגין דדרנא דלהון לעילא ודרגין דעמין עכו"ם לתתא. אלין כסטרא דקדושה ואלין כסטרא דמכאבא אלין לימינא ואלין לשמאלא, כיון דאתחרב בי מקדשא מה כתיב (איכה ב') השיב אחור ימינו מפני אויב ובגין כך כתיב (תהלים ס') הושיעה ימינך וענני, ושמאלא אתגבר ומכאבא אתתקף עד דיבני קודשא בריך הוא בי מקדשא ויתקין עלמא על תקונוי ויהדרון מלי"י כדקא יאות ויתעבר סטרא מסאבא מן עלמא, והא אתמר דכתיב (זכריה י"ג) ואת רוח הטומאה אעביר מן הארץ וגו'

IID3 - TEXT # 3

Zohar, Vol. 3, p. 112:1

זוהר כרך ג פרשת בהר דף קיב עמוד א

בפולחנא דב"נ פלח ליה לקודשא בריך הוא אית פולחנא דאצטריך ב"נ לאתכללא בתרווייהו למהוי עבד ובן לאתעטרא ביה בקודשא בריך הוא, ומה איהו, דא פולחנא דצלותא דאצטריך למהוי בה עבד ובן לאתכללא בדרגין עלאין אלין, למפלח ולאחנא צלותא ברחא דעבד למפלח פולחנא דתקונא דעלמין ולאחנא רעותיה ברחין דחכמתא לאחנא ברחא במאריה בגנחין עלאין כדקא חזי, בן אתרבק תדיר באבוי בלא פרודא כלל * לית מאן דימחי בידיה, עבד עביר פולחניה דמאריה ואתקין תקוני עלמא.

יתבו גו ההוא מערתא כל ההוא יומא
 כך רמז ליליא אתנהיר פיהרא במערתא עברו [א] חרי סיעי וחמריהון סעינן מחצרא
 ופיכלא לגרמיהו שארי על מסולא אברי האי להאי נבית הכא גיהב פיכלא ומסתייא
 לחמרי ואנן נעול למערתא דא. איל חבריה [ב] עד לא ניעול תימא האי קרא דלא
 מתישבא. א"ר מאי הוא א"ל מלה חד דכתיב (מחליכ נב) אודך לעולם כי עשית וגו'.
 מהו כי עשית ולא כתיב מה. וכתיב כי טוב נגד חסידיך. וכי לגבי אחרא לאו איהו
 טוב לא הוה בידיה אמר [ג] ווי לסיוענא דשבקנא לקב"ה בניניה. רבי חייא ור' יוסי דהוו
 יתבי במערתא חדו א"ר חייא דר' יוסי ולא אמרית לך דכד צביד קב"ה ניסא
 בכלא עביד. נפקו כד נפקו אקדים ר' חייא ופתח (ישעיה גו) שלום שלום לרחוק
 תרי שלמא הכא חד לרחוק וחד לקרוב וכלא חד (א) לרחוק דאתעביד קרוב. (תו לרחוק)
 דא הוא מאריה דתשובה קודם הוה רחוק והשתא איהו קרוב ו). תו רחוק כד ב"נ
 אחרתיק מאורייתא רחיק הוא שקב"ה ומאן דקריב לאורייתא קריב ליה קב"ה בהריה
 והשתא אתחברו עמנא ועולו למערתא אתו אינון סיעין ואשתתפו עמהון [ד] (ב)
 אשתנקלו לחמרייהו ואתקנו לכיכל נפקו כולהו לסוס מערתא. אמר חד סן סעינן
 נימרו לן מארי דאורייתא האי קרא אודך לעולם כי עשית ואקוה וגו'.
 כי עשית מהו כי עשית ולא כתיב מה. וכתיב כי טוב נגד חסידיך וכי לגבי
 אחרא לאו הוא טוב. א"ר חייא כי עשית ודאי ומה עשית לעולם. דבנין האי
 עולם דעבד קב"ה ואתקן ליה אודי ב"נ לקב"ה בכל יומא. ואקוה סמך כי טוב
 נגד חסידיך הכי הוא ודאי לקבלי אינון זכאין דמא דקב"ה טוב ולא לקבלי חייביא
 דמבזין ליה בכל יומא ולא בשתדלי באורייתא

ותי"ח כד חב אדם בעין הדעת טוב ורע חב דכתיב ומעין הדעת וגו' ואיהו ביה חב וגרם
 מותא לעלמא מה כתיב ועתה פן ישלח ידו ולקח גם מעין החיים וגו' (וגרם מותא לכל בני
 * עלמא) וכד אתא אברהם באילנא אחרא אתקין עלמא דהוא אילנא דחיי ואודע
 מהימנותא לכל בני עלמא:

* סְמוּכִים דָּא דְּכֵר וְנוֹקְבָא דְּאֵנוּן סְמוּכִים בְּחָדָא וְנִי"א דְּאֵינוּן סְמוּכִים עוֹלָם הַתָּאָה בְּעוֹלָם
עֲלָאָה דְּעַד לֹא אֶהְתְּקֵן עוֹלָם הַתָּאָה לֹא אֶהְתְּקֵן הַהוּא עוֹלָם דְּקֶאֱמָרָן) (הָאֵי עוֹלָם דְּקֶא
אֱמָרָן תְּלִיא בְּעוֹלָם דְּלִתְתָּא וְכֹד לֹא אֶהְתְּקֵן עוֹלָם דְּלִתְתָּא לֹא אֶהְתְּקֵן הַהוּא עוֹלָם דְּקֶא
אֱמָרָן), כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יי' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָרֶץ. דִּהָא דָּא בְּדָא סְמִיךְ עוֹלָם דָּא הַתָּאָה כֹּד אֶהְתְּקֵן
וְאֶתְהַדְּרוּ אֲנָפִין בְּאֲנָפִין וְאֶתְהַקְּנוּ אֶשְׁתַּכַּח סְמִיךְ לְעִילָא דִּהָא מְקַדְּמַת דְּנָא לֹא הוּא עוֹבְדָא
בְּתִקּוּנָא וְנִי"א עוֹלָם בְּתִקּוּנִיהָ) בְּגִין דְּלֹא הִמְטִיר יי' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָרֶץ וְדָא בְּדָא תְּלִיא מַה
כְּתִיב בְּתַרְיָה וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן הָאָרֶץ דָּא תִּקּוּנָא דְּלִתְתָּא לְבַתֵּר וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת כָּל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ, וְאֵד
יַעֲלֶה מִן הָאָרֶץ דָּא תִּיֹאבֶהָ דְּנוֹקְבָא לְגַבֵּי דְּכוּרָא דִּי"א מַאי טַעְמָא לֹא הִמְטִיר בְּגִין
דְּלֹא אֶשְׁתַּכַּח תִּקּוּנָא דִּיעֲלֶה מִן הָאָרֶץ וְעַל דָּא מִן אֶרְעָא תִּתָּאָה אֶתְעַר עוֹבְדָא לְעִילָא תִּי"ח
תִּנְנָא סְלִיק מִן אֶרְעָא בְּקַדְמִיתָא וְעִנְנָא אֶתְעַר וְכָלֹא אֶתְחַבֵּר לְבַתֵּר דָּא בְּדָא כְּנוּנָא דָּא
תִּנְנָא דְּקֶרְבְּנָא אֶתְעַר מִתָּא וְעִבִיד שְׁלִימוּ לְעִילָא וְאֶתְחַבֵּר כָּלֹא דָּא בְּדָא וְאֶשְׁתַּלִּימוּ
כְּנוּנָא דָּא לְעִילָא אֶתְעַרוּתָא שְׂרִי מִתָּא וְלְבַתֵּר אֶשְׁתַּלִּים כָּלֹא, וְאַלְמַלָּא דְּכִנְסַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
שְׂרִיא בְּאֶתְעַרוּתָא בְּקַדְמִיתָא לֹא אֶתְעַר לְקַבְלָה הַהוּא דְּלְעִילָא וְכִתְּאוּבָהָא דְּלִתְתָּא
אֶשְׁתַּלִּים לְעִילָא,

Appendix IIIA - Mitzvah in the Bible

IIIA1 - TEXT

Jeremiah 32:11

ירמיה לבייא

יֹאמֶר אֶתְדַבֵּר הַמִּקְדָּשׁ אֶת־הַחֲבִיטִים הַכְּצִיחַ וְהַחֲקִים יֵאמֹר
הַגִּלְיָאִי:

IIIA2 - TEXT #2

Nehemiah 10:33

נחמיה י"ג

וְהַעֲבַדְנִי עַל־נֹס מִצִּוֹת לַתֵּת עָלַי
שְׁלִישִׁית הַשֶּׁקֶר בַּשָּׂקָה לַעֲבֹדֶת בֵּית אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

IIIA3 - TEXT # 3

Isaiah 29:13

ישעיה כט:יג

וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲדֹנָי יִצְחָק כִּי נָגַשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּפִי וּבִשְׁפָתָיו כִּבְדִּי וּלְבֹו רָחַק
מִבִּי וְהָיוּ יִרְאָהֶם אֵתִי מִצִּוֹת אֲנָשִׁים מְלֻמָּדִים:

IIIA4 - TEXT # 4

Jeremiah 35:14

ירמיה לה:יד

הַקֶּסֶם אֶתְדַבֵּרִי
וְהִנֵּנִי בְּדֶרֶב אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה אֶתְדַבְּרִי לְכַלְתִּי שְׂתוּתָאֵנִי וְלֹא
שָׁתוּ

IIIA5 - TEXT # 5

Nehemiah 13:5

נחמיה יג:ה

וְעַם הַזֶּה לֹא־לָקַחְס נְהִיִּים אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה הַלְּבִיָּה וְהַכֹּהֲנִים יִמְעָשֶׂר
הַדָּגָן הַתְּרִישׁ וְהַתֵּבָאֵר מִצִּוֹת הַלֵּוִיִּם וְהַמְשֻׁדְּרִים וְהַשִּׁיעִירִים
וְהַתְּרוּמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים:

IIIA6 - TEXT # 6

II Kings 18:36

מלכים ב יח:לו

וְהַחֲדִישׁוּ הָעָם יֵלֶאֱדָעֵנִי אֵתִי דָבָר כִּי־צִוִּיתִי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַזֶּה
לֵאמֹר לֹא תִעֲנֶה:

IIIA7 - TEXT # 7

Genesis 6:22

בראשית ו:כב

וַיֵּשֶׁב נֹחַ כָּלֹּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים בֶּן נִשָּׁה:

IIIA8 - TEXT # 8

Exodus 24:12

שמות כד:יב

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־
מֹשֶׁה עֲלֶה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְהִנְחֵשׁ וְאָמַנְהָ לְךָ אֶת־לֶחֶת הָאֶבֶן
וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר בִּרְבִּיתִי לְהוֹרָתָם:

IIIA9 - TEXT # 9

Leviticus 7:37-38

ויקרא ז:לז-לח

וְאֵת הַתּוֹרָה לַעֲלֹה -
לְמִנְחָה וּלְחֶטְאֵת וְלָאֵשֶׁם יִלְמְלוּאִים וְלִזְבַּח הַשְּׁלָמִים: אֲשֶׁר -
עֹשֶׂה יְהוָה אֶת־מִטֵּה בָהֶר סִינַי בְּיוֹם צִוְּתוֹ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְהַקְרִיב אֶת־קֶרְבָּנֵיהֶם לַיהוָה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי:

IIIA10 - TEXT # 10

II Chronicles 7:17-20

דברי הימים ב ז:יז-כ

יָאֵתָה אִסְרָאֵל לִפְנֵי כְאֲשֶׁר פָּלַח בְּנֵי -
אֲבִיךָ וּלְעִשׂוֹת כָּל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ וְהָקִי וּמִשְׁפָּטֵי הַשְּׁמוֹר:
וְהַקִּימוֹתִי אֶת כָּל מַלְכוּתְךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר בָּרַתִּי לְדָוִד אֲבִיךָ לֵאמֹר
לֹא־יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ בִּישָׁאֵל: וְאִסְדָּשׁוּכֹן אֲתָם
וְעִנְיָתָם חֲקוֹתִי וּמִצִּוֹתִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיכֶם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם וְעָבַדְתֶּם
אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם: וְנִתְּשִׁים מִעַל אֲדָמָתִי
אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם וְאֶת־הַכֹּפֶת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר־הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי לְשִׁמִּי
אֲשָׁלֹךְ מִעַל פָּנַי וְאֶתְּנֶנּוּ לְמִשְׁלַל וּלְשִׁאֲנָה בְּכָל־הָעַמִּים:

Appendix IIB - *Mitzvah* in the Formative Rabbinic Sources

IIIB1 – TEXT # 1

Mishnah Pesachim 10:3

משנה מסכת פסחים פרק י משנה ג

הביאו לפניו מטביל בחזרת עד שמגיע לפרפרת הפת. הביאו לפניו מצה וחזרת וחרסת ושני תבשילין. אף על פי שאין חרסת מצנה. רבי אליעזר ברכי צדוק אומר: מצנה. ובמקדש היו מביאים לפניו גופו של פסח.

IIIB2 – TEXT # 2

Mishnah Yebamot 4:5

משנה מסכת יבמות פרק ד משנה ה

מצנה בגדול ליבם. לא רצה – מהלכין על כל הארץ. לא רצו – חוזרין אצל גדול ואומרים לו: עליך מצנה. או חלין או יבם!

IIIB3 – TEXT # 3

Mishnah Kiddushin 1:9

משנה מסכת קדושין פרק א משנה ט

כל מצנה שהיא חלויה בארץ. אינה נוהגת אלא בארץ: ושאינה חלויה בארץ. נוהגת בין בארץ בין בחוצה לארץ. חוץ מן הערלה והכלאים. רבי אליעזר אומר: אף מן התרש.

IIIB4 – TEXT # 4

Talmud Bavli Sukkah 37b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סוכה דף לו עמוד ב

ואמר רבה
יהדס של מצוה אסור להדירה בו אתרוג
של מצוה מותר להדירה בו מ"ט הדס ולרחא
קאי כי אקציה מרחא אקציה אתרוג ולאכילה
קאי כי אקציה מאכילה אקציה •

IIIB5 – TEXT # 5

Talmud Bavli Berachot 47b

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מז עמוד ב

הכותי מזמנין עליו. אמאי? לא ידא אלא עם הארץ, והניא, אין מזמנין על עם הארץ! אביי
אמר: בכותי חבר. רבא אמר: אפילו תימא בכותי עם הארץ, והכא בעם הארץ דרבנן
דפליגי עליה דרבי מאיר עסקינן. דתניא: אחוה עם הארץ? כל שאינו אוכל חוליו
בטהרה, דברי רבי מאיר; וחכמים אומרים: כל שאינו מעשר פירותיו כדאוי, והני כותאי.
* עשורי מעשרי כדחזי, דבמאי דכהיב באורייתא מזהר זהירי דאמר מר: כל מצוה שהחזיקו
בה כותים - הרבה מדקדקין בה יותר מישראל.

IIIB6 – TEXT # 6

Tosefta Soth 7:24

תוספתא מסכת סוטה פרק ז הלכה כד

כל אילו שאמרו אין יוצאין כל עיקר כנון הבונה בית וחנכו ולא שהה שנים עשר חודש נטע
כרם וחללו ולא שהה שנים עשר חודש ארש אשה ולקחה ולא שהה שנים עשר חודש הללו
אין נותנין פסי העיר ואין מספקין מים ומזון למלחמה ואין מתקנין את הדרכים ר' יהודה
היה קורא למלחמת הרשות מלחמת מצוה אבל מלחמת חובה הכל יוצא אפי' חתן מהדרו
וכלה מחופתה

IIIB7 – TEXT # 7

Talmud Bavli Hulin 106a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חולין דף קו עמוד א

אמר ר' אלעזר אמר רבי אושעיא: לא אמרו נטילת ידיים לפירות אלא משום נקיות. סבור
מינה: חובה הוא דליכא, הא מצוה איכא, אמר להו רבא: לא חובה ולא מצוה אלא רשות.

IIIB8 – TEXT # 8

Talmud Bavli Gittin 14b-15a

תלמוד בבלי מסכת גיטין דף יד ב' עמוד א

דתנן יהיאלק נכסו על פיו ר' אלעזר
אמר אתה בריא ואיד מסכן נכסים שיש להן אדירות נקנן בבמה ובשטר
ובחזקה ושאלן להן אדירות אין נקנן אלא במשיכה וחכמים אומרים אלו ואלו
נקנן באמירה אפרו לו מעישה באופן של בני חבל שהיתה חולה ואמרה תינתן
בביתו לבתי וזהו בשנים עשר מצה ומתה
וקיים חכמים את דבריה אמר להם בני חבל
תקבצו אבם ת"ק בראו' נתן ור' יעקב נבי
ברא אע"ג דמיה לא אמרין מצוה לקיים דבר
הבת ויש אומרים כרבנן ור' יהודה הצניא
שאמר משה ר"ם ברא מיה היכא דמיה
אמרין מצוה לקיים דבר הבת

ביומי דר' תנחומא היו צריכין ישראל למטרא אהון לגביה ואמרינן ליה רבי גזר העניתא
 דייחות מטרא גזר העניתא פעם ראשונה ושניה ולא ירדו גשמים פעם שלישית קם ודרש
 אמר לון כל עמא יפליגון מצוה קב חד גבר ונסב מה דהוה ליה בגו ביהיה ונפק למפלגה
 פגעה ביה משבכתיה וא"ל זכי בההיא איתתא דמן יומא דנפקית מן ביתך לא חמיה טב
 כיון שראה אותה ערומה ובצרה גדולה נתמלא עליה רחמים ונתן לה על שוב ומבשרך לא
 התעלם חמיתיה חד גבר סליק וא"ל לרבי תנחומא רבי אתה חבא ועבירה חבא א"ל מה
 חמית א"ל חמית גבר פלך דמשהעי למשבכתיה ולא עוד אלא דיהב לה פריטין אי לאו
 דחשיד עלה לא יהיב לה שלח ר' תנחומא ואייתיה וא"ל ברי את ידע דעלמא קאי
 בצערא ובדיאתה קיימא בצערא ואזלת ואשתעית עם משבכתך ולא עוד אלא דיהבת לה
 פריטין אלולי דחשיד אתה לא יהבת לה פריטין א"ל ולא כך דרשת ומבשרך לא התעלם
 * את אמרת כל עמא יפקון ויפליגון מצוה קאים אנא למפלגה מצוה פגעת בי משבכתי
 ואמרת לי זכי בההיא איתתא דמן יומא דנפקית מביתך לא חמית טב כיון שראיתיה
 ערומה ובצרה גדולה נתמלאתי עליה רחמים ונתתי לה על שום ומבשרך לא התעלם
 באותה שעה הגביה רבי תנחומא פניו לשמים ואמר לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע מה אם זה שהוא
 בשר ודם ואכזרי ולא היה עליו מזונותיה נתמלא עליה רחמים ונתן לה אנו שאנו בני בניך
 בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב ומזונותינו עליך עאכ"ו שהתמלא עלינו רחמים באותה שעה
 ירדו גשמים ונתרווח העולם.

ב ד"א איש כי יפליא הה"ד ואיב לז כי פצל אדכ יסלם לו וכאורח איש ימציאנו עובדא
 * הוה בחד נבר דהוו ליה תרין בנין חד מנהון עבד מצנה וחד מנהון לא עבד כל עיקר
 הדוא דעבד מצוה זבן לביהיה וכן כל מה דהוה ליה ואנקפתהון למצוהא חד זמן כיומא
 דהושענא יחבי ליה אינתהיה עשרה פולסין אמרה לו פוק זבין לבניך כלום מן שוקא כיון
 שיצא לשוק פגעו ביה גבאי צדקה אמרי הא אתא מדי מצוהא אמרו לו הב חולקך כהדא
 מצוהא דאנן זבנין חד קולא לחדא יתומהא נסב אלין יי פולסין ויהב יתהון להון ונתייש
 לילך לביהיה דלך לו לבהכ"נ חמא המן מן אלין אתרונגיא דמינוקיא מקלקלי ביום
 הושענא ותנינן המן מיד התינוקות שומטין לולביהון ואוכלים אתרונגיה נסב מנהון ומלא
 ית סקא והלך לפרש בים הגדול עד שהגיע למדינת המלך כיון שהגיע שם ארצה שעהא
 ואשתכח מלכא חשש מעוי אמרין ליה בחלמא אסונהך אכול מן אלין אתרונגין דיהודאי
 מצלין עמדהון כיום הושענא ואת מהסי שפשיין כהדוא שעהא לכל אלפיא ולכל מדינהא
 ולא אשכחון אלין ואשכחון להווא גבאי יתיב על סקא אמרין ליה איה גבך כלום אמר
 להם גבר מסכן אנא וליה גבי כלום למוכנא שפשו בכקא ואשכחין מן אלין אתרונגין
 ואמרין ליה אלין מן הן אמר לון מן אלין דיהודאי מצלי ביום הושענא אטענון סקא
 ואעלה קדם מלכא אכל מלכא אלין אתרונגיא ואיתי פנין שקא ומלאוה דירגין אמר
 ליה מלכא שאיל לך עוד שאילה ואנא עבד ליה שאילנא דיחזור לי מודלי ויפקון כל
 עמא לקרמוחי עבדיין ליה כן כיון דמטא להדיא מדינתא נפק כרחא קדמיי ונפקו כל עמא
 לקדמוחיה נפקו אחרי ובניו לקדמוחיה מיני נחין בחד נהר יתב להון שבלתא דנהרא
 ושטפת יתהון ואשתכר עלל לביהיה וירת מודלי דאחויי לקיים מה שנאמר כי פועל אדם
 ישלם לו

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