

The Biblical Source for *Tikkun Olam*

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“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”
“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”
“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

—Lewis Carroll

The problem with the contemporary usage of the phrase *tikkun olam* is that it has come to mean so many different things that we can hardly be sure it truly means anything at all.

In the past half-century the term has come to be identified primarily with a call for social justice. It serves as the guiding slogan for the many organizations catering to communal needs and defining Judaism by the performance of good works for the larger world. Jill Jacobs perceptively points out: “In its current incarnation, *tikkun olam* can refer to anything from a direct service project such as working in a soup kitchen or shelter, to political action, to philanthropy. While once regarded as the property of the left, the term is now widely used by mainstream groups such as synagogues, camps, schools, and federations, as well as by more right-wing groups wishing to cast their own political agendas within the framework of *tikkun olam*.”¹ She concludes by noting: “Some have suggested imposing a ban or hiatus on the term *tikkun olam*, given the general confusion about the meaning of this phrase.”

Shortened to one word, simply *tikkun*, and chosen as the name for the left-leaning liberal publication founded in 1986 by Michael Lerner, it was meant to suggest the very essence of Judaism.

Going back to the Middle Ages, it was in the sixteenth-century mystical school of Lurianic Kabbalah that the word *tikkun* first came to be invested with deep spiritual meaning, but in a far different context.² For Isaac Luria (1534–1572), the foremost leader of the community of mystics in Safed in the Galilee and considered the father of contemporary Kabbalah, the idea of *tikkun olam* was based on the notion that the ten vessels that contained the perceptible world of divinity had shattered, bringing evil into the world. The broken vessels required repair, and this would become the greatest mission of humanity. The way to restore the divine light to its proper place was through prayer, study of Torah, and the performance of *mitzvot*. It seems clear that for Luria, *tikkun* was not seen as synonymous with a call for social justice; rather, it was a challenge to strive toward perfecting oneself. Human life on its own, without reference to any communal context, was perceived as having meaning, since every person's actions have the capacity to affect the cosmos—and, with daring audacity, even God's perceptible reality.

Whereas the modern understanding of *tikkun olam* has to do with the idea of changing the world at large, the earlier medieval mystics had understood it as charging humankind with the primary mission of spiritually changing itself. The difference of emphasis may well hinge on an ancient philosophic question that remains to be resolved: is our quest for universal improvement better served by concentrating on the individual, or on humanity as a whole?

Both the early and later understandings, however, share an acknowledgment of *tikkun olam* as a fundamental and all-important principle of our faith. But what is remarkable is that there seems to be very little source material to justify the kind of prominence that this concept has taken on in the Jewish tradition. It may come as a surprise to learn that the phrase *tikkun olam* is not found anywhere in the

entire Torah; neither is it counted by any of the commentators as one of the 613 *mitzvot*. Indeed, in the whole of the Mishnah it appears as the rationale for rabbinic decrees in a mere ten instances—hardly indicative of a primary place in the pantheon of Jewish values.³

In this essay, I will argue that *tikkun olam* has a biblical source from a concept implicit in the word “Shaddai,” which is one of the seven major names of God found in the Torah that are identified by Maimonides as so sacred that they may never be erased.⁴ In so doing, I believe we will also gain a far better understanding of the authentic parameters that ought to define the meaning of the phrase *tikkun olam*.

The link between the name Shaddai and the ideal of *tikkun olam* has an early precedent. This conjoining is familiar to us from a phrase in the Aleinu prayer, with which we close every synagogue service and which is second only to the Kaddish (in all of its forms) as the most frequently recited prayer in current synagogue liturgy.⁵ In its concluding paragraph, we express the hope that we may soon see the Almighty’s mighty splendor, the removal of detestable idolatry from the earth, and be enabled *l’takkein olam b’malkhut Shaddai*—that is, “to perfect the world beneath the sovereignty of Shaddai.”

The words of this prayer have an ancient source. Although there is a tradition that its authorship goes back to Joshua, the disciple of Moses,⁶ almost all contemporary scholars find this improbable.⁷ Yet another suggestion attributes the prayer to the Men of the Great Assembly during the period of the Second Temple.⁸ What is indisputable, though, is that Aleinu was incorporated into the Musaf service on Rosh Hashanah as a prologue to the Malkhuyot portion of the Amidah⁹ by the talmudic sage Rav, who lived in Babylonia in the third century.¹⁰ At the very least, then, its text dates back to early talmudic times. And it is in this prayer that the concept of *tikkun olam* finds expression (in the verbal formulation *l’takkein olam*) as a key element of the ultimate vision of messianic fulfillment. Achieving *tikkun olam* is what will lead to the realization of the

prophetic promise with which the Aleinu prayer closes: “The Eternal shall be sovereign over all the earth; in that day the Eternal will be one and His name will be one” (Zechariah 14:9).

To my mind, this makes the Aleinu prayer the most significant indicator of the importance that the talmudic sages attached to the concept of *tikkun olam*. Here, the idea has moved beyond its most frequent valence in the Talmud, as the rabbinic motive for curbing possible corruptions of the halakhic system,¹¹ and it has come to signify an all-embracing goal of Jewish life and law, one whose acceptance would make possible the fulfillment of prophetic visions of a glorious universal future.

From the perspective of the Aleinu, it is clear why the obligation “to perfect the world beneath the sovereignty of Shaddai” is not one of the 613 commandments: it cannot be *one* of them because it is the *summary of all of them*. This fact readily explains why *tikkun olam* is not found as a *mitzvah* in the Torah. Including it would have diminished its importance, because each individual *mitzvah* is part of a larger panoply of commandments, each with its own specific claim on our attention and performance. *Tikkun olam*, however, is not really a specific commandment; rather, it is an overarching category under which is subsumed all of divine law, by way of purpose and goal.

The task of humanity is clearly defined: to perfect the world. But what is most intriguing is the particular name of God that is used in conjunction with this mission. The expression of our duty is linked to the phrase “the sovereignty (*malkhut*) of Shaddai.” The name of God that occurs most frequently in Scripture (6828 times) is, of course, the Tetragrammaton, the name liturgically pronounced as Adonai and more casually referenced simply as “*the Name*,” *Ha-sheim*, which functions as the distinctive personal name of the God of Israel.¹² Yehudah Halevi¹³ (along with Maimonides¹⁴ and others) emphasizes that this name, *the Name*, is the only proper name of God; all other names are simply attributive descriptions. It is remarkable that the summary of human responsibility for *tikkun olam* is connected to a

name of God that is descriptive rather than distinctive—one of the six names that reflects attributes of the Almighty but that is not the one that confirms God’s primary essence.

I believe that it is precisely the unique significance of God’s name as Shaddai that makes it possible for us to fulfill our historic mission of perfecting the world—for the very same reason that it was the name used by God when establishing the covenant of *b’rit milah* with Abraham, who was to become the spiritual founder of the Jewish people.

The Theological Problem of Circumcision

Rabbi Elijah ben Shelomo Zalman Kremer, commonly known as the Gaon of Vilna (1720–1797), often stressed the importance of examining the very first appearance of a word in the Torah in order to best understand its most correct and primary meaning.¹⁵ With this in mind, it is crucial to recognize the context in which God initially self-identifies as Shaddai: “Abram was ninety-nine years old when the Eternal appeared to him and said, ‘I am El-Shaddai; walk before Me and be perfect’” (Genesis 17:1).¹⁶ This introductory statement serves as a preface both to the name change of Abram to Abraham, as well as to the commandment of circumcision to mark the covenant between God and the spiritual “father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5).

Circumcision was the sign of Abraham’s selection. It was a *mitzvah* to be carried out by all future generations of his descendants as well: “This is My covenant, which you shall observe between Me and between you and between your seed after you, that every male among you be circumcised” (Genesis 17:10). Yet circumcision is an act that seems profoundly paradoxical to the idea of a divine Creator.

Rabbi Moses Alshikh (1508–1600), called the Maharam, states the problem clearly in his classic commentary to the Torah:

Before we discuss those verses, we will address questions raised about *brit milah*, namely: how is it possible that the Creator of everything, the One whose deeds have no faults—but rather, who only does works that shall be praised, as it is stated in Midrash Rabbah: “Look and see how good is the work of the Eternal”—how it could be possible that the supreme sovereign of sovereigns...created man with a fault so grievous that he is forced to remove part of the flesh with which God created him?¹⁷

In somewhat different form, an ancient rabbinic midrash had already posed the same question, from the mouth of an unidentified “philosopher”:

A philosopher asked Rabbi Hoshaya: “If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam?”

“If [that is a valid question],” he replied, “[let me ask you] why you shave the corners of your head and leave your beard?”

He answered, “Because it grew with me in folly [in childhood and youth, before I reached the use of discretion; hence it is of lesser value and I cut it].”

“If so, you should blind your eye and cut off your hands [since you have these too from birth].”

“To such an argument have we come!” he [the philosopher] observed [i.e., your arguments are mere sophistries].

“I cannot send you away empty-handed,” the rabbi responded. “[The real reason is this:] Whatever was created during the first six days requires further preparation. For example, mustard needs sweetening, vetches [any of a genus of herbaceous twining leguminous plants] need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man too needs to be completed [i.e., by circumcision].”¹⁸

Clearly the midrash intended this debate, between a devotee of Greek philosophy and a spokesman for Jewish belief, to leave us with appreciation for the rabbi's victorious response. Yet the reader is left unsatisfied. The final words of the story don't seem to fully address the philosopher's problem. We are informed that God's created works are incomplete, that they still require additional effort to bring them to their ultimate state of perfection. But that still does not offer any *reason* to explain this state of affairs. The midrash begs the question of why the Creator—who is obviously capable of producing masterpieces—permits the divine handiwork to be diminished by seeming flaws that bespeak imperfection and require further correction and improvement.

Perhaps the midrash expected us to intuit its meaning. Its point, though, becomes clear in light of yet another midrash on the same theme. This text describes a somewhat similar discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Turnusrufus:¹⁹

The evil Turnusrufus asked Rabbi Akiva, "Which are better, things made by the Almighty or things made by flesh and blood?"

He [Akiva] replied, "Things made by flesh and blood are better!"

Turnusrufus said to him, "But heaven and earth—can a human being make anything like these?"

Rabbi Akiva said, "Don't talk to me about things that are above created beings, that can't be controlled; rather, talk to me about things that are to be found among humanity."

He [Turnusrufus] said, "Why do you circumcise?"

He [Akiva] replied, "I knew you would ask me about that, which is why I pre-empted and told you that things made by humans are better than things made by the Almighty."

Rabbi Akiva brought him wheat and cakes and said to him, "These are made by the Almighty and these are made by humans. Aren't these [cakes] better than the wheat?"

Turnusrufus retorted, “If God wanted circumcision, then why doesn’t the baby come out circumcised from his mother’s womb?” Rabbi Akiva responded, “Because the Almighty didn’t give *mitzvot* to Israel for any reason other than to refine humanity through them.”²⁰

This conversation reflects a deep theological chasm between Rabbi Akiva and the Roman leader. For the Roman, creation belongs exclusively to God. Rabbi Akiva, however, sees divine purpose in the world’s incompleteness—a purpose that is central to the reason for the observance of all the commandments. God intentionally created humanity imperfect, in order to leave room for us to become God’s partners in creation. Indeed, God placed us into an imperfect world and charged us with the responsibility of perfecting it. “Things made by humans are better than things made by the Almighty,” insists Rabbi Akiva. God will not do it all; human dignity requires that we be left with a role to play as well. The pagan couldn’t understand how Jews could take a gift of God, a newborn baby boy, and immediately alter a portion of his anatomy. Rabbi Akiva saw in this the very meaning of circumcision as *b’rit* (literally “covenant”), implying a partnership of mutual responsibility between God and humanity.

The commandments are meant to refine humanity. Just as metal needs to be purified, so too is the case with people: though we were created by an all-perfect God, we are in need of additional refinement. A child comes forth from the womb with an imperfection, and we are commanded to complete the task of creation.

The *Sefer Ha-hinnukh*, a classic work that systematically discusses the 613 commandments of the Torah,²¹ explains the rationale for the *mitzvah* of circumcision by way of this concept:

God desired that the completion be through the hand of a human [partner], and so did not create the male complete

from the womb [specifically] in order to hint that, just as the completion of the form of his body is to be by his [own] hand, so too is it in his hand to complete the formation of his soul by way of the improvements of his actions.”²²

This is what Rabbi Akiva says is the ultimate purpose of all *mitzvot*, when he observes that the commandments “were given for no other reason than to refine humanity through them.”²³ As the Meiri²⁴ explains it, the commandments were given “to refine humankind through them—that is to say, to acquire for those who perform them the perfection that is required of them.”²⁵

The question posed by Turnusrufus has been asked in many other contexts, concerning the permissibility of change in humanity’s relationship to the world. Do we have a right to interfere in a world created by God? Dare we heal the sick? May we feed the hungry? Is it allowed to clothe the naked? If God had wanted any of these things, shouldn’t the religious response be that God would have done them personally? And doesn’t the fact that God chose not to do so then imply that things are to remain exactly as they are?

If the world as it currently is expresses God’s ideal, then all change would be impermissible. Progress would be a sin. Human intervention of any kind would be nothing less than tampering with the divine will. All human efforts to improve life would be a disrespectful affront to the Almighty.

But the fact that circumcision appears as the very first *mitzvah* given to Abraham is highly symbolic: it is meant to teach us the error of this approach. *A Jew dare not simply accept the world as it is, rationalizing its inadequacies as the will of God.* Humanity was given a mission to imitate God—to be, in the words of the Talmud, “partners with God in the act of creation.”²⁶ That means that we too must share in the task of creating a better world. For that reason, God did not complete creation—for only an imperfect world affords humankind the opportunity to play a part in its ultimate perfection.

Rabbi Akiva's response to Turnusrufus with regard to circumcision has a fascinating sequel in the Babylonian Talmud. In another discussion between these two very same disputants, it becomes clear that the debate between them had far greater ramifications:

It has been taught: Rabbi Meir used to say, "The critic [of Judaism] may bring the following argument: 'If your God loves the poor, why does God not support them?' If that happens, answer as follows: 'So that through them we may be saved from the punishment of Gehinnom.'" This question was actually put by Turnusrufus to Rabbi Akiva: "If your God loves the poor, why does God not support them?" He [Akiva] replied: "So that we may be saved through them from the punishment of Gehinnom."²⁷

God did not eradicate poverty, so that those who support the poor may gain the great merit of charitable giving. In this way, the wealthy are granted the opportunity to share in the divine task of sustaining the needy.

The world is not perfect, so that we can work toward perfecting it.

The story of creation concludes with the words *asher bara Elohim la'asot* (Genesis 2:3). This is often awkwardly translated as "which God created in the making," or something along those lines. Literally, the text means "which God created to make," and so the real question is: what exactly does that mean? For example, to whom is the last word, *la'asot* (rendered into English as "to make"), addressed? Rabbi Hayim Paltiel (born c. 1240) suggests that this text teaches that at a certain point in creation, God transferred the responsibility for its completion to humankind—whose specific obligation it is to assist God in "making" the world. This is what the word *la'asot* suggests.²⁸

This reading suggests that there is an early biblical hint about the concept of *tikkun olam*, which underlies the very first *mitzvah* that would later come to define the male Jew. Circumcision continues

creation, by improving on what God had purposely left imperfect. It grants us not only permission but also the obligation to change the world for the better. And its focus is the male sexual organ, the very source of our ability to procreate—and hence become partners with God in the act of ongoing human creation.²⁹

I heard from my revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph Soleveitchik (1903–1993), that this may well account for the fact that a *b'rit* is to be performed on the eighth day. Seven days represent the week of creation on the part of God; the eighth day begins the time when this task is transferred to us. We are thus meant to continue God's work, and through our own efforts help bring it to perfection.³⁰

Shaddai

This helps us to understand why, in the passage discussing the mitzvah of circumcision, the Torah refers to God as “Shaddai.”

What is the meaning of this name, which refers not to God's essence but rather to an attribute? Many suggestions have been offered by scholars, but the traditional rabbinic explanation offers us the greatest insight into the appropriateness of using the name “Shaddai” in the context of the mitzvah of *b'rit milah*. The Talmud preserves a midrash that explains the name Shaddai as a kind of contraction of two other words: *she-amar* (“who said”) and *dai* (“enough”).³¹ The idea is that the name Shaddai is meant to evoke the image of God seeing creation unfolding and then saying “Enough!”—even before all was perfectly in order. And in that thought rests our conviction that we have the right, and perhaps even the obligation, to alter the world.

Had God simply declared that the work of creation was done, there would have then been no greater sacrilege than for us to suggest that the world would still benefit from any human improvements—which effort would then reasonably taken be taken as something akin to touching up Michelangelo's frescoes or Leonardo da Vinci's

paintings, attempting to make them brighter or better. But instead, we are allowed to know that God—acting specifically in the divine guise of El-Shaddai—intentionally left room for us to contribute our own efforts to the work of creation. It is as if God has said, “Remove the defect of the foreskin that I left on your son, so that you do not fear to continue to do away with all the other imperfections you will find on earth—imperfections that are meant to allow you to join your creative labors with those of the divine Creator.” The verse from Genesis may thus be understood: “I am El-Shaddai, [therefore] walk before Me”—and do not fear sharing the same path upon which I Myself walk—“and become perfect”—for I did not make you perfect, in the hope that you would come to achieve it on your own.

In the Torah, the divine name Shaddai is used in introducing the first *mitzvah* given to Abraham. In our prayers, the use of the name Shaddai reveals to us the theological justification for *tikkun olam*. The Aleinu prayer reminds us that our mission is *l'takkein olam b'malkhut Shaddai*—that is, literally, “to perfect the world beneath the sovereignty of Shaddai.” If the world were already perfect, then *tikkun olam* would be a meaningless slogan: not only unnecessary, but also indefensible, as an effort to “fix” what God had already made, according to the divine will. But if the faults and the flaws of the world are divinely ordained by a God who chooses to give humankind the honor of rectifying them, then *tikkun olam* is nothing less than our reason for being, and it speaks to our opportunity to live up to God’s aspirations for us.

What Does *Tikkun Olam* Demand?

To complete what God left unfinished. To become God’s “partners in the work of creation.” To use our God-given gifts to enhance the lives of others. To fight evil and injustice. To utilize our talents and abilities in the service of humanity. To employ our freedom

responsibly. To be creators and not destroyers. To live meaningfully, so that we may make a difference in the grand story of history. To live in such a way that we reflect nobly upon our presence on earth, as those designated as having been created “in God’s image.” To ensure that the world is a little bit better when we leave it than it was when we first arrived.

That is why, as Jonathan Sacks put it so beautifully in his closing message to his United Kingdom community upon his retirement as chief Rabbi,

Judaism was the world’s first religion of protest. The exodus in the days of Moses was an unprecedented event: the supreme Power intervening to liberate the supremely powerless. Elsewhere, religion in ancient times was a conservative force. The gods were on the side of the established power. They legitimated hierarchy. They reconciled the masses to a life of ignorance and servitude. How could you challenge the status quo? It was the will of the gods, the structure of the cosmos, on earth as it was in heaven. That is what Karl Marx meant when he called religion the opium of the people.

Judaism opposed this entire constellation of values. It laid the foundations for an egalitarian society based not on equality of wealth or power but on equal access to education, welfare, and human dignity. The prophets never argued that there is injustice, poverty, disease, and violence in the world because that is how God wants it to be. Judaism is God’s call to human responsibility, to bring *the world that is closer to the world that ought to be*.

That is why Jews are to be found disproportionately as doctors fighting disease, lawyers fighting injustice, educators fighting ignorance, economists fighting poverty, and scientists extending the frontiers of human knowledge. The Greeks believed in fate and gave the world masterpieces of tragedy. Jews believed there is no fate that cannot be averted

by penitence, prayer, and charity. Judaism is the principled rejection of tragedy in the name of hope.³²

The concept of *tikkun olam* is revolutionary in the history of religion. It defines faith in dual terms: just as people are to have faith in God, God has faith in people. We are to offer God devotion; God in turn provides us with dignity. Progress is the purpose of the covenant between the Creator and those entrusted with the task of emulating the Divine. History is the story of humanity's struggle to fulfill the obligations imposed upon us, as part of the divine partnership.

Tikkun olam demands that we not accept the world as it is, but rather that we view it as it might become. That remains still an unfinished task. Yet our glory is the extent to which we help to narrow the gap between the world as it is, in its actuality, and the world as it might become, its potential.

NOTES

¹ Jill Jacobs, “The History of Tikkun Olam,” in *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture* (June 2007), at www.zeek.net/706tohu.

² Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1941; rpt. London: Thames & Hudson, 1955), pp. 244–286.

³ See for example M. Gittin 4:2, regarding divorce law, or M. Gittin 4:3, about the collection of the *k'tubbah* money for a widow, and cf. also the laws regarding the limit on payments to redeem captives (M. Gittin 4:6), the purchase of religious articles from non-Jews (M. Gittin 4:6), the way in which previously spoken vows might undermine the legitimacy of a divorce (M. Gittin 4:7), and the question regarding the status of first fruits grown on land purchased from non-Jews (M. Gittin 4:9). Several additional uses of the phrase are found in M. Gittin 5:3. During the talmudic period, the principle of *mi-p'nei tikkun ha-olam* is applied to a very limited number of additional cases; see, for example, B. Pesahim 88b. Many of these passages are discussed at length in other essays in this volume.

⁴ Maimonides, M.T. Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah 6:2. The names are: the Tetragrammaton (i.e., *yod-hei-vav-hei*), Adonai, El, Elo'ah, Elohim, Shaddai, and Tz'va'ot. Some editions of Maimonides' code include the name Ehyeh, found in Scripture at Exodus 3:14. Cf. also B. Shevuot 35a.

⁵ Barry Freundel, *Why We Pray What We Pray: The Remarkable History of Jewish Prayer* (New York: Urim, 2010), p. 204; Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), p. 24.

⁶ Nulman, *Encyclopedia*, p. 24; Freundel, *Why We Pray*, pp. 205–206. Among the authorities who support the attribution to Joshua are Rav Hai Gaon (d. 1038), Eleazar of Worms (d. 1230), Rabbi Natan ben Rabbi Judah (13th century), and the *Kol Bo*, a sixteenth-century halakhic compendium of uncertain authorship.

⁷ There is much evidence that Aleinu could not have been composed by Joshua. For one thing, the prayer cites verses from the prophet Isaiah, who lived centuries later. Additionally, the term “blessed Holy One” (*ba-kadosh barukh hu*) appears in Aleinu, but this was not used as an appellation for God in biblical times. Finally, the Hebrew word *olam* had a temporal sense only in biblical times; it took on a spatial sense (“world”) only in the post-biblical period (see, e.g., the *Daat Mikra* commentary to Psalms by Amos Hakham [Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1983] to Psalm 89:3, p. 138, nn. 4 and 5). Moreover, terms found in Aleinu are characteristic of the so-called *heikhalot* literature that came into being in the rabbinic period, at least a millennium after Joshua's day. (See in this regard Elliot R. Wolfson's essay, “Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on Aleynu: Further Evidence of Moses De León's Pseudepigraphic Activity,” in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 81:3–4 (1991), pp. 365–410, particularly pp. 379–380.)

⁸ Nulman, *Encyclopedia*, p. 24; Freundel, *Why We Pray*, p. 207. This attribution was also supported by the seventeenth-century Kabbalist Manasseh ben Israel.

⁹ Malkhuyot, “kingship” or “sovereignty,” is one of three special sections that

are added to the central portion of the Musaf Amidah on Rosh Hashanah; it focuses on the idea of God's rule over the whole world. The other two sections are Zikhronot, "remembrances," which focuses on those ideas and events that God has promised to recall forever; and Shofarot, which focuses on the ways in which the shofar plays a role in Jewish history.

¹⁰ Bernhard Salomon Jacobson, *The Weekday Siddur: An Exposition and Analysis of Its Structure, Contents, Language and Ideas*, trans. Leonard Oschry (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1973), p. 307; Nulman, *Encyclopedia*, p. 24.

¹¹ For examples of this usage, see the examples provided in note 3 above.

¹² In this volume, the Tetragrammaton is usually rendered in English as "the Eternal" or "the Eternal One."

¹³ This is Halevi's argument in his most famous work, the *Kuzari* II 2, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (1905; rpt. New York: Schocken, 1964), p.83.

¹⁴ M.T. Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah 6:2.

¹⁵ Cf. the comment of Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin in his *Sefer P'ri Tzaddik* (Lublin: Shteinmesser and Hershenhorn, 1901), vol. 1, p. 38a; cf. idem, *Sefer Yisrael K'doshim* (1928; rpt. B'nei B'rak: Yahadut, 1973), pp. 33b–34a.

¹⁶ The name El-Shaddai (literally, "God-Shaddai") appears six times in the Torah, five of them in Genesis and one in Exodus, and one sole time in the Bible elsewhere, at Ezekiel 10:5. Of special interest is Exodus 6:3, which specifically notes that El-Shaddai was the name by which the patriarchs (and presumably the matriarchs) of Israel knew God.

¹⁷ *Sefer Torat Mosheh* (ed. Warsaw 1879), p. 45a. The midrash cited is found at Bereishit Rabbah 12:1.

¹⁸ Bereishit Rabbah 11:6.

¹⁹ In all probability, he was the governor of Judea in the first century C.E. Rufus was governor at the time of the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba war, and may well have had frequent interactions with Rabbi Akiva.

²⁰ *Midrash Tanhuma, Tazria* §5, ed. Solomon Buber (1885; rpt. New York: Hotzaat Sefer, 1946), p. 18a.

²¹ The sixteenth-century author Gedaliah ibn Yahyah credited the *Sefer Ha-ḥinnukh* to Rabbi Aaron Halevi of Barcelona (1235–c. 1290) but others disagree, as the views of the book contradict opinions set forth by Halevi in other works. This has led to the conclusion that the true author of *Sefer Ha-ḥinnukh* was a different Aaron Halevi, this one a student of Rabbi Shelomo ben Aderet (called the Rashba 1235–1310). The work circulated anonymously in thirteenth-century Spain.

²² *Sefer Ha-ḥinnukh, mitzvah* 2, ed. Hayyim David Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1960), p. 56.

²³ Rabbi Akiva's explanation for *mitzvot* has another source in Bereishit Rabbah 44:1: "What does it matter to God if an animal is slaughtered by cutting its neck through the spine or the throat? [The answer is:] The commandments were given only in order to refine humanity."

²⁴ Rabbi Menaḥem ben Shelomo Meiri (1249–1315), one of the leading

talmudists of the medieval period.

²⁵ *Beit Ha-b'hirah* to B. Berakhot 34b, ed. Shemuel Dickman (Jerusalem: Makhon Ha-talmud Ha-yisraeli Ha-shaleim, 1965), p. 120, s.v. *ha-mishnah ha-sb'lisbit*.

²⁶ B. Shabbat 10a and 119b, and cf. B. Sanhedrin 38a.

²⁷ B. Bava Batra 10a. In rabbinic parlance, Gehinnom is roughly equivalent to the Western notion of Hell.

²⁸ Commentary of Rabbi Hayyim Paltiel to Genesis 3:2. Rabbi Isaac Samson Lange personally published the commentary, properly called *Sefer Peirushei Ha-torah L'rav Hayyim Paltiel*, in 1981; it has now been entered into the Bar Ilan Responsa Project.

²⁹ Cf. B. Kiddushin 30b: “There are three partners in the creation of a human being: the father, the mother, and the blessed Holy One.”

³⁰ In this vein, I believe that the sign of the covenant was exclusively reserved for males and has no corresponding sign for women because the underlying concept—that all Jews are called to serve as God’s partners in creation through the covenant—does not need to be “added” to women’s bodies, because they are already God’s partners in creation through their ability to conceive and give birth. For other interesting approaches to this question, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

³¹ B. Hagigah 12a.

³² Jonathan Sacks, “A Judaism Engaged with the World” (delivered on June 24, 2013, and available on-line at <http://www.rabbisacks.org/a-judaism-engaged-with-the-world>; the passage quoted here appears on p.16 of the pdf).