

*Aleinu: Obligation to Fix the World or the Text?*¹

By: MITCHELL FIRST

The Jewish obligation of *תקון עולם* (=improving the world) is widely referred to and it is traditionally assumed that the *Aleinu* prayer is one of the texts upon which this obligation is based.

This article will show that a very strong case can be made that the original version of *Aleinu* read *לתכן עולם* (=to **establish** the world under God's sovereignty), and not *לתקן עולם* (=to **perfect/improve** the world under God's sovereignty.)² If so, the concept of *תקון עולם* has no connection to the *Aleinu* prayer.³

¹ I would like to thank Yehiel Levy for showing me his Yemenite *siddur* which read *לתכן*, which inspired this research. I would also like to thank R. Moshe Yasgur for sharing his thoughts and for always being willing to listen to mine. I dedicate this article to my beloved wife Sharon, whose name has the *gematria* *תקון*, and who needs no improvement.

² The above is how this phrase is usually translated. But *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, p. 161, translates: "to perfect the universe **through** the Almighty's sovereignty." Others adopt this translation as well. See e.g., J. David Bleich, "Tikkun Olam: Jewish Obligations to Non-Jewish Society," in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, eds. David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson 1997), p. 61.

³ One scholar who has already suggested that the original reading was *לתכן* is Meir Bar-Ilan. See his "*Mekorah shel Tefillat 'Aleinu le-Shabeah'*," *Daat*

Mitchell First resides in Teaneck and practices law in NYC. He has an M.A. in Jewish History from Bernard Revel Graduate School and is the author of "Jewish History in Conflict: A Study of the Major Discrepancy Between Rabbinic and Conventional Chronology" (Jason Aronson 1997); "The Origin of Ta'anit Esther" (*AJS Review* 34:2, November 2010); and other articles on liturgy at <seforim.traditiononline.org> and <seforim.blogspot.com>.

It is reasonable to assume that *Aleinu* was already included in the *Amidah* of *Rosh ha-Shanah* (=RH) by the time of Rav (early 3rd cent. C.E.).⁴ But no text of *Aleinu* is included in the Talmud, nor is

vol. 43, Ramat Gan: 1999, p. 20, n. 72. Bar-Ilan did not cite any sources for his suggestion and seems to have merely intuited it. Also, an on-line article discusses the לתקן reading briefly and cites two of the sources that I will cite. See “תיקון עולם - תיקון טעות” at <www.yhn.co.il/articals/mach shava/tikun-taut> (the site of the *hesder yeshivah* “*Abavat Yisrael*” of Netivot). In 2005, Gilbert S. Rosenthal wrote a detailed article about the concept of *tikkun olam* throughout the ages, and merely assumed that the reading in *Aleinu* was לתקן. See his “*Tikkun ha-Olam: The Metamorphosis of a Concept*,” *Journal of Religion* vol. 85:2, Chicago: 2005, pp. 214-40. The various articles in *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* also merely assume that the reading was לתקן (see pp. 26, 61 and 98).

⁴ The Jerusalem Talmud, at *Avodah Zarah* 1:2, includes the following passage:

א"ר יוסי בי רבי בון מאן סבר בראש השנה נברא העולם? רב, דתני בתקיעתא דבי רב זה היום תחילת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון וכו'.

A very similar passage is found at J. Talmud RH 1:3 (where the reading is (בתקיעתא דרב). The sentence referred to from the liturgy (...זה היום) is from the introductory section to the ten verses of *zikhronot*. A reasonable inference from these Talmudic passages is that Rav composed (at least) the introductory sections to *zikhronot*, *malkhuyyot* and *shofarot*. *Aleinu* is part of the introductory section to *malkhuyyot*. Since the sentence quoted from the introduction to *zikhronot* corresponds to the present introduction to *zikhronot*, it is reasonable to assume that their introduction to *malkhuyyot* corresponded to the present introduction to *malkhuyyot*, i.e., that it included *Aleinu*. Admittedly, Rav could have made use of older material in the introductory section he composed. The fact that *Aleinu* has been found (in a modified version) in *heikhalot* literature is evidence for *Aleinu*'s existence in this early period, even though the prayer is not specifically mentioned in any Mishnaic or Talmudic source. (Regarding the dating of *heikhalot* literature, see below.) On the version of *Aleinu* in *heikhalot* literature, see Michael D. Swartz, “*Alay Le-Shabbath: A Liturgical Prayer in Ma'aseh Merkabah*,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 77, Philadelphia: 1986-1987, pp. 179-190. See also the article by Bar-Ilan cited above. For parallels in later sources to the two passages from the Jerusalem Talmud, see Swartz, p. 186, n. 20. See also RH 27a.

A statement that *Aleinu* was composed by Joshua appears in a collection of Geonic responsa known as *Shaarei Teshuvah* (responsum #44). But the statement was probably a later addition by the thirteenth century kabbal-

a text of *Aleinu* included in any of the classical *midrashim*.⁵ Therefore, we must look to later sources for texts of *Aleinu*.

When we do, we find that the reading לַתְּכֵן is found in the text of the RH *Amidah* in the *Siddur* of R. Saadiah Gaon (d. 942),⁶ and in the text of the RH *Amidah* in the *Mishneh Torah* of Rambam (d.

ist Moses de Leon. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on 'Aleynu: Further Evidence of Moses De León's Pseudepigraphic Activity,'" *Jewish Quarterly Review* vol. 81, Philadelphia: 1990-91, pp. 379-380. Statements that *Aleinu* was composed by Joshua are found in various Ashkenazic *Rishonim*. For the references, see Wolfson, pp. 380-381.

There is much evidence that *Aleinu* could not have been composed by Joshua. For example: 1) *Aleinu* cites verses from the prophet Isaiah (this will be discussed below); 2) *ha-kadosh barukh hu* was not an appellation for God in Biblical times; 3) *olam* was a time-related word, and not a word for "world" in Biblical times (see, e.g., *Daat Mikra*, comm. to Psalms 89:3, p. 138, n. 5); and 4) terms are found in *Aleinu* that are characteristic of *heikhalot* literature.

⁵ As noted, *Aleinu* has been found (in a modified form) in *heikhalot* literature. There are five manuscripts which include the relevant passage. But four of these manuscripts only include *Aleinu* in an abbreviated form and are not long enough to include the phrase לַתְּכֵן/לַתְּקֵן עוֹלָם. See Peter Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981, sec. 551, pp. 206-207. The only manuscript that includes the phrase reads לַתְּקֵן. But this manuscript, N8128, dates from around 1500. See Ra'anan S. Boustán, "The Study of *Heikhalot* Literature: Between Mystical Experience and Textual Artifact," *Currents in Biblical Research* vol. 6.1, Los Angeles: 2007, p. 137.

Regarding the dating of *heikhalot* literature, Bar-Ilan (*Mekorah*, p. 22, n. 85) estimates this literature as dating from the third through fifth centuries. Moshe Idel, in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (11:592) summarizes the subject as follows:

Even though it is quite possible that some of the texts were not edited until this period [=the geonic era], there is no doubt that large sections originated in talmudic times, and that the central ideas, as well as many details, go back as far as the first and second centuries.

⁶ *Siddur Rav Saadiah Gaon*, p. 221. Admittedly, what has been published here is not a manuscript composed by R. Saadiah himself. Neither R. Saadiah nor Rambam recited *Aleinu* in the daily service.

1204).⁷ Moreover, it is also found in at least four texts from the Cairo Genizah which include all or part of *Aleinu*:⁸ 1) a fragment of the RH *Amidah* first published by Jacob Mann in 1925;⁹ 2) a fragment of the RH *Amidah* first published by Richard Gottheil and William H. Worrell in 1927;¹⁰ 3) a fragment of the RH *Amidah* first published by Mordecai Margalioṭ in 1973;¹¹ and 4) a text of *Aleinu* first published by Mann in 1925.¹² In this last text, *Aleinu* is included in the *Pesukei de-Zimra* section of the Palestinian *shaharit* ritual.¹³

⁷ See the *Seder Tefillot Kol ha-Shanah* section at the end of *Sefer Ahavah*. I have looked at the *Or ve-Yeshuah* edition, the Frankel edition, the Mechon Mamre edition <www.mechon-mamre.org>, and the editions published by R. Yiṯhak Sheilat and by R. Yosef Kafah. All print להֲתַן. (The Frankel edition does note that a small number of manuscripts read להֲתַקֵּן.) In the standard printed *Mishneh Torah*, in the *al kein nekaveh* section of the RH *Amidah* (*Sefer Ahavah*, p. 154), only the first ten words were included (up to עוֹזֵר), followed by a וְכִי.

⁸ The Genizah includes more texts of *Aleinu* than I listed here. All the ones I have seen to date are noted above and all read להֲתַן. Most of the texts in the Genizah date from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries. See Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the Shaping of Medieval Jewish Culture*, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1998, p. 32.

⁹ See his “Genizah Fragments of the Palestinian Order of Service,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* vol. 2, Cincinnati: 1925, p. 329. (The fragment is known as Cambridge Add. 3160, no. 10.) When Mann published the fragment, he printed להֲתַקֵּן. But I had the fragment checked and it reads להֲתַן. I would like to thank Dr. Ben M. Outhwaite and Dr. Julia G. Kriivoruchko of the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University Library for checking the reading.

¹⁰ See their *Fragments from the Cairo Genizah in the Freer Collection*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927, plate XLIII (opposite p. 194). The volume includes a photograph of the fragment (plates XLIII and XLIV) but not a transcription. The authors remark (p. 195): “nor do the contents of this fragment appear, from any point of view, to justify transcription, translation and notes.” Based on the word להֲתַן alone, a transcription would have been justified!

¹¹ See his *Hilkhot Erez Yisrael min ha-Genizah*. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1973, p. 148. The fragment is known as T-S 8 H. 23/1.

¹² See above, pp. 324-325. See also, more recently, Ezra Fleischer, *Tefillah u-Minbagey Tefillah Erez-Yisreliyyim bi-Tekufat ha-Genizah*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988, p. 238. The text is known as Cambridge Add. 3160, no. 5. Neither Mann nor Fleischer printed the full text of *Aleinu* in this

Furthermore, the reading לַתְּכֵן survives in Yemenite *siddurim* to this day. It was also the reading in the original tradition of the Jews of Persia.¹⁴

Admittedly, the reading in Europe since the time of the *Rishonim* has been לַתְּקֵן. See, for example, the following texts of *Aleinu*:

- *Maḥzor Vitry* of R. Simḥah of Vitry (daily *shaharit* and RH);¹⁵
- *Siddur Hasidei Ashkenaz* (daily *shaharit* and RH);¹⁶

fragment. I again would like to thank Dr. Ben M. Outhwaite and Dr. Julia G. Krivoruchko for checking the reading.

¹³ Since the second word of the *Aleinu* prayer is לַשְּׁבָה, it was probably seen as fitting to include this prayer in the *Pesukei de-Zimra* section. A main theme of both *Barukh she-Amar* and *Yishtabah*, as well as of the entire *Pesukei de-Zimra*, is שְׁבָה.

A Palestinian practice of reciting *Aleinu* in *Pesukei de-Zimra* may also explain a statement found in several Rishonim (e.g., *Sefer ha-Maḥkim*, *Kol Bo*, and *Orhot Ḥayyim*) in the name of *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (a work composed in eighth century Palestine): שְׁבָה גְדוּל יֵשׁ בְּעֵלֵינוּ לַשְּׁבָה לְכַךְ צְרִיךְ לְאוֹמְרוֹ מְעוֹמֵד. The statement is obviously not giving an instruction regarding the RH *Amidah* recited by individuals. Nor does the language of the statement (לְאוֹמְרוֹ) fit as an instruction to individuals listening to the repetition of the RH *Amidah*. The recital of *Aleinu* in a context outside of the *Amidah* seems to be referred to. (The statement is not found in the surviving texts of *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*.)

¹⁴ See Shelomoh Tal, *Nusah ha-Tefillah shel Yehudei Paras*. Jerusalem: Makhon Ben Zvi, 1981, p. 154 (RH). The Persian-Jewish prayer ritual followed that of R. Saadiah in many respects. At the end of the eighteenth century the Persian Jews were influenced to adopt a Sefardic prayer ritual and their own ritual was forgotten.

¹⁵ Ed. Aryeh Goldschmidt. Jerusalem: Makhon Ozar ha-Poskim, 2004, pp. 131 (daily *shaharit*) and 717 (RH). The earliest surviving manuscript of *Maḥzor Vitry* seems to have been copied around the year 1145; a calendar for this year is found within it. See Israel Ta-Shema, “*Al Cammah Inyanei Maḥzor Vitry*,” *Alei Sefer* vol. 11, Ramat Gan: 1984, p. 87.

¹⁶ Ed. Moshe Hirschler, Jerusalem, 1972, p. 125 (daily *shaharit*), and p. 214 (RH). (This work was published by Hirschler together with another work, *Siddur Rabbenu Shelomoh*; both are integrated into the same volume.) *Siddur Hasidei Ashkenaz* was compiled by the students of R. Judah he-Hasid (d. 1217) and presumably reflects his text of *Aleinu*. Hirschler's edition of this *siddur* is based on several manuscripts.

- *Peirush ha-Tefillot ve-ha-Berakhot* of R. Judah b. Yakar (RH);¹⁷
- *Peirushei Siddur ha-Tefillah* of R. Eleazar b. Judah of Worms (RH);¹⁸ and
- *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem* of R. Abraham b. Azriel (RH).¹⁹

The three main manuscripts of *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* also read לַתְּקַן.²⁰ But these manuscripts are not from the time of R. Amram (d. 875); they are European manuscripts from the time of the later Rishonim.²¹

Earlier than *Mahzor Vitry*, we have circumstantial evidence for the reading לַתְּקַן in comments on *Aleinu* that were probably composed by R. Eliezer b. Nathan of Mainz (c. 1090-1170). Here, in

¹⁷ Ed. Samuel Yerushalmi. Jerusalem: Meorei Yisrael, 1979, sec. 2, pp. 91-92. R. Judah flourished in Spain and died in the early thirteenth century. Aside from the text of *Aleinu* in the manuscript published by Yerushalmi including the reading לַתְּקַן, it is also clear from the various explanatory comments by R. Judah that he was working with a text that read לַתְּקַן.

¹⁸ Ed. Moshe Hirschler. Jerusalem: Machon Harav Hirschler, 1992, p. 659. R. Eleazar died circa 1230. The text of *Aleinu* is found in his commentary to the *Aleinu* of RH. In his commentary on the daily *shaharit*, only the first two words of *Aleinu* and the last two (*timlokh be-khavod*) are recorded. In his *Sefer ha-Rokeah*, his references to *Aleinu* in both the RH *Amidah* and the daily *shaharit* are similarly very brief.

¹⁹ Ed. Ephraim E. Urbach. Jerusalem: Mekizei Nirdamim, 1963, vol. 3, pp. 469-470. *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem* was composed in 1234, in Bohemia. Aside from the text of *Aleinu* published here including the word לַתְּקַן, it is also clear from R. Abraham's explanatory comment (p. 469, lines 8-9) that he was working with a text that read לַתְּקַן.

Other early European texts of *Aleinu* include that of Ms. Cambridge Add. 667.1 (early thirteenth century) and the three texts of *Aleinu* in Ms. Oxford Corpus Christi College 133 (late twelfth century). I have not been able to check these readings. I have no reason to suspect that they do not read לַתְּקַן.

²⁰ See *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971, p. 142.

²¹ *Ibid.*, introduction, pp. 11-13. A few fragments of the *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* have been found in the Genizah, but these are very small and do not include our passage.

Hamburg MS 153,²² the following explanatory comment about *Aleinu* is expressed (without a text of the line itself): ויהיו כל העולם... מתקנים מלכותך וכולם יקראו בשמך...²³ Another manuscript, also largely composed of the comments of R. Eliezer b. Nathan, has essentially this same reading in two places.²⁴ Another manuscript, which is probably the *Siddur* of R. Eliezer b. Nathan, has a similar reading: ויהיו כל העולם מתקנים במלכותך. וכולם יקראו בשמך...²⁵

Admittedly, I cannot prove that לתכן was the original reading. But this seems very likely, as לתכן is by far the better reading in the context. We see this by looking at all the other scenarios that are longed for in this section:

לראות מהרה בתפארת עוזך
להעביר גילולים מן הארץ
והאלילים כרות יכרתון
לתכן/לתקן עולם במלכות שד-י
וכל בני בשר יקראו בשמך
להפנות אליך כל רשעי ארץ
יכירו וידעו כל יושבי תבל כי לך תכרע כל ברך תשבע כל לשון
לפניך ה' אלקינו יכרעו ויפולו
ולכבוד שמך יקר יתנו

²² This manuscript is generally considered to be largely composed of the comments of R. Eliezer b. Nathan. See, e.g., Urbach, *Sefer Arugat ha-Bosem*, vol. 4, p. 24 and the facsimile edition of this manuscript published by Abraham Naftali Zvi Rot, Jerusalem: 1980, pp. 21-30. The manuscript itself is estimated to have been copied in the fourteenth century (Rot, p. 21).

²³ See Rot, p. 20a (comm. to RH *Aleinu*).

²⁴ See Alter Yehudah Hirschler, "Peirush Siddur ha-Tefillah ve-ha-Mahzor Meyubas le-Rabbi Eliezer ben Natan mi-Magenza (ba-Ravan)," *Genuzot* vol. 3, Jerusalem:1991, pp. 1-128. In this *siddur* commentary (pp. 78 and 114), ויהיו כל העולם מתקנים מלכותך וכולם יקראו בשמך is found in the commentary to daily *Aleinu* in *shaharit*, and ויהיו כל העולם מתקנים מלכותך וכולם יקראו בשמך is found in the commentary to RH *Aleinu*. (One should not deduce from this manuscript that R. Eliezer b. Nathan recited *Aleinu* daily in *shaharit*.)

²⁵ See *Siddur Rabbenu Shelomoh*, p. 212 (commentary on RH *Aleinu*). Hirschler published this work as the *siddur* of Shelomoh b. R. Shimson of Worms (1030-1096), but it is probably that of R. Eliezer b. Nathan. See, e.g., Grossman, *Hakhmei Ashkenaz ha-Rishonim*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001, pp. 346-348.

ויקבלו כולם את עול מלכותך
 ותמלוך עליהם מהרה לעולם ועד
 כי המלכות שלך היא
 ולעולמי עד תמלוך בכבוד

Beginning with the second line, להעביר, every clause expresses a hope for either the removal of other gods or the universal acceptance of our God. With regard to the first line, properly understood and its mystical and elevated language decoded,²⁶ it is almost certainly a request for the speedily rebuilding of the Temple.²⁷ Taken to-

²⁶ Gershom Scholem recognized long ago that *Aleinu* includes several terms that are not only post-Biblical, but are characteristic of *heikhalot* literature. See his *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition*, New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965 (2d. ed.), pp. 27-28. He points to the terms *yozer bereshit*, *moshav yekaro*, and *shekhinat uzo*. Meir Bar-Ilan (*Mekorah*, p. 8) also points to the term *adon ha-kol*. (I suspect that *gavhei meromim*, another non-Biblical term, will eventually be found in this literature as well.) All of this suggests that *Aleinu* was composed by someone with some connection to *heikhalot* literature, or composed at a time after terms originating in *heikhalot* literature came to be in normative rabbinic use. This explains how *Aleinu* easily came to be borrowed into *heikhalot* literature. Due to the common terms, the authors of this literature probably saw *Aleinu* as a text “related to their own hymnology.” Scholem, p. 28.

In *heikhalot* literature, *Aleinu* serves as a prayer of gratitude purportedly recited by R. Akiva (in the singular form עלי לשבח) on return from a safe journey to heaven. See the article by Swartz referred to above. Meir Bar-Ilan, *Mekorah*, pp. 12-24, argues that *Aleinu* originated here, and was then changed into the plural and borrowed into the RH service. This is very unlikely. There are too many themes in *Aleinu* that are out of context and extraneous under the assumption that *Aleinu* originated merely as a prayer of gratitude on return from a safe journey to heaven (e.g., the hope for God’s future reign and that the nations shall acknowledge God’s sovereignty). See Swartz, p. 188.

²⁷ The idiom is based on verses such as Psalms 78:60-61 (ויתן לשבי עזו ותפארתו) and 96:6 (עז ותפארת במקדשו) and Isaiah 60:7 (ובית תפארתו אפאר) and 64:10 (בית קדשנו ותפארתנו). This interpretation is probably implicit in the commentary of R. Judah b. Yakar. On לראות מהרה בתפארת עורך, he writes: ע"ש [=על שם] כי תפארת עוזמו אתה, ונזכה לראות פני שכינה ולראות בתפארת בית המקדש דכתי' ובית תפארתך אפאר.

gether, this whole section is a prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. This fits the reading לתכן perfectly.

That this section of *Aleinu* is fundamentally a prayer for the establishment of God's kingdom makes sense given that, most likely, this section was composed as an introduction to the *malkhuyyot* section of the RH *Amidah*.²⁸

See the *Peirush ha-Tefillot ve-ha-Berakhot* of R. Judah b. Yakar, part II, p. 91. R. Judah's statements are adopted by R. David Abudraham in his commentary to the *Aleinu* of RH. See also R. Shemtob Gaugine, *Keter Shem Tov*, Kédainiai, 1934, p. 104. Unfortunately, this interpretation of the phrase תפארת עוון has generally been overlooked.

Scholem (p. 28, n. 18) notes the following passage found in other *heikhalot* texts: ברוך שמו במושב הדרו ומבורך בתפארת עוון. The parallel to מושב הדרו strongly suggests that תפארת עוון in this passage represents the physical Temple. For *heikhalot* texts with this passage see Mordecai Margaliot, *Sefer ha-Razim*, Jerusalem, 1966, pp. 107-09, and Martin Samuel Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985, pp. 173 and 175.

²⁸ Aside from the fact that the theme of the section fits as an introduction to verses of *malkhuyyot*, the section ends with four words from the root מלך: ויקבלו כולם את עול מלכותך ותמלוך עליהם מהרה לעולם ועד כי המלכות שלך היא ולעולמי עד תמלוך בכבוד.

I have little doubt that the first section of *Aleinu* (which includes the words מלכי המלכים and מלכינו) was also composed at the same time. This is contrary to the view of many scholars who point to the two separate themes in the two sections as evidence of different authors. *Aleinu* is a short prayer, and in the earliest texts of *Aleinu* there is no division into sections. Therefore, our presumption should be one of unitary authorship. Close analysis of the verses cited shows that **both sections quote or paraphrase from the same chapter of Isaiah** (45:20: ומתפללים אל אל לא; 45:23: כי לי תכרע כל ברך תשבע כל לשון; and 44:24 and 46:9 as well.) This strongly suggests that both sections were composed at the same time. (I have not seen anyone else make this point.) The terms characteristic of *heikhalot* literature are found in both sections as well.

While it cannot be proved that Rav (early third century, Babylonia and Palestine) was the author of *Aleinu*, it has been observed that "in some of Rav's homilies a tendency to a certain mystical thinking is discernible." See EJ 13:1578 and the citations there, as well as the statement of Rav at Ber. 55a: יודע היה בצלאל לצרף אותיות שנבראו בהן שמים וארץ... Also, several

Moreover, we can easily understand how an original reading of לתכן עולם might have evolved into לתקן עולם, a term related to the familiar term תקון העולם. The term תקון העולם (always with the definite article) is widespread in early rabbinic literature.²⁹ For example, it is found thirteen times in the Mishnah, and seventeen times in the Babylonian Talmud.³⁰ The alternative scenario, that the original reading was לתקן עולם and that this evolved in some texts into לתכן עולם is much less likely.

Finally, the ב of במלכות שדי seems to fit better in לתכן עולם (=to establish the world under God's sovereignty) than in either of the two ways of understanding לתקן עולם במלכות שדי.³¹ Also, the lack of an את before the object עולם perhaps fits the reading לתכן better. I will leave a detailed analysis of these aspects to grammarians.

Talmudic passages record Rav's authorship or contribution to the text of other prayers. Most of these passages are collected at Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, tr. Raymond P. Scheindlin, New York: Jewish Publication Society and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993, pp. 207-208. Most relevant is *Ber.* 12b where the המלך הקדוש and המלך המשפט changes for the Ten Days of Repentance are recorded in the name of Rav.

²⁹ לתקן העולם was the correct classical term, even though it has now been replaced in popular parlance by לתקן עולם. Rosenthal, p. 214, n. 1.

³⁰ Rosenthal, p. 214, n. 1. It is also found eight times in the Jerusalem Talmud and four times in the Tosefta. Most of the time, the term is used in the context of the laws of divorce, but it is found in other contexts as well (e.g., Hillel's enactment of *prozbol* at *M. Gittin* 4:3). Rosenthal suggests that the concept originated in the context of the laws of divorce, and was later expanded into the other contexts. See Rosenthal, pp. 217-219.

³¹ As mentioned earlier, in the reading לתקן עולם, there are two ways to translate במלכות שדי: "under the sovereignty" or "through the sovereignty." If the translation is "under," **establishing** a world under the sovereignty of God is a simpler reading than **perfecting** a world under the sovereignty of God. If one wants to advocate for the translation "through," it requires investigation whether the prefix ב could have been used to mean "through" in the Talmudic period.

Conclusion

There is no question that social justice is an important value in Judaism.³² Moreover, classical rabbinical literature includes many references to the concept of תיקון העולם, both in the context of divorce legislation and in other contexts. The purpose of this article was only to show that it is almost certainly a mistake to read such a concept into the *Aleinu* prayer, a prayer most likely composed as an introduction to the *malkhuyyot* section of the *Amidah*, and focused primarily on the goal of **establishing** (תכוון) God's kingdom on earth. Even if we do not fix the text of our *siddurim*, we should certainly have this alternate and almost certainly original reading in mind as we recite this prayer. ❧

³² See, e.g., *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (cited earlier), and Jacob J. Schacter, "Tikkun Olam: Defining the Jewish Obligation," in *Rav Chesed: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Dr. Haskel Lookstein*, ed. Rafael Medoff (Jersey City: Ktav, 2009), vol. 2, pp. 183-204. For some citations to Biblical verses on justice, see Rosenthal, p. 215, n. 2.