

# What drives you to work for a better world?

## *D'var Torah Study for Brit Olam*

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### **D'var Torah Congregational Leadership Development Exercise for use with the 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 longer text study exercise (20-30 minutes). 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. Motivations for improving our world:**

- a. First, the leader of the text study should affirm that improving our world is an inherently Jewish value.
- b. Pose the questions: The question is why do you want to make this world better? What motivates you?
- c. Jewishly, there are three primary motivations. Have three volunteers from your group read the three motivational texts out loud.
- d. Invite everyone to individually think of their primary motivator, and if possible, to pick a significant life story that connects to that value.
- e. Invite group members to turn to their neighbor or get into small groups to discuss what they picked and why.
- f. Bringing everyone together, affirm that all three are Jewish values and we likely feel connection to more than one.

For the texts on the second page, either have someone read each of the texts aloud and discuss them together as a group using the discussion questions (or create your own!), or have participants break into pairs or small groups, read each of the texts, and answer the questions below each one.

1. **“Tikkun Olam” as a Reform Movement priority:** When the URJ Board was talking about its vision for the future, they picked “Tikkun Olam” as one of our movement’s three primary purposes.
2. **Whatever political party we support, we are commanded: “do what is just and right.”:** The commitment to make this world more and more shaped by our values is not made up. It was articulated as our core purpose to Abraham.
3. **If not now, when?** If we take this seriously, action is necessary.

Then conclude with whatever words feel appropriate and authentic to you about Judaism’s commitment to improving the world.

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**Which Jewish value most motivates you? In your own life, what significant story/moment/experience connects you to this motivation?**

1. The Experiential Motivation: ***Yitziyat Mitzrayim***

**יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם**

*We were **redeemed from Egypt**; we know what it is like to be the stranger.*

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*

*You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the “soul” of the stranger, since you were strangers in the land of Egypt. – Exodus 23:9*

2. The Existential Motivation: ***B'tzelem Elohim***

**בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים**

*We are all created **in the image of God**.*

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*

*God created human beings, making [them] in the likeness of God. - Genesis 5:1*

3. The Phenomenological Motivation: ***Tikkun Olam***

**תִּקּוּן עוֹלָם**

*The world was created imperfectly; **tikkun olam** is how we partner with God to **repair** it.*

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 16<sup>th</sup> c. Rabbi Isaac Luria*

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### **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. [צְדָקָה 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?**

How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment to start to improve the world. - Anne Frank

“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?