

What drives you to work for a better world?

Brief D'var Torah Study for Brit Olam

Todah rabah for working with your congregation's leadership to sign the Brit Olam, a Covenant with our World! Our hope is that the signing of each Brit will serve as the culmination of a thorough process of meaningful discussion and deliberation among congregational leaders at the board and clergy/staff levels.

We encourage you to begin discussions with your congregational leadership about the Brit Olam with a text study. This way, you are rooting your conversation about social justice work in Jewish values rather than partisan politics.

Below is a guide for a brief text study (8-10 minutes) if you do not have time for the longer congregational leader development exercise. Ideally, this can be done at the beginning of a board or other meeting before and separate from discussion about the particulars of the Brit Olam. Please feel free to change the texts and formats to best meet the needs of your congregation.

1. What is your motivation for improving the world?
 - a. In pairs (chavruta study) or as a large group, read these texts aloud and give time to let its message to be heard.
 - b. Discuss: Which text most articulates your motivation for improving the world?

2. If there is time remaining, read aloud the URJ 2020 Vision Text, the quote from Genesis, and the Martin Luther King Jr. quote and have the group respond to the discussion questions below each text.

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Which text most articulates your motivation for improving the world?

In every generation, one is obligated to see oneself as one who personally went out from Egypt. Just as it says: "You shall tell your child on that very day: 'It's because of this that God did for me when I went out of Egypt.'" Exodus 13:8. – *from the Haggadah*

Rabbi Akiba would say, "Beloved is humanity for we were made in the image of God. And doubly beloved are we for God made it known to us that we are made in God's image." - *Mishnah, Pirkei Avot, 3:14*

When God created the Universe, God contracted God's Self to make room for creation, then sent forth God's light into the void in material vessels. These vessels shattered for the light was too great. We humans were created to gather the shards of light by doing mitzvot (the act of *tikkun olam*) to heal/repair the world. - *From the ideas of 16th c. Rabbi Isaac Luria*

From the Union for Reform Judaism 2020 Vision:

Reform congregations and their leadership are strengthened and emboldened as they enlist the support of their members to repair the world. The vision and mission for 2020 is to catalyze a movement of people to make North America, Israel, and the world more just. Acting together through our congregations, other Reform institutions, and with partners of all faiths, we can work to make a difference by leveraging our collective power. The Reform Movement has a long and successful history of speaking truth to power, of advancing our values in the political arena. The URJ will build on this rich history and capitalize on the increased desire and demand to make a difference in the world by leading, supporting, and nurturing social justice activity at the local and North American level.

Tikkun Olam is articulated above as one of the three purposes for our Movement in our URJ 2020 vision. What do we learn about our Movement with the above statement? How does this statement reflect the above Jewish values?

Whatever political party we support, we are commanded: "do what is just and right."

For I have selected him [Abraham] so that he may instruct his children and his posterity after him to keep God's ways: to do what is just and right. [טַדָּקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט Tzedakah U'Mishpat] - Genesis 18:19

This text says the reason that God chose Abraham was for a purpose. How would you characterize that purpose?

If not now, when?

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late." – Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Are you inspired to act?