

"In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Romans 11:5)

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Repairing the World God's Way

Understanding the Jewish Concept of *Tikkun Olam* from a Biblical Perspective

by Galen Peterson

The contributions of the Jewish people to the well-being of the people of the world is remarkable. Jews comprise a miniscule 0.2 percent of the population of the entire world. Yet Jews make up 26 percent of Nobel Prize winners in the science. That means their scientific achievements are 130 times greater than what should be expected.

Jewish scientists have invented such things as the laser, pacemaker and defibrillator, fiber optic cable, vaccinations for polio, cholera and bubonic plague, and numerous medicines like the antibiotic Streptomycin for the treatment of tuberculosis. Many innovations were specifically created in Israel.

- The processor that ran the first Personal Computers.
- Flash memory with USB drives.
- The chipsets of most smartphones, as well as the facial recognition technology that Apple and other phone manufacturers use for security.

- The automated driving technology that is part of all new vehicles today.
- The traffic app called Waze.
- Numerous techniques for fighting cancer and diabetes, and the development of Interferon proteins.
- A miniature camera in a capsule that is swallowed for diagnostic imaging.
- A device that uses a special camera that enables the visually impaired to read.
- A medical robot that performs intricate and precise surgeries.
- A bionic walking assistance system (pictured above) that uses powered leg attachments to enable paraplegics to stand upright, walk and climb stairs.

Israel leads the world in water desalination technology. The same is true regarding drip irrigation, so that many nations in Africa and elsewhere have benefited greatly from this technology. Many more examples can be cited, all of



which illustrate the way that the number of blessings to the world by Jewish inventors, and especially by Israelis, greatly exceeds their proportion of the world's population.

And yet, those who hate Jews and hate Israelis will gladly use these devices and treatments for their own benefit, which is the very definition of hypocrisy. It only seems reasonable that for such people to have credibility, they ought to opt out from medical treatment for most of the life-threatening ailments that afflict humanity. They can demonstrate true commitment to the cause of BDS against Israel if you will boycott not just Israeli products produced in the West Bank, but by putting down your smartphone and your PC. That also means having to drive an older model car without safety features, and

finding your way around town by using a paper map. That's what it takes to avoid being a hypocrite while hating Jews and Israelis.

The unassailable truth, backed up by an abundant of evidence, demonstrates that Jews are not responsible for world domination, as the haters claim, but they have put time and effort into making all of our lives better, whether we realize it or not. And that calls for appreciation instead of hate.

What is the Concept of *Tikkun Olam*?

The question then becomes—why are so many Jewish people dedicated to advancements in science and medicine, and other concepts like peace and social justice and humanitarian causes? Why are these aspects of life so important within the Jewish community? Is it because of a high value on education in the Jewish culture? That may be true, but there are other groups around the world who work hard and value education, yet none of them hold fifty Nobel Prizes in physics alone.

Is it because Jewish people are especially gifted by God? We always have to be open to God's sovereignty in the way that He distributes gifts and talents, especially regarding His redemptive purposes.

For example, we are told in Exodus 36 that God placed specific skills upon the men who were commissioned to build the tabernacle. But we do not see in Scripture a description of a broad endowment of talents from God on a national level.

There is another explanation, however, that must be considered and is both cultural and spiritual in nature. It is the concept known as *tikkun olam*—"repair of the world"

that is embedded in the Jewish culture.

Tikkun olam is not a biblical term, but it is the blending of two terms used in the Bible separately. The verb *takkan* means to "make straight," and is used in the sense of straightening out something that is crooked or bent (Eccl 1:15; 7:13). *Olam* can mean "eternity or permanence" in a temporal sense, or the "world" in a physical sense.

The first time these words appear together in writing is in the *Mishnah* (the oral tradition of Judaism in the second temple period) in a volume dealing with divorce (*Gittin 45a*). *Tikkun olam* in this context involved interpretation of the Torah in such a way that defenseless people could be protected. From that foundation, it was extended to ethical business practices.

The implication was that acting in a protective and ethical way straightened out the crooked or bent aspects of life. So, in that sense, the concept of *tikkun olam* was consistent with biblical mandates for moral and ethical behavior.

In the late 13th century, rabbinical Judaism was greatly influenced by the advent of *Kabbalah*, which is Jewish mysticism based on a series of books called the *Zohar*.

Among its many mystical teachings, the *Zohar* stated that when Adam sinned in the garden, the entire universe was ruptured or broken physically and spiritually. But when Jews obey the *mitzvot* (commandments of the Torah), these acts of obedience contribute to the repair of the spiritual realm. Then, benefits flow into the physical realm, which contributes to the repair of the rupture caused by Adam. It is said to be a slow process with small repairs completed over and over again

through good deeds in obedience to the Torah.

This is an aspect of *Kabbalah* that influenced Jewish thought greatly, regardless of one's religious orientation. It gave Orthodox Jews another motivation for strict adherence to the Law. It gave Reform Jews a mystical motivation for ethical living. And it gave secular Jews a connection to their heritage, while providing a purpose for their lives.

Instead of being religious, they had a calling to make the world a better place. Thus it didn't matter if you were religious, agnostic or atheistic—all Jews could work together on repairing the broken down aspects of the world together for their own reasons.

This approach especially provided a reason for making your life meaningful if you did not believe in *olam ha ba*—the world to come in eternity. In that way of thinking, since all that remains after you die is the memory of your life and what you accomplished among the living, a great incentive exists for making one's life on earth as meaningful as possible.

Becoming a doctor or scientist means you can contribute to the physical health of humanity. Becoming a lawyer or supporting the ACLU means you can defend the civil rights of people. A large number of philanthropic organizations have been founded by Jews, and a disproportionate number of Jewish people serve in humanitarian and political causes. No more war, no poverty, no disease is the goal of a community dedicated to making this world a better place.

Ultimately, the driving force behind the many advancements in science and the empowerment of humanitarian causes within the

Jewish community is having a high value on repairing a broken world, either as the result of sin in the Garden of Eden or just the inadequacies and failures of humanity over time.

The good news is that everyone benefits from this Jewish cultural value in an earthly sense, and yes, that even includes those who hate Jews.

Unfortunately the emphasis on repairing the world ignores an unavoidable reality, namely that humanity is beyond fixing by ourselves. Science is no match for the concept of death. Greed will always leave others impoverished. The lust for power will always lead to oppression. Jewish people should know that more than anyone, for the past is the best predictor of the future.

The Greatest Need of Repair

So should scientists give up their ambition to provide a blessing to the world? Should we abandon humanitarian causes? Not at all. In fact, we desperately need some repair right now in terms of a solution to our health crisis and our social crisis. But even if we get a vaccine for Covid19 and people feel that rioting and protesting are no longer needed, we will still be living in a fallen world because of sin.

We need the ultimate repair to the broken nature of humanity that we all share, including brilliant scientists and virtuous humanitarians—all of us. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, a rupture or a break did in fact occur. It was a rupture in the relationship between people and the Holy God of the universe. And that brought with it a number of calamities affecting the universe itself.

The Hebrew Scriptures tell us that every human being who descended from Adam receives a fallen nature to sin as part of our conception. As David declared:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me (Ps 51:5).

The context of this Psalm is very clear in showing that this is not an accusation against his mother, for there is no evidence of any indiscretion on her part. It is all about David inheriting a nature to sin from his parents, just as all people share and then pass on to the next generation.

Unfortunately, that also means that we share in the same fate of Adam, which is death. That is the profound declaration by Paul in the book of Romans:

Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Romans 5:12-14)

Paul is showing us that this is a human nature problem. The problem was the same before and after the coming of the Law of Moses. The Law did not do away with sin and it did not provide a solution or a complete repair of the rupture of our relationship with God, as it is claimed in *Kabbalah* and thus widely in Judaism. All the Law did was to define the boundaries of sinful behavior and the consequences for violating those boundaries. It never affirmed that obedience to the

commandments would bring about a permanent fix for the problem and the elimination of our sin nature.

That should tell us that no amount of scientific progress or humanitarian efforts will repair the world because it doesn't repair human nature. It is like trying to stitch a tear in cloth that is rotten and will just tear again in another place.

The bottom line is that none of us are exempt from the problem of sin. None of us are able to overcome it on our own as *Kabbalah* teaches. As a result, none of us are able to free ourselves from the consequences of our sin, which is both physical death and spiritual death.

But praise God, He has provided a solution that is the mirror image of the problem:

The free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Messiah Yeshua, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Messiah Yeshua.

Romans 5:15-17

In other words, just as one person (Adam) represented all humanity in the establishment of our sin nature, one person (like a

second Adam) represents all humanity in overcoming our sin nature. And that is Yeshua (Jesus), the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel. Scripture is clear in affirming that He had an earthly mother but no earthly father. Instead, the Holy Spirit came upon her in a miraculous way and she conceived. So like the first Adam, He was born without sin because He did not inherit a sin nature from an earthly father.

But *unlike* Adam, Yeshua never committed an act of the will that was disobedient or sinful. With no sin nature and no act of sin, He was a perfect human and perfect as God dwelling on this earth. He was perfect in every way. So when He willingly gave His life as the atonement for our sins, it was the perfect sacrifice, as Paul goes on to describe:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:18-19

When we believe that Yeshua died in our place, God accepts that

penalty as sufficient for the curse of sin. And we are made righteous in God's eyes, just like Adam and Eve were before they fell. It is not because of our own merits, but because of the perfection of Yeshua. He is our *tikkun*—the one who repairs the rupture between us and God.

Through Yeshua we can all have the kind of relationship with God that is like walking with Him in the Garden of Eden freely and not under the condemnation of sin. And it is a relationship that will endure *l'olam*—forever. Yeshua truly is God's perfect way of repairing this broken world.

Meanwhile, we should not shirk our responsibility of caring for the world that was given as a dominion to humanity in the garden. That means supporting efforts to improve the health of other people. And it means following Yeshua's example, as He declared:

"To preach the Good News to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set free those who are oppressed" (Lk 4:18).

In that way, we join with the Jewish people in a quest for repairing of the world. But we do so in the only way that has the power to repair it once for all. And

that is through faith in Yeshua, the one who has been present since the very beginning of the universe and will return one day to restore all things just as they were in the Garden of Eden, only better for us personally, because we get to be there.

Let it be said that there is a widespread lack of appreciation for what the Jewish people have contributed to this world. And even more tragically, there is a lack of understanding of what Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah, has done for all of us, including His own kinsmen in the flesh.

May we all come to recognize Yeshua as our *tikkun olam*—the one who provides the only repair for sin and its consequences that will endure forever and ever.



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