

ROSH HASHONNA

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L'SHONA TOVA EVERYONE

TODAY I AM PLEASED to have been invited to give a sermon during the holidays. I am going to talk about Tikun Olam. We all know that its about "repairing the world". As this service is a Healing service Tikkun Olam is an appropriate theme today, given how much the world needs repairing..I am going to talk about its history, expand on its meaning and propose ways that we need to make this repair

Simply, tikun olam is any activity that improves the world. But lets explore this idea a bit further. It is a concept that didn't come from the Torah. Rather, it appeared in the Mishna, then the Talmud, from classical rabbinical teachings, during the first millennium, CE. In the Mishna, tikun olam has a range of meanings: that Mishna's writings were based on the idea that Jews have a responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual and material welfare, but also for the welfare of society at large. Also, that tikun olam means to improve, fix, repair. There is an art to tikun olam. It is a fine tuning of our world's voices. With each tikkun, we are creating meaning out of confusion, harmony from noise, revealing the unique part each creation plays in a universal symphony .

The Kabbalists saw the human being as an active party in the improvement of the universe. Rabbi Yitzchuk Luria's ,thinking was that there is a divine spark in everything. 'Tik kun Olam was interpreted on a cosmic level. The thought was that God's essence is being repaired through Tikkin Olam, not the present.

Tikkun Olam is the ultimate act of love in partnership with whatever we call our God, in the creation of heaven and earth. Whatever we do or are, it's with purpose. We are being led to the places that await our repair. It forces people to take ownership of our world. A tall order for sure. And what does this ownership look like? What does it mean to you? Taken on a personal level, it's for each of us to decide what your ownership is, what your world looks like. It suggests that we work, repair in all communities, not only Jewish ones. Love the stranger and the poor is one of its edicts.

The Mishna also refers to social policy legislation providing extra protection for those disadvantaged. This means that tikkun olam can occur behind the scenes, working for change at the political level, whether it be for better, affordable day care, better long term care solutions, effective health policies for all. Tikkun Olam is to create pragmatic legislation to protect the vulnerable and preserve the integrity of society.

But back to some history. Rabbinic intervention on matters of Tikkun Olam was justified, in order to maintain the social order of the day. Only in the early 1200's did Tikkun Olam become part of the liturgy in the Aleinu prayer. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Irtori founder of the modern Chief Rabbinate of Israel in the 1920's, was among the first Jewish thinkers who believed that Tikkun Olam could be achieved by humans acting in history, by creating a Jewish state. However, the term Tikkun Olam never caught on in Israel as it did in North America.

The Holocaust had a major impact on people and their belief system. The relationship between humans and their Almighty, whatever it was, had to be reconsidered. Tikkun Olam was quite obscure until the 1950's.

By the 1970's, Tikkun Olam became associated with social justice through the Conservative and Reconstructionist Jews, especially those activists involved in the Havurah movement. People opposing the United States in the Viet Nam war, for example, was seen as Tikkin Olam and as a universal concept.

All throughout this talk, if you're like me, you're probably thinking about what you are currently doing for Tikkun Olam, or, what you've been meaning to do, but haven't gotten around to it. Or, 'is what I'm doing "enough" to count as a repair for the world? And do I have enough time to do one more thing?' Some of the literature in my research, says that even the smallest action can count as a repair. At an earlier time, I might have agreed that sorting our garbage qualified, but now, we are seeing the results of the world burning up, so small actions, although reflect an awareness of the problem, are not nearly enough. The situation is dire. Fires have been all around us. I feel strongly that we need to embrace the climate action movement. Seniors for Climate Action Now, better known as SCAN, an organization I belong to, is working towards building a mass movement to let all levels of government and large corporations know or be reminded that the world's environment is in very deep trouble. And to also know that the small measures some of them are making while continuing to produce fossil fuel products are not significant enough and cancel out what positive actions they have made, to have the impact that is needed to curb carbon from entering the environment.

I don't want to end on a doom and gloom note, as positive actions are taking place all over the province and the world. Without guilt or judgement, we can all be active in Tikkun Olam,

repairing our world, one at a time As the Talmud teaches us, we are not obligated to the complete the work, but nor are we free to ignore it.. For the new year, working for justice and equality is a part of what being Jewish is all about. Again L'Shona Tova!