

TIKKUN OLAM : BASIC QUESTIONS AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

By Yehudah Mirsky

Recent years have seen a surge of projects in social justice, humanitarianism, ecology and similar endeavors, aiming both to bolster Jewish identity and enhance Jews' standing with other communities, and expressed in terms of *Tikkun Olam*. This traditional term, literally meaning "repair and restoration of the world," has come to signify a Jewish commitment to ethically charged social activism, and well beyond the parameters of Jewish communities as such.

Thinking about *Tikkun Olam* and its place in Jewish life entails coming to grips with a number of basic, practical questions. For instance:

- Do we have reasonably clear visions of what *Tikkun Olam* means in today's world?
- What should we concretely do in order to work for the realization of those visions?
- Should the Jewish People proceed in *Tikkun Olam* through exclusively or distinctively Jewish ventures? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so, both substantively and in terms of perceptions?
- What ought to be the shape of institutional cooperation between Israel and the Diaspora on *Tikkun Olam* projects?

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- What should be the appropriate venues for recruitment, organization and financing Jewish efforts for "*Tikkun Olam*"?

These are the sorts of questions that will frame our discussion at the Conference. But before proceeding to these concrete issues, some more basic introduction is necessary, and that is what this paper seeks to provide. It seeks briefly to suggest some lines of conceptual order and clarity that can help us make sense of the welter of activities that are and may be pursued under the rubric of *Tikkun Olam*; to lay out the pros and cons of different forms of activity in their various rubrics; to raise some – hopefully constructive – questions and criticisms regarding these activities as a whole and their place in organized Jewish life; and, in closing, to suggest some tentative policy directions for Jewish activists, professionals and concerned citizens that may help focus the work of *Tikkun Olam* and better realize the potential good it may work for the Jewish people at large and the family of humanity as a whole.

Historical Background

While our focus is on contemporary issues, some historical background is indispensable to our approaching the subject.

*The term Tikkun Olam, which literally means "repairing the world," first appears in the Mishna, the canonical Jewish legal digest compiled at the turn of the 3rd century CE, where it is given as the rationale for a number of specific legal provisions and edicts enacted within Jewish society and its then-existing frameworks towards ends of social justice.¹ The term entered contemporary usage as the rubric for spiritually charged social justice efforts in recent decades, most notably via the *Journal Tikkun*, founded in 1986. While that journal espouses an unmistakable and assertive Left orientation, the term has gained increasingly wide currency and appeal indicating a consciously-assumed Jewish responsibility to work for the general welfare of humanity.*

¹ The term appears in Mishna Tractate Gittin chapter 4, and acquired a more broadly redemptive sense in the Kabbalistic literature of the Middle Ages, signifying chiefly the spiritual transformation of the world, in which ethical action plays a major role. A very helpful collection of historical and conceptual essays is David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman and Nathan J. Diament, eds., *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Northvale & London: Jason Aronson, 1997).

Jewish tradition and Jewish history offer rich troves of thought and experience regarding social responsibility, ethics and justice, ranging from the exhortations of the Prophets to the detailed legal analyses of the Talmud, which in turn served as the basis for a rich jurisprudence of justice and ethics over the centuries. At the same time, it must be recognized – for the sake both of historical accuracy as well as conceptual clarity in our own time – that in many respects the corpus of Jewish tradition is of limited usefulness in addressing many contemporary questions of social justice – and certainly on a global scale – if for no other reason than that the historical moment in which we find ourselves is without precedent in human history.

The radical newness of modernity (and beyond) poses challenges, and opportunities, which are well beyond the scope of the traditional sources, if they are to be read seriously and not anecdotally or superficially. Central features of today's world, such as the extraordinary power and reach of modern states, economies and transnational entities; an increasingly networked global community, facilitated in many ways by the Internet; and, at a deeper level, the conviction, central to all modern politics and certainly to much humanitarianism, that societies are man-made entities which can be remade by the proper application of knowledge and skill – all these pose major, though not insurmountable, challenges to the inheritors and interpreters of Jewish texts and traditions.

Indeed Jewish law and philosophy have over the centuries regularly proved themselves to be deeply responsive to changing circumstances and new ideas – but here as elsewhere it is easy to read the tradition sloppily or worse; it is more demanding to read and interpret it meaningfully and with care. This is no merely academic point but has powerful implications for thinking about *Tikkun Olam* as a vehicle of Jewish identity, and in terms of its relationship to Jewish cultural literacy as a whole.

How Jewish Is Tikkun Olam?

A critical question underlying this entire discussion is whether we are talking about a distinctively Jewish set of practices, for example, a distinctively Jewish way of doing humanitarian work in developing countries, or whether we are talking about a set of activities which are not distinctively “Jewish,” as such (as are, say, observing Shabbat or building a Jewish Community Center). Do the specific activities of *Tikkun Olam* differ in some ways from ethically-driven social action undertaken by non-Jews and if so how?

There is no doubting that much of the contemporary appeal of *Tikkun Olam* activities – especially for many young people and for adults who generally find themselves uncomfortable with other forms of Jewish identity – is precisely that they can seem no different from the works of other people of conscience the world over, or put a little differently, that they seem to draw on and reflect a more broadly human, and perhaps universal, moral sense. Yet, if indeed many activities currently pursued under the rubric of *Tikkun Olam* are not being done in any distinctively Jewish fashion, we may ask what value if any they add to ethically-charged action undertaken by people of goodwill in other frameworks, and what claim these activities can make on Jewish communal energies and resources.

Put a little differently, the impulse to think in terms of *Tikkun Olam* does have the potential to bring great benefit to Jews and to the world. But we would do well to try and formulate distinctively Jewish forms of this work, not as a substitute for universalist moral concern but rather as the best way to bring Judaism’s own resources to bear on that concern, and in so doing offer one way of invigorating Jewish identity in a globalizing age.

Why should *Tikkun Olam* Matter -- What Ends does it Serve?

There are several reasons to consider *Tikkun Olam* as a significant project and as one – though not necessarily exclusive – organizing principle for contemporary Jewish life, one which operates at multiple levels as a driving force empowering and enlightening Jewish peoplehood. *Tikkun Olam* offers the possibility of reinforcing Jewish identity and solidarity, contributing morally

to the good of humanity (Raison d'Humanite) as well as better integrating the Jewish People into the emerging networks of global civil society.

Of course the creation of just societies and the advancement of such goals as environmental protection, public health, economic well-being, and so on are incumbent on all people. Thus speaking of a specifically Jewish effort of *Tikkun Olam* beyond social responsibility and other efforts in which Jewish communities and the State of Israel participate as a matter of course entails articulating distinctively Jewish values and objectives. How could *Tikkun Olam* work differ in substance from the broad gamut of humanitarian, environmental or social justice work? Does a Jewish focus illuminate problems and potential solutions to issues of broad human concern which might otherwise go unnoticed? And what distinctive benefits might this focus bring to Jewish life?

1) FULFILLING OUR MORAL OBLIGATIONS AS JEWS AND AS HUMAN BEINGS

As members of the human race we bear inescapable moral obligations, and participate in the broader ethical life of humankind. How we go about living up to those obligations has of course varied greatly over time and place and among cultures, traditions and belief systems. And in this globalizing age, in which such marvels as modern medicine and the internet are more than challenged by catastrophic threats of nuclear weaponry, global terrorism and massive climate change, the urgency of a moral commitment to humanity at large is perhaps keener than ever before.

At the same time, and no matter one's specific political, religious or ideological position, there is no doubt that a strong sense of moral obligation and a commitment to realizing moral ideals in practice, are a central element of Jewish tradition and a central feature of Jewish civilization. Both interpersonal ethics and a commitment to fostering a just and moral social and political order on earth have been central to Jewish thought and

practice throughout history, however imperfectly those ideals have been realized in practice.²

This moral commitment must be brought to bear on specific problems and in very concrete, indeed prosaic, terms. While this point seems trivial it bears repeating. This is because one of the pitfalls of ideal-driven politics, a pitfall to which *Tikkun Olam* can be very susceptible, is that without the disciplining focus of the concrete effects that public policy and social activism have on people's lives, those policies and engagements can proceed in an abstracted, and at times romanticized fashion which serves both to undermine their effectiveness and even generate backlash against them.

At the same time, a careful attention to details and a pragmatic approach to problem-solving is itself a hallmark of the Jewish tradition in general and the Jewish legal, halakhic, tradition in particular and this mix of focused pragmatism and idealism may itself be a defining Jewish element of *Tikkun Olam*.

2) STRENGTHENING JEWISH IDENTITY

Undertaking ethically-charged action, and in broader, non-Jewish, and thus altruistic contexts, is a moving and stirring vehicle of identity. This is especially the case with younger people who are several generations removed from earlier, more primal connections to Jewish identity. They are often made uncomfortable by activities emphasizing specifically Jewish commitment and identity which can seem to them narrow and even potentially chauvinistic and/or grounded in an archaic religious language that does not speak to them or give expression to their passions and concerns.

Yet young people are far from the only ones whose Jewish identity stands to be enriched by the work of *Tikkun Olam*. It has been pointed out that in the course of modernity key dimensions of Jewishness – ethical universalism,

2. The Jewish commitment to social responsibility is a major theme of Jewish thought in modern times and has been articulated by major thinkers who deeply differ with one another on numerous issues, such as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Abraham Isaac Kook, Aharon David Gordon, Abraham Joshua Heschel and Emanuel Levinas, to name just a few. Their writings offer rich resources for reflection on the meaning of Jewish social responsibility.

group identity and a relationship to spirituality and the sacred – broke apart from one another, each becoming, as it were, the property of a specific party.³ Thus actions by Jews, qua Jews, undertaking social activism with a universalist orientation can have a powerfully healing effect on the fractured Jewish identities of our times.

It is widely recognized that many young people and others inside and outside the Jewish community often perceive the Jewish People as narrowly self-centered and chauvinistic, a perception both deeply disturbing and destructive. *Tikkun Olam* work which makes credible and meaningful contributions to the well-being of humanity, done so out of humility, sincere conviction and in concert with other groups and peoples offers an especially powerful alternative to these disturbing perceptions. Needless to say, it can only offer that alternative if pursued for its own sake and with integrity, with real commitment over time and not as an exercise in image-building and public relations.

3) BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

A salient feature of today's world is the steady growth and sophistication of global networks of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which interact in increasingly complex and cross-cutting ways with one another and with international bodies, public and private. All these connections are of course deeply wired into the Internet. We see, in other words, alongside the increasing interconnectedness of governments, economies and markets, the steady emergence of a global civil society, an international society defined neither by governments nor economics as such, in which NGOs – and the values, interests and commitments they represent – play a very significant role.

And so, there simply is no denying that part of the *appeal of Tikkun Olam* work is that it seems to offer the possibility of enhancing the Jewish People's position within global civil society in a number of ways, and of fostering

3. This analysis was put forth by Abraham Isaac Kook, see his canonical work *Orot*, pp. 70-72, (*Shemonah Qevatzim* III:1-2), English version in Bezael Naor, ed. & tr., *Orot* (Northvale & London: Jason Aronson, 1993), pp. 176-178.

positive images of the Jewish People, as is indeed the case for any number of polities, institutions or individuals who engage in idealistically-charged and humanitarian work. *Similarly, Tikkun Olam* may beckon as an avenue for the expression of Jewish ethics in the international geopolitical arena apart from the wrenching and at times seemingly intractable moral dilemmas in which the State of Israel finds itself. Yet it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that these collateral *effects of Tikkun Olam* work will be meaningless – and indeed counterproductive – if they are pursued as ends in themselves and are not anchored in a good faith moral commitment, pursued on its own terms and to substantive ends of social and global responsibility.⁴

And it is worth emphasizing again the need for humility in pursuing this work if it is to be sustainable and true to Jewish and other moral visions.

Questions and Critical Thoughts

Notwithstanding all the above, serious examination of the present-day *Tikkun Olam* enterprise as a whole must reckon with some very substantive questions and criticisms, especially given that we face in the coming years a shrinking pool of Jewish resources.

Three serious sets of questions must be addressed in the present-day context of *Tikkun Olam*:

- 1) Is this the sort of humanitarian and charitable “feel good” work that does little other than to assuage the consciences of those involved in it at best, and often ignores the complex dimensions of problems?
- 2) *Can Tikkun Olam* serve as a meaningful, long-term ground for Jewish identity in the absence of other commitments, or is *talk of Tikkun Olam* as a vehicle for Jewish identity just a particularly edifying way of changing the subject?

4. Indeed parading one’s social awareness is not only self-defeating but even self-parodying. This is the argument of Sarah Moore’s recent book *Ribbon Culture: Charity, Compassion and Public Awareness* (London: Palgrave/MacMillan, 2008) see the review at http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/reviewofbooks_article/4919/

- 3) What is the relationship *between Tikkun Olam* and political work and advocacy? Can there be a broadly shared *concept of Tikkun Olam* which might serve as a reference point for many different Jewish communities and groupings while still maintaining enough definition to be operationally meaningful and morally compelling, indeed normative?

The Problems with Humanitarianism

Critics of humanitarian assistance have pointed out several problems with the construct as a whole, which are of particular relevance here. Humanitarian assistance can often seem as an exercise in what Rudyard Kipling famously labeled “The White Man’s Burden,” a condescending attempt to ease perceived Western guilt with programs which are oblivious to worse or local conditions, politics and cultures.

On the colloquial level, we are all familiar with the problems of well-intentioned volunteers or entities wandering into places about which they know little, intending to do good and at times doing the reverse. Serious as this is, another powerful concern is that articulated by Michael Edwards of the Ford Foundation who, in criticizing what some have dubbed “philanthrocapitalism,” has pointed to “(t)he diversion of energy and resources away from structural change, institution building and deep reform, in favor of social and environmental service-provision.”⁵

Moreover, Jews in the Diaspora, and increasingly in Israel as well, by and large subscribe to free market capitalism. This may certainly be justifiable both on economic and on moral grounds, but for social justice commitments not to be hollow rhetoric, Jews as individuals and communities must be self-consciously aware of those commitments and their biases. This is not a reason to desist from humanitarianism, on the contrary, but an argument that it be done with great awareness and care.

5. See his essay “Philanthrocapitalism: After the Goldrush,” available at http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/globalisation/visions_reflections/philanthrocapitalism_after_the_goldrush

Jewish Identity: Changing the Subject?

It is unclear that *Tikkun Olam* can serve as a meaningful, long-term basis for Jewish identity in the absence of some other commitments, to Jewish peoplehood and civilization, to distinctively Jewish forms of spiritual life, the Jewish textual tradition, and so on. Simply encouraging young people who are otherwise indifferent to or estranged from Jewish life to engage in humanitarian work with no distinctive – let alone transformative – Jewish dimensions other than the label “*Tikkun Olam*” will strengthen neither Jewish identities nor Jewish life. Humanitarianism, social justice and ecological advocacy are not distinctively “Jewish” as such, and while this makes for very meaningful points of contact with people of goodwill outside the Jewish community it also suggests that in and of themselves they will not reinforce stable Jewish identities over time, no matter how they are labeled.

Political Dimensions

It goes without saying that there is seldom if ever one unequivocally “Jewish” position on most issues of social policy. This is due to the great diversity of contemporary Jewish life, the multiple and regularly conflicting perspectives to be found in the classic sources (themselves reflective of the complexities of Jewish historical experience) and the interests and values of contemporary Jewish communities.

At the same time, engaging in meaningful *Tikkun Olam* work regularly entails staking out distinctive – and regularly contentious – positions on a range of issues of political, economic and social policy.⁶ Jews act as individuals and groups within the political processes of their countries, and above all in democracies, to shape public policies which reflect not only their interests as such but also their values. They also act in international arenas to further not only specific goals relating to Jews and Israel, but also objectives relating to

⁶ A further complicating dimension is the growing recognition that issues of economic development are deeply intertwined with political development as well. The well-known but still thought-provoking finding of Amartya Sen, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, that famine is more a function of the lack of political openness and freedom than it is of economic and ecological variables as such, serves to remind us that development work, when done well, is deeply implicated in politics.

the international community as a whole, such as treaties and conventions, international efforts on issues such as refugees, climate change, rights of persons with disabilities and so on.

On a different note, Israel figures in this entire discussion in two ways. First, it is a Jewish state which on its own undertakes numerous *Tikkun Olam* projects, most notably through Mashav, the Center for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Second and more broadly, it is a society where by definition Jews assume responsibility for all of society and its welfare and which can point to many extraordinary achievements in that regard both by the State and civil society. Yet by the same token, one cannot talk about *Tikkun Olam* in an Israeli context without getting into such thorny questions as mounting income inequalities, discrimination against Arab citizens, the treatment of foreign workers, trafficking in women and the unresolved status of the Palestinians and of Judea and Samaria; these and other problems threaten to undercut the moral suasion of Israeli and Jewish social justice efforts as a whole.

All the above critical comments are not arguments for inaction but rather a spur to further and disciplined thinking on the concrete meanings of *Tikkun Olam*.

Tentative Policy Directions and Recommendations

This discussion does yield a number of conclusions and tentative policy recommendations:

***Tikkun Olam* ought to be recognized as a major, over-arching Jewish value**

Jewish life proceeds through a basic conceptual vocabulary – including such terms as Torah, Jewish People, Mitzvah – and *Tikkun Olam* ought to be incorporated into that basic lexicon, with the full awareness that there is no obviously or unequivocally “Left” or “Right” way to live up to that ideal. Of course a major challenge here is developing a broadly shared concept of *Tikkun Olam* which might speak to a wide range of people and yet be substantive, concrete and compelling, even commanding.

At this point we might suggest a productive working definition of *Tikkun Olam* as Jewish social responsibility arising out of a Jewish commitment to human flourishing and well-being, guided by over-arching moral imperatives, as articulated and interpreted through Jewish history and tradition. The normative – or if you will, mitzvah – character of *Tikkun Olam* is vital to its effectiveness as part of a robust commitment to Jewish and human flourishing.⁷

Tikkun Olam is, in this light, not a substitute for other, more particular or more strictly spiritual or metaphysical Jewish values – but takes its place alongside them.

Articulating a distinctively Judaic moral vision for the 21st century

A searching imperative of our time, incumbent on the world community, is the creation of some sort of global moral language which would in some measure emerge in part from – and reflect the differing teachings and historical experiences of – the great and varied religious traditions which have shaped our world.⁸ Jews and Judaism must take part in this global conversation, because we do indeed have much to say. Judaism's vast library of texts and equally vast range of historical experience, heroic and tragic, mined with knowledge and care, is a large and precious resource for contemporary moral reflection and action.

To take several examples:

- 1) One can think of distinctive Jewish contributions to rights discourse, which would integrate thinking of rights with corresponding discussion of responsibilities, including responsibilities of rulers and regimes.

7. One particularly eloquent articulation of this idea is put forth in Eugene Korn's essay, "the Mitzvah of Tikkun Olam," to be found at http://www.learningtogive.org/religiousinstructors/voices/mitzvah_tikkun_olam.asp

Another is the presentation by Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth available at

http://www.ou.org/public/Publib/tikkun.htm#_ftnref26

My thanks to Dov Maimon for directing me to these essays.

8. One particularly helpful introduction to thinking about these issues is the slim but powerful volume by Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

- 2) Jews have for centuries been a deeply globalized people who have nonetheless maintained a very distinctive identity, due not only to external circumstances but also their own inner resources. This combination can serve as a powerful source of reflection for others on navigating the ethical and societal challenges of globalization.
- 3) Jewish tradition may have distinctive contributions to make to contemporary thinking on economics and human development. Thus for instance, the approach to tzedakah,(the traditional Hebrew term for 'charity,' whose literal meaning is 'justice') as the cultivation of self-reliance and moral perfection, most famously enunciated by Maimonides but resonant elsewhere in the tradition, interestingly intersects with emerging ideas of development which see economic growth as simply one element in a larger picture in the development of human capabilities and flourishing.⁹
- 4) The practices of Sabbatical and Jubilee years offer a distinctive model linking ecological sustainability and social justice, one worth pondering.
- 5) The interaction throughout Jewish history of the prophetic and rabbinic/ sage models of leadership offer instructive models of the relationship between moral and legal/political leadership. A distinctive feature of Jewish ethical thinking is the ceaseless effort to integrate the passionate moralism of the Biblical prophets with the detailed, case-by-case analysis of Talmudic law. This centuries-long interpretive drama bears potentially great significance for the creation of contemporary moral discourse across the globe.
- 6) The Jewish mobilizations in response to the genocides in the Balkans and Darfur bespeak an historical sensibility especially tuned to the possibility of

9. I am referring to the celebrated passage in Maimonides' Code, the Mishne Torah, in Hilkhot Matnot `Aniyim (Laws of Gifts to the Poor) 8:10-14, and to the "capabilities approach" to development put forward in recent years by Nobelist Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, see, e.g. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

genocide – a sensibility that deserves to be explored and whose lessons can be shared with others.¹⁰

- 7) The Jewish commitment to lifelong learning and the unique forms of study to be found in the traditional *beit midrash* have much to offer educational reformers today.

Jews have over the centuries cultivated not only a passion for learning but a variety of educational forms and methods, which, both separately from and in tandem with new information technologies, can do much to raise global education and human development.

- 8) As was noted above, the interaction of principles and pragmatism is a hallmark of the Jewish legal, halakhic, tradition – and that approach offers rich resources for thinking through the relationship between ideals and reality on a range of issues. Jewish bioethicists working out of that tradition have already made distinctive contributions to that field, and provide a model for further endeavors.
- 9) The rich tradition of tzedakah is a model of communal social responsibility in the absence of a strong welfare state; it also connects to the burgeoning area of Micro Philanthropy, which pools large numbers of small donations resulting in more direct interaction between donors and recipients, or "givers" and "doers," higher resolution in the focus of giving and the creation of new networks of cooperation.¹¹ This could reinterpret

10. The issues of human rights protection and democracy-promotion, though grounded in deep moral intuitions and in the long run vital both for Jewish survival and global well-being, are nonetheless complex and deserve careful study. Thus advocacy on behalf of international treaties and conventions and broadly-based UN and similar organizations for the promotion of human rights, may for a variety of reasons, some deeply structural, result in profoundly unintended consequences. I have discussed this at some length in "Human Rights, Democracy and the Inescapability of Politics, or, Human Dignity Thick and Thin," *Israel Law Review*, (2005:1-2) pp. 358-377. A PDF is available on request.

11. See Tom Munnecke and Heather Wood Ion, "Towards a Model of Micro Philanthropy," <http://www.givingspace.org/papers/microphilanthropy.htm>
It is of course related to the somewhat more-developed field of Microcredit, which fuels economic development by small loans to small business and lone entrepreneurs, often women, in developing countries

a time-honored commitment to charitable giving as a moral imperative, incumbent even on the poor themselves, for the more diffuse social and global landscape of today.¹²

- 10) The traditional idea and discipline of “keeping kosher” can be extended to a broader range of concerns, such as the treatment of workers in workplaces, or ecology.¹³

One may differ with some of these ideas, suggest others – and deep humility is always called for when talking about trying to shape the world. Yet this list should, if nothing else, stimulate thinking on a range of possibilities for thought and action.

Moving from Ideas into action

"Great is study, for it leads to practice" (Babylonian Talmud, Qidushin 40b)

Bringing these more philosophical ideas to life entails a number of concrete steps.

- 1) Efforts should be undertaken to develop a strong interdisciplinary *Tikkun Olam* study group, based in Jerusalem and in dialogue with peers elsewhere, which will bring together a range of scholars and practitioners for ongoing focused and disciplined work on *Tikkun Olam's* philosophical and policy dimensions. The objective of this group will be to think hard in a

12. Danny Siegel, founder of the Ziv Tzedakah Fund, is widely regarded as the pioneer of Jewish micro philanthropy, see his website: www.dannysiegel.com.

13. A sterling example is the “kosher” certification program of the Israeli religiously-based social justice NGO Be’maaglei Tzedek, which certifies that eating establishments and other workplaces adhere to legally-mandated standards as regards wages and work-conditions. See their website www.mtzedek.org.il

The notion of eco-kashrut, incorporating traditional kashrut with ecological and other concerns was first put forward in the 1970s by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and has been popularized by Rabbi Arthur Waskow. A particularly engaging website addressing this and related issues is www.jcarrot.org

disciplined fashion and in both theoretical and practical terms about how the Jewish People might realize the many potential dimensions of *Tikkun Olam* and how those commitments might in turn enrich Jewish life.¹⁴

- 2) *Tikkun Olam* must be made a serious vehicle of Jewish identity and continuity, especially in projects for young people. Thus the study of Jewish texts ought to be incorporated into *Tikkun Olam* projects,¹⁵ and the development of appropriate materials should thus be a significant educational priority.¹⁶ Thought should be given to incorporating forms of *Tikkun Olam* into the life cycle and other developmental stages of life, into the yearly cycle and into the ongoing life of communities – not as a substitute for other forms of Jewish life but as one particularly enriching and vital dimension.
- 3) A diversity of *Tikkun Olam* work is to be encouraged, in order to allow for the expression of a range of visions and energies. A wide array of people is already involved in a wide number of *Tikkun Olam* projects under both Jewish and non-Jewish auspices, and it would be worthwhile for them to be in contact with one another for the sake of sharing ideas and information and building solidarity.
- 4) At the same time, thought should be given to developing several Jewish People-wide *Tikkun Olam* projects. One possibility is the creation of a Jewish Youth Corps which would bring together young people from

14. Some projects in this direction have already begun such as the social justice beit midrash programs of Beit Morasha in Jerusalem and Yeshivat Chovevei Torah in New York, the humanitarian assistance and religion program of the Hartog School of Tel Aviv University, and the conference on Judaism and Ecology at Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions, which yielded the important volume, Hava Tirosh-Samuelsen, ed., *Judaism and Ecology: Created World and Revealed World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). These are marvelous beginnings which deserve to be built upon and integrated into larger wholes.

15. One such example is Tevel B'Tzedek, which incorporates study of Jewish texts with on-site ecological and development work in Nepal; another is the work-study volunteer efforts done by groups of US Rabbinical students from different denominations.

16. One very interesting and creative example of such materials is the series of volumes, entitled *The Jewish Political Tradition*, jointly edited by Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam Zohar and others, published in English by Yale University Press and in Hebrew by Carmel Publishing, incorporating a wide and erudite range of primary texts with contemporary commentaries.

across the Jewish world, including the Diaspora and Israel and from across denominations (with special emphasis on projects relating to education, science and technology) for work in a range of countries or settings. Their programs would include a strong learning component as well.

Tikkun Olam is a project which has the potential to unleash special energies and passions – and that potential needs to be realized.

Conclusion: What does a Repaired World Look Like?

What ought to be the guiding vision of *Tikkun Olam*? What is a “repaired world,” “an *olam metukan*”? Here as elsewhere Jewish tradition speaks in many voices, and utopianism is as deceptive and dangerous an illusion here as elsewhere. But I would nonetheless give the last word for now to one of the most authoritative voices in all of Jewish history. Moses Maimonides, at the close of his encyclopedic, fourteen-volume treatise of Jewish law, the *Mishne Torah*, shares his vision of the Messianic era which has fired human imaginations for centuries:¹⁷

Do not think that in the Messianic age the way of the world will pass away or that there will be some change in the order of creation; rather the way of the world will continue...and all will return to true morals, and neither steal nor ravage...The sages and prophets did not long for the Messianic era in order to be world-sovereigns, or to rule over the nations, or to be exalted by the nations, or to eat, drink and be merry but rather to be free to devote themselves to Torah and its wisdom, with none to oppress or disturb, and thus attain life eternal. And in that time there will be neither famine, nor war, neither jealousy nor competition...as is written (Isaiah 11:9), “and the world will be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters blanket the sea.”

17. Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, *Hilkhot Melakhim* (Laws of Kings) 12:1, 4-5.