

# Tikkun Olam For Today



**Rabbi Michael Zimmerman**

**March 20, 2014**

# What is an essential part of what being Jewish means to you?

Remembering Holocaust	73%
Leading ethical/moral life	69%
Working for justice/equality	56%
Being intellectually curious	49%
Caring about Israel	43%
Having good sense of humor	42%
Being part of a Jewish community	28%
Observing Jewish law	19%
Eating traditional Jewish foods	14%

(Pew Research Report: *A Portrait of Jewish Americans*)



# Roots of Tikkun Olam:



**Tzedek**



**Tzedek tzedek tirdof!**

# Tzedek u'mishpat



**“refers primarily to the improvement of the conditions of the poor...through regulations issued by the king and his officials” (Moshe Weinfeld)**

# Roots of Tikkun Olam:



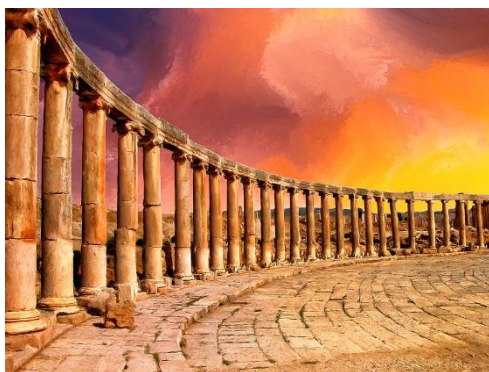
**Gemilut chasadim**

# **Rabbinic conceptions of Tikkun Olam:**

## **1. Aleinu**

# Aleinu:

**L'taken olam b'malchut shaddai**

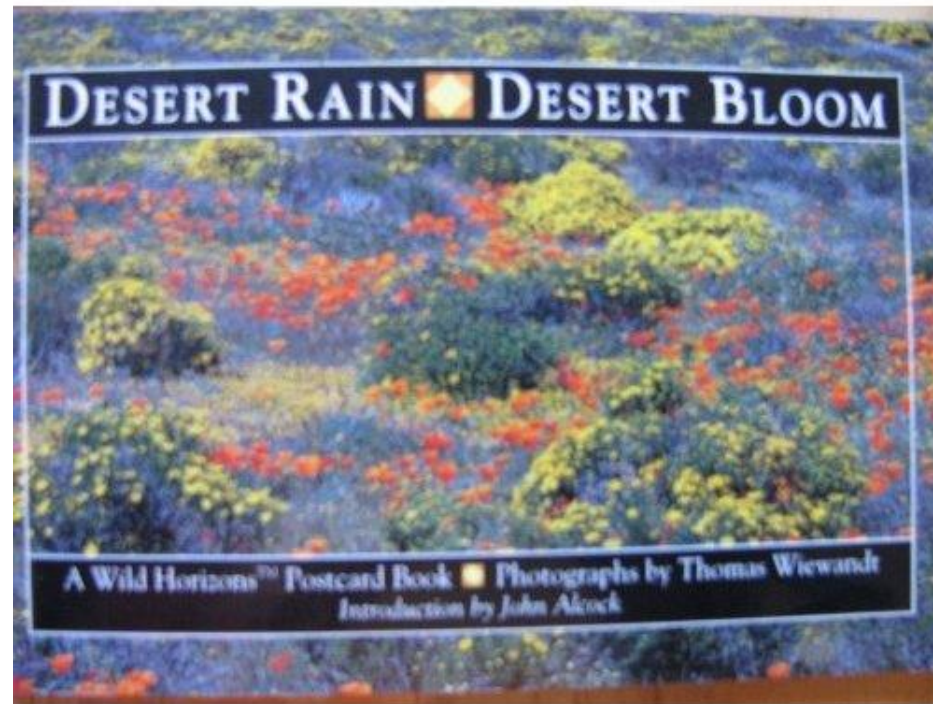


**“we can derive from this prayer a sense that ‘fixing the world’ means working toward...the establishment of godly qualities throughout the world.” (Rabbi Jill Jacobs)**

# **Rabbinic conceptions of Tikkun Olam:**

## **2. Midrash**

**God divided the heavens and  
created rain *l'taken olam*.**

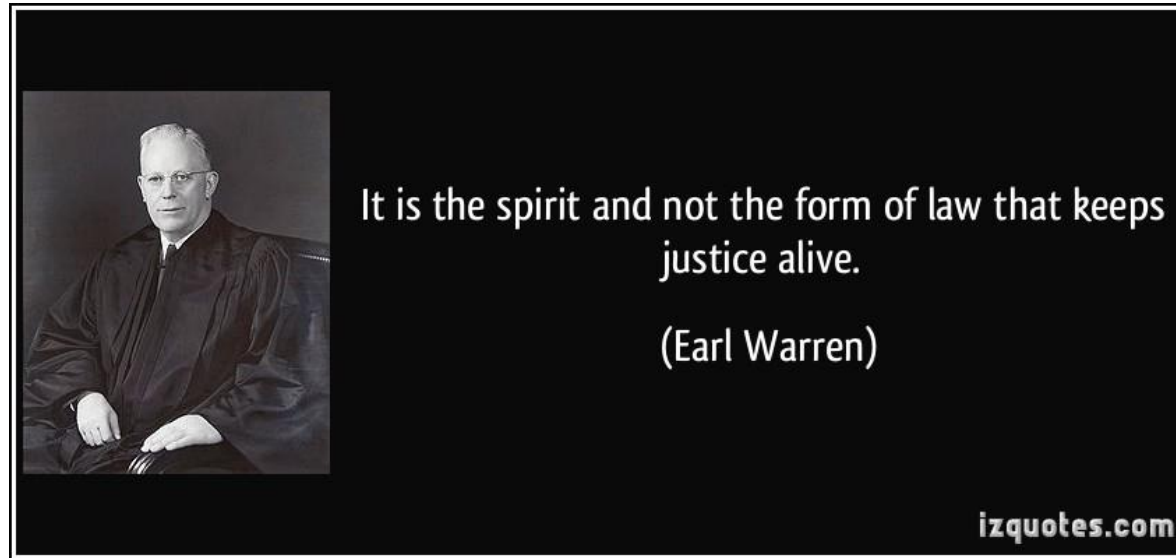


**“According to this *midrash*, the world is ‘fixed’ when it is physically viable” (Rabbi Jill Jacobs)**

# **Rabbinic conceptions of Tikkun Olam:**

## **3. Halacha**

# Halachic innovations to modify stringencies *mipnei tikkun ha'olam*

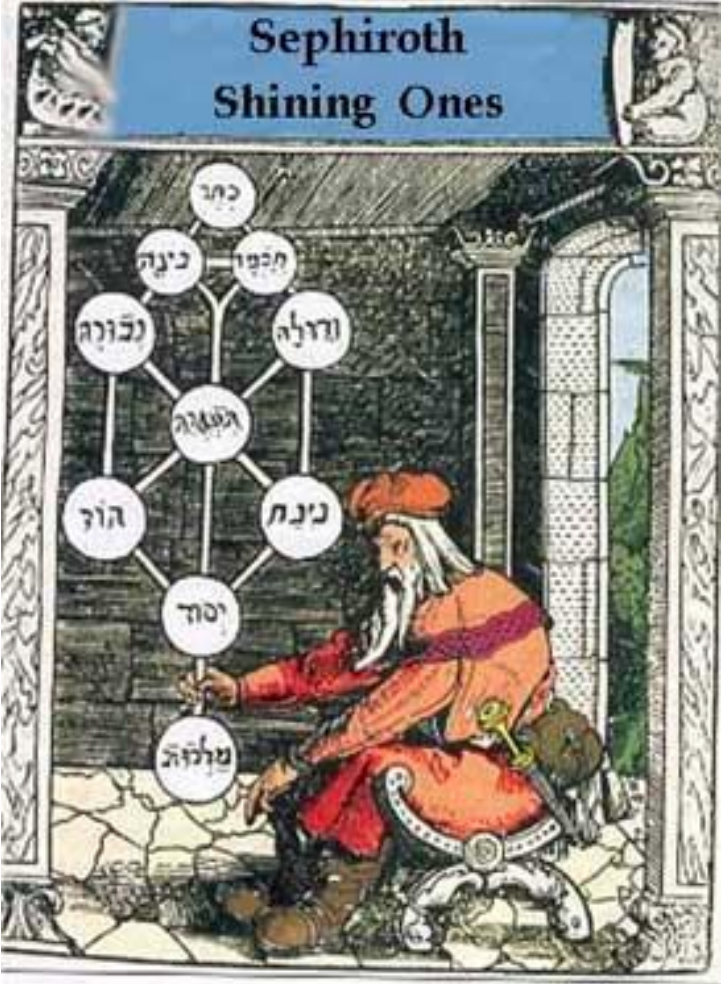
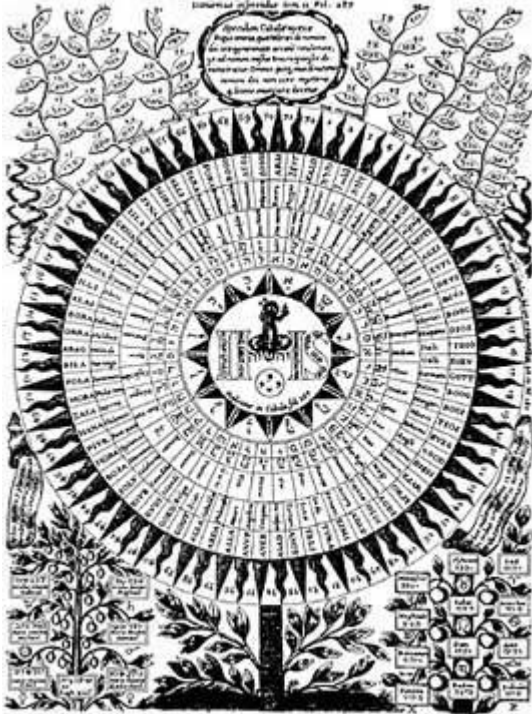


“The rabbis also use the term *mipnei tikkun ha'olam* to forbid practices that may lead to negative consequences. Thus,...aimed at protecting the Jewish community in the long run.” (Rabbi Jill Jacobs)

# **“Rabbinic” conceptions of Tikkun Olam:**

## **4. Lurianic Kabbalah**

# Raising sparks of holiness from the shards of a broken world



# Putting it all together:

- From the *Aleynu* conception: the elimination of evil and the restoration of the world to a perfected divine state.
- The *midrashic* emphasis on the physical maintenance of creation reminds us of the need to work to preserve the planet.
- The rabbinic understanding leads to a mandate to correct the systems that make our own society dysfunctional.
- The Lurianic belief that individual actions can have a permanent effect on the cosmos offers hope that our efforts will succeed.

(Rabbi Jill Jacobs)

**Other perspectives**

**“*Tikkun Olam* is Judaism envisioning an ideal world. Often translated to mean 'repair of the world', and even as social justice, *tikkun olam* underpins our religious way of life and perspective that works towards a time of peace – not just ending war, but a time of prosperity, health and justice for all. For Reform Jews the importance of working individually and collectively towards a better and redeemed world is vital to our understanding of what being active Jews means.”**

**(a-to-z of Reform Judaism)**

**“My own tikkun olam work includes embracing collaborative leadership, transforming all obstacles to working with others effectively, and modeling *now* the world I want to create in my thoughts, words, and actions.”**

**(Miki Kashtan, Israeli-born founder of Bay Area Nonviolence Center)**

**“a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tikkun Olam: . The humanitarian imperative is to help 250 million people with in a decade...Two fundamental criteria apply: any program must be technologically feasible, and it must be operationally viable.”**

**(Alliance for Global Good)**

**“Tikkun olam encompasses both service to society by helping those in need and service to the Divine by liberating the spark within. By pursuing spiritual inner work, we grow more able to bear that spark without shattering, more willing to act on what we know to be right, less willing to act in harmful or grasping ways, and more able to notice the quiet presence of conscience. By working to perfect ourselves, perfect our soul, and serve society, we each contribute in our own unique way to the perfecting of the world. This is our duty and our calling as human beings.”**

**(Joseph Naft, born to Holocaust survivors in a displaced persons camp; founder of Inner Frontier) (abridged)**

# **This is Not a Reframing of Secular Ideas in Spiritual Clothing**

**We don't believe that the liberal agenda can be won simply by reframing it in spiritual language. For a large section of the American public, the primary source of pain in their lives is not about economic deprivation or non-inclusion, but about the way that the ethos of selfishness and materialism plays out in their personal lives and in the lives of people around them in ways that are destructive and feel terrible. They can't stand being part of the manipulative, narrowly utilitarian way people treat each other and themselves and the earth. They want a framework of meaning to their lives...and need a meaning-oriented movement that can counter the spiritual depression that surrounds them. Don't confuse this with those who simply are trying to put some Biblical quotes in front of the same old Democratic Party or liberal agenda-we are seeking a much deeper change.**

**(Rabbi Michael Lerner, "Tikkun's Core Vision")**

**“Tikkun Olam requires the imagination of children.”**

**(Lois Dickason)**

**“In Warsaw 1932, Alter Hayim Levinson published a work entitled Tikkun Olam that was aimed at encouraging Jews to join the Agudas Yisroel political party...an organization that would unite observant Jews under the one banner.”**

**(Levi Cooper, “The *Tikkun Olam* Catch-All”)**

**“...at the hands of Jewish liberals, ‘Tikkun Olam’ has become a nonsense mantra representing nothing more than the replacement of actual Judaism with a pseudo-theology consisting entirely of the pursuit of liberal political fads.”**

**(Paul Plaut, “On the ‘Tikkun Olam’ Fetish)**

# Tikkun Olam for Today:



**Positive Change in a  
Positive Way**

- 1. Study traditional and contemporary texts.**
- 2. Put ideas into action.**
- 3. Look at the big picture.**
- 4. Activities for all ages.**
- 5. Utilize creativity and the arts.**
- 6. Involve persons affected by the issue: break down “us-them.”**
- 7. Learn and practice Jewish models of healthy communication.**
- 8. *Machlochet l’shem shamayim*: open, respectful controversy.**
- 9. Inner growth and outer fulfillment.**
- 10. Joyful spirit with serious purpose.**

***Shimon ha'Tzaddik used to say:***

**On three things the world stands:**

**on Torah, on sacred service, on acts of kindness**

***Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said:***

**On three things the world stands:**

**on justice, on truth, on peace**

***Hillel used to say:***

**If I am not for myself, who is for me?**

**And when I am only for myself, what am I?**

**And if not now, when?**

***Rabbi Tarfon used to say:***

**You are not obliged to finish the task; neither are you free to neglect it.**

**Closing thoughts  
from *Pirkei Avot***