
SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM: TIKKUN HANEFESH V'OLAM IN OUR TIME

RABBI SHAWN ISRAEL ZEVIT



RECONSTRUCTIONIST LEARNING NETWORKS

Goals...of the network

(<https://www.jewishrecon.org/networks/2017/spirituality-activism>)

This network will focus on aspects of weaving together the work of tikkun olam and one's spiritual life. From a Jewish perspective, we are always called to tikkun in the times of our lives. Our current times have brought with them an intensified level of challenge in the realm of social, environmental, economic and racial justice.

We will explore Jewish perspectives, spiritual approaches and best practices of our day to live the deep call to tikkun hanefesh v'olam— the repair/balancing/integration of one's own soul and the world we are part of. Whether your focus is on mindfulness meditation, prayer and ritual, community organizing, marches or lobbying, will work on the integrative Jewish approach to a healthy and balanced life and a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

Towards the Evolving Globally Sustainable Religious Civilization of the Jewish People Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Mordecai Kaplan argued that Jewish life must provide us with recipes for justice in the world when he wrote, “A theology which is not a plan of social action is merely a way of preaching and praying. It is a menu without the dinner.” (Not So Random Thoughts) If we are to have a viable future as a Jewish People, we need to build on Kaplan’s formulation of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization to include a globally sustainable approach to living in faith community. A globally sustainable, evolving religious culture will also include interdependent and healthy economic, social, political, environmental and spiritual systems. For us as Jews, as non-Jewish partners and allies sharing a Jewish path, and as human beings on this planet, there may be no more important issue to engage in and face than the issue of global sustainability in the 21st century.

1. Tikkun Hanefesh V'Olam: Balance and Repair of the Soul and the World

Often times this task can seem daunting. With so much suffering amidst the wonder of life itself, where is one to begin to attempt to return the balance to the world? Before *tikkun olam* became synonymous with *social action* in the 1960's, earlier Jewish mystics developed the idea of *tikkun* as re-balancing the divine energies in the world within one's own soul (*tikkun hanefesh*) and on a transpersonal and universal level (*tikkun olam*).

2. Tikkun Hanefesh V'Olam: Balance and Repair of the Soul and the World

The imbalance was not seen as a result of an absence of *hesed* (loving-kindness or fluidity), *gevurah* (strength or structure) or any of the other *sephirot* (Divine emanations, attributes or foundational energies of existence), but rather the absence of interdependent relationships between all the energies that make up the fabric of the world.

3. Tikkun Hanefesh V'Olam: Balance and Repair of the Soul and the World

We are not inherently broken and need repair. We are inherently whole, but not always in relationship with this sense of *Echad* (Unity), our Godly potential, with each other and with the world. Perspective or systems may be broken; their repair happens when we reaffirm our covenant with Life and take our values and beliefs from the prayer book and the study halls into every aspect of our lives.

Blessing for Study for Community

Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz, Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Blessing for Study and the Needs of Community:
*Baruh atah Adonay eloheynu meleh ha'olam asher
kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu la'a'sok b'tzorchei
tzibur.*

Blessed are you God, Creator of the Universe, Source
of Holiness in our engaging in the needs of
community

Torah and Talmud Texts

Any person who works for needs of community, it is as if that person is studying Torah. P. Tal., Berachot 5:1

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
Deuteronomy 16:20

There shall be one law both for you of the community and also for the stranger who lives among you; A law for ever throughout the generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before YHVH. One Torah and one code...
Bamidbar (Numbers), 15:15-16

Zechariah 8: 16-17

These are the things that you shall do: speak every one the truth to your neighbor, execute the judgment of peace and truth in your gates; and let none of you devise evil in your hearts against your neighbor, and love no false oath, for these are the things I hate, says God.

Leadership, Community and Responsibility, Beyond Leviticus 19

While obligations to community have historically been incumbent upon each adult Jew, there is an additional level of responsibility that our tradition holds for those of us in leadership positions when it comes to living out our values of gemilut hasadim and tikkun. As is stated in Exodus Rabbah, Yitro 27:9 *"So long as a man is only a simple haver, he is not bound to the community and he is not punished for its sins. But when he is appointed to a post, and he receives the tallit of investiture, then he must not say, 'I am concerned only with my good, I am not bound to the community.' On the contrary, all the burden of the community is upon him. If he sees a man doing wrong to his neighbor, or committing a sin, and he does not stop him, he will be punished for his neglect. The Holy One of Blessing says to him, 'You are responsible for your neighbor.'*

*Walking in God's Path:
Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a*

Rabbi Hama... said: What does the text mean, 'You shall walk in God's paths?' Surely this does not imply that a person may actually walk behind the Divine presence. Rather the meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One. As God clothes the naked... so do you... clothe the naked; as the Holy One visits the sick... so do you visit the sick; as the Holy One comforts mourners, ... so do you comfort mourners; as the Holy One, buries the dead, so do you bury the dead.

Likutei Amirim, “The Tanya” , Reb Schneur Zalman of Llyady (Hasidic)

Tohu (disorder) refers to the state of the original Sefirot (Divine Emanations), as unformed and unordered points. Tikun (restitution; reformation) refers to the state of the sefirot rearranged, meded and reformed... Thus among the Sefirot of Tohu there is no inter-relationship... no mutual inclusion- each on its own, without relating to its opposite. The Sefirot of Tikkun, on the other hand, compound one another...permitting the mitigating influence of wisdom, and are, therefore, able to inter-relate.

Rabbi Ira Eisenstein (adapted), From the Shabbat Vehagim, the Reconstructionist Shabbat and Festival prayer book, Recon Press

Belief in God, has to do... with human nature, with the way individual men and women act, with their attitudes, their ideas of what is good and what is bad, with their ideals... If we believe that life is worthwhile, that it is good, that, in spite of sickness and accidents, in spite of poverty and war, in spite of all the sad and difficult conditions in the world, that the world can still be made a better place, then we believe in God. When we believe in God, we cannot be discouraged because we believe that all the misery in the world is due, not to the fact that misery must be there, that it is a necessary part of life, but to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery.

Tikkun Olam (Acts of Caring and Repair of the World) Mishkan Shalom, Phil, PA

Tikkun Olam refers to the imperative to repair the world, so that it reflects the divine values of justice (tzedek), compassion (hesed), and peace (shalom). Our ethic as a people is grounded in our collective memory of slavery and exodus, oppression and liberation. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes that our experience as slaves teaches us that we have a special responsibility to the stranger and the powerless, "You shall not oppress the stranger for you know the experience of the stranger having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt."

After the Holocaust, the Biblical commandment "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" assumes a new and urgent meaning. As a people who suffered so much as a result of the indifference and passivity of others, we must actively oppose injustice and oppression wherever it occurs. To be neutral on issues of justice is to side with the oppressor. Our passion for justice must be applied not only to Jews but to all peoples. If we are not for ourselves who will be for us; if we are only for ourselves, what are we?

Rabbi Sid Schwarz, Finding a Spiritual Home, p.26

Many congregations sponsor occasional social action projects. Yet, if a congregation were to undertake the mission statement initiative, it is likely that it would find that one of the main purposes of Judaism is to bring aid and comfort to those less fortunate than oneself. A justice agenda will move a community between people doing important mitzvah work with each other. It will also result in attracting Jews to the congregation with deep commitments to working for peace and justice in the world.

1. What of Prayer and Social Justice? by Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Is this not the beginning and end of prayer?
To love each other and the planet
Of which we are a part
To inspire and ignite within us
The very sense of communal responsibility
That our prayers become activist stances-
Connecting us to our own hearts and values,
To those in our immediate communities
And ultimately as all worship ends in Aleynu-
It is upon us “li’takeyn olam b’malchut Shaddai”
- To repair the world for
Godliness to permeate everywhere.

2. What of Prayer and Social Justice? by Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Love is an action, not only a feeling-
And we pray for justice to enter our hearts
The Jewish path in prayer and justice
Is both reflexive and externally active.
Our word for prayer is “tefillah”
From the ancient Hebrew “palal”-
To judge or discern.
The prefix directs us
to meet the internal “judge”
And pour our hearts and action outwards
From the place of greater clarity and equanimity.
Are not judges those we look to
For the dispensation and discernment of justice?

3. What of Prayer and Social Justice? by Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Without prayer we may start to believe

We alone are the source and judge

Of what is a right course of action

Without taking our prayers

Out of the sanctuary into the streets

We risk seeking comfort and escape

From the cries around us.

All of the natural world

Has its own song to the universe

When we lovingly open our hearts

When we strive for justice within

And outside the walls of our communities

Then we prayer can become

A grounding source for the ideas of justice

And a grounding force for the actions of justice

1. What were the “aha” moments or thoughts you are taking away from this session, and what can you see integrating right away and report on in session 2?
2. What goal do you have that you want to reach for between now and the final session moving into the year ahead?

Aleynu (its Upon Us)
Music and Words by Shayndel Kahn, Recorded by S Zevit

www.cdbaby.com/zevit3

May we feel Your holy power,
May we feel Your holy strength,
May we feel Your holy presence,
Surround us in this holy place.
May we feel the earth beneath our feet,
As we bend and bow to You,
May our bodies rise to greet You,
As we feel your presence forging through.

**It's upon us, it's upon us,
to feel Your holy ground,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to hear Your holy sound,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to feel the love inside,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to face You and not hide.
It's upon us, it's upon us, to think, to act, to do,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to do what's right and true,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to reach up to the sky,
It's upon us, it's upon us, to take our wings and fly.**
Aleinu l'shabeach ladon hakol (repeat)



Resources

RESOURCES FOR TIKKUN OLAM

Dorff, Elliot N. "The Meaning and Significance of *Tikkun Olam*," *The Way into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)*, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2005, pp.7-20, 250-251

Jacobs, Jill. "The History of 'Tikkun Olam'," *Zeek*, June 2007, <http://www.zeek.net/706tohu/>

Zion, Noam. "The History of the Term Tikkun Olam in 20th Century America,"
https://hartman.org.il/Blogs_View.asp?Article_Id=1238&Cat_Id=413&Cat_Type=

<https://www.jewishrecon.org/act/doing-justice/tikkun-olam>

<https://www.jewishrecon.org/document/making-our-synagogues-vessels-tikkun-olam>

<https://www.jewishrecon.org/article/how-build-just-and-holy-congregations>

<https://www.jewishrecon.org/article/political-activism-form-prayer>

<http://jewishexponent.com/2017/09/13/new-year-start-renewed-sense-tikkun-olam/>

<http://zevit.wpengine.com/prayer-and-social-justice/>

<http://auburnseminary.org/rev-dr-william-barbers-rosh-hashanah-sermon-time-new-year-new-america/>