**Tikkun Olam**

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**Definition**

The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam* (pronounced tee-KOON oh-LUHM) means "world repair." In modern Jewish circles, *tikkun olam* has become synonymous with the notion of social action and the pursuit of social justice (MyJewishLearning.com).

Historic Roots

The phrase *tikkun olam* is found in the *Mishnah*, a body of classical rabbinic teachings compiled in the 3rd Century. In this instance, the phrase is used when discussing issues of social policy, insuring a safeguard to those who may be at a disadvantage (MyJewishLearning.com).

*Tikkun olam* also refers to repairs performed on an individual level, as found in Lurianic *kabbalah*, or Jewish mysticism. This view of *tikkun olam* is more abstract and cosmological. Rabbi Isaac Luria, a teacher and *kabbalist*, in 16th Century Palestine, explained that the world is made up of good and evil. In order for the balance between good and evil intended by G-d to be restored, humans must be involved in the world's reparation. Humans are responsible for separating the holy world from the material world (MyJewishLearning.com). This separation can be achieved by contemplative actions, including "liturgical prayer, performance of all other *mitzvot* [commandments], and the practice of certain special exercises (Fine).

In the 1950s, the phrase *tikkun olam* was used by Shlomo Bardin, the founder of the Brandeis Camp Institute (BCI). To Bardin, the phrase "*l'taken olam b'malchut shaddai,*" encapsulated the essence of Jewish values. The term, meaning "when the world shall be perfected under the reign of the Almighty," is found in the liturgical prayer "*Aleinu*" (MyJewishLearning.com). Bardin taught that Jews are obligated to work towards achieving a more perfect world.

Since the 1950s, other Jewish movements have adopted the use of the phrase and concept *tikkun olam* as a platform for the fulfillment of *mitzvot* (commandments) and *tzedakah* (justice, righteousness) (MyJewishLearning.com). Jews are often involved in social action/volunteer projects, motivated by the concept of *tikkun olam*.

Importance

The most modern and broadly understood notion of *tikkun olam* is that of "repairing the world" through human actions. Humanity's responsibility to change, improve, and fix its earthly surroundings is powerful. It implies that each person has a hand in working towards the betterment of his or her own existence as well as the lives of future generations. *Tikkun olam* forces people to take ownership of their world. It is them, not G-d, who will bring the world back to its original state of holiness.

More simply, it is important for Jews to participate in repairing the world by participating in *tzedakah* (justice and righteousness) and *g'milut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness). Without their stake in the improvement of their environment, injustice and evil will continue to exist.

Ties to the Philanthropic Sector

*Tikkun olam* embodies the spirit of philanthropy. Increasing the well-being of humankind is one of the key elements of repairing the world. Helping those who are in need, no matter in what capacity, is crucial and "holy" work. *Tikkun olam*, as it relates to practical methods, applies to working in all communities, not just Jewish communities. Jews are members of greater society, and as such, their actions are not limited to their own communities. Social welfare and volunteer work, as well as the donation of monetary and physical resources, are ways in which people can be philanthropically involved, and at the same time, be involved in *tikkun olam*.

Key Related Ideas

*G'milut Hasadim* (pronounced geh-mee-LOOT chah-sah-DEEM) refers to performing acts of loving kindness; and Jewish communal actions to help the needy, not only monetarily (MyJewishLearning.com).

Chessed is defined as an act of kindness. Shimon HaTzaddik, also known as Simon the Righteous, stated that the world's continued existence is due to three things including Torah Study, Hashem worship, and the performance of acts of kindness (gemilut chasadim) (Orthodox Union).

Humanitarianism requires a concern for human welfare, especially as manifested through philanthropy; it is the belief that the sole moral obligation of humankind is the improvement of human welfare (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language).

*Kabbalah* (pronounced kuh-BAH-luh) is from the Hebrew, "to accept, to receive; a tradition;" and Jewish mysticism. Jewish mysticism has been part of Judaism since early times. *Kabbalah* seeks to explain cosmological issues and is traditionally not taught until a Jewish man is 40 years of age, when he has completed his study of the Torah and Talmud. Many *kabbalistic* teachings are recorded in a book, *Zohar* (Judaism 101).

*Mitzvah* (Mitzvot, pl.) (pronounced meets-VAH or MEETS-vah) is a commandment. There are 613 commandments given by G-d to the Jewish people in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. *Mitzvah* refers to laws, practices and customs; and good deeds (Jewish Virtual Library).

*Righteousness* is defined as adhering to moral principles (WordNet).

*Social Justice* is provision of help or relief to the poor; almsgiving; It is something given to the needy; alms; an institution, organization or fund established to help the needy; benevolence or generosity toward others or toward humanity; indulgence or forbearance in judging others; and, often in Christianity is the theological virtue defined as love directed first toward G-d. It is also toward oneself and one's neighbors as objects of G-d's love (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language).

*Tzedakah* (pronounced tseh-DUH-kuh) is righteous behavior; justice; and fairness (Judaism 101; MyJewishLearning.com).

*Volunteerism* involves the giving of time and skills to perform social or educational work in communities (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language).

Important People Related to the Topic

* Emil Fackenheim (1916- ): Fackenheim is a Canadian theologian. Born in Halle, Germany in 1940, he immigrated to Canada where he was professor of philosophy at the University of Toronto. He has written about the religious response to the HOLOCAUST with publications that include God's *Presence in History, The Jewish Return into History and To Mend the World*.
* Leonard Fein: Fein is a writer, teacher, long-time social activist, and the author of *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews*, and *Israel: Politics and People*. He is founder of *Moment* magazine; Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger; and the National Jewish Coalition for Literacy. He was Director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.
* Lawrence Kushner: Kushner is the Emanu-El Scholar at San Francisco's Congregation Emanu-El and visiting professor of Jewish spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union. He was formerly Rabbi-in-Residence of Hebrew Union Collegeâ€”Jewish Institute of Religion and the rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts. A frequent commentator on National Public Radio's "All Thing Considered," he is one of the most widely read authors on Jewish spiritual life.
* Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572): Luria was known for his work in and scholarship and teaching of Jewish mysticism. He was also known for his innovative idea of *tzimtzum*, the belief that G-d contracted Himself in order to create the world. This idea is related to the concept of *tikkun olam* (Jewish Virtual Library).
* Ismar Schorsch: Schorsch is the sixth Chancellor of The Jewish Theological Seminary and is the Rabbi Herman Abramovitz Professor of Jewish History. Throughout his eighteen years as Chancellor, Dr. Schorsch has a strong belief that Conservative Judaism is the most authentic expression of rabbinic Judaism today. In 1995, he published *Sacred Cluster: The Core Values of Conservative Judaism*, his highly praised monograph explaining the seven important tenets of Conservative Judaism.

Related Nonprofit Organizations

There are many organizations who work with a guiding mission of tikkun olam. The entire Jewish communal world including synagogues, fundraising bodies, community centers and social welfare agencies participate in work to repair the world around them. Some examples are:

* The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has served as the overseas arm of the American Jewish community since 1914. Its mission is to serve the needs of Jews throughout the world, particularly where their lives as Jews are threatened or made more difficult. It sponsors programs of relief, rescue and renewal and helps Israel address its most urgent social challenges. JDC is committed to the idea that all Jews are responsible for one another and that "to save one person is to save the world" (*Mishnah*, Sanhedren 4:5) ([http://www.jdc.org](http://www.jdc.org/)).
* Areyvut reaches out to Jewish day schools and congregational schools, regardless of affiliation. Located in New York City, the organization offers a unique opportunity for schools to create innovative and meaningful programs to make tradition values such as *chesed*, *tzedakah* and *tikkun olama* reality for both students and educators ([http://www.areyvut.org](http://www.areyvut.org/).)
* The Ziv Tzedakah Fund, is dedicated to the collection and distribution of funds involving Tzedakah projects, particularly small or little-known projects. Ziv funds both Jewish and non-Jewish programs, and is devoted to bringing the educational message of Tzedakah to communities and secular schools throughout the United States, Canada and Israel ([http://www.ziv.org](http://www.ziv.org/))
* American Jewish World Service (AJWS) was founded in 1985 to help alleviate poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the world regardless of race, religion or nationality. It breathes life into Judaism's imperative to pursue justice and helps American Jews act upon a deeply felt obligation to improve the chances for survival, economic independence and human dignity for all people. Doing *tzedakah*, or righteous deeds, is part of the Jewish obligation to participate in *tikkun olam* - helping to repair the world ([http://www.ajws.org](http://www.ajws.org/))).
* The JUF TOV Volunteer Network (TOV) links prospective volunteers to service opportunities in the Chicago area. TOV places members of the Jewish community with Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago agencies (<http://www.juf.org/services_resources/directory.asp?id=0002>).
* United Jewish Communities (UJC) represents 156 Jewish Federations (community fundraising bodies) and 400 independent communities across North America. Through an annual fundraising campaign, UJC provides life-saving and life-enhancing humanitarian assistance to those in need and translates Jewish values into social action on behalf of millions of Jews in hundreds of communities in towns and villages throughout Israel, in the former Soviet Union, and 60 countries around the world (United Jewish Communities).

Related Web Sites

Areyvut, at [http://www.areyvut.org](http://www.areyvut.org/), offers a wealth of resources relating to Jewish concepts. Links keep users up-to-date on the latest news in Israel and other Jewish communities. The site also provides holiday chesed (kindness) suggestions, links to other nonprofits, and a database searchable by topic and preferred media format (article, book, etc.).

MyJewishLearning.com, at [http://www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/), is a Web site offering Jewish learning for people of all religious and educational backgrounds. It contains information about all things related to Judaism and Jewish tradition, history, culture and daily life. The site provides a guided learning section about *tikkun olam*, highlighting its history and relevancy today.

Tikun Olam Web site, at [http://www.tikkunnews.org](http://www.tikkunnews.org/), is a Jewish Humanitarian Newsletter. It is a new online initiative of Ve'ahavta, including partners: The Canadian Jewish Humanitarian and Relief Committee, IsraAID: The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid, UKJAID: UK Jewish Aid & International Development and other Jewish aid organizations from different parts of the globe that wish to find new ways to improve their working relationships.

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