

A CUFI PRIMER: Tikkun Olam - The Heart of Israel

What is Tikkun Olam?

The Hebrew phrase *tikkun olam* developed over time but has its roots in the Bible (where it is used to mean “to make straight, establish, arrange or repair”). It literally means “repairing the world” and is often used to describe social justice and improving society.

*Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
And thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you,
Just as you have said!
Hate evil, love good,
And establish justice in the gate!... But let justice roll down like waters
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

Amos 5:14-15a, 24

The Talmud, a central text of Rabbinical Judaism, says “If you save one life, it is as if you have saved the world.” The concept of *tikkun olam* within Judaism originated as the injunction to behave and act constructively and beneficially. In the modern era, the principle of *tikkun olam* carries the idea that Jews bear responsibility not only for their own moral, spiritual, and material welfare, but also for the welfare of society at large. Contemporary rabbis view the term as meaning “the establishment of Godly qualities throughout the world.”

Tikkun Olam in Practice

Israel is described in the Bible as a light unto the nations (Isaiah 42:6). And modern Israel’s medical and technological breakthroughs are a blessing to all of humanity, fulfilling ancient prophecies.

Today, Israel is a leading innovation destination for an increasing number of multinational corporations utilizing Israel’s more than 6,000 startups for new ideas. A new report maps 35 countries that are currently active in Israel and are being challenged by and absorbing Israel’s approach to innovation.

For example, Watergen, an Israeli company, creates water from the world’s most available resource: air. This groundbreaking technology taps into the atmosphere and uses the humidity in the air to provide fresh and clean drinking water to people anywhere, from a remote village to a busy city.

Israeli scientists at Tel Aviv University recently produced the first ever 3D printed heart with human tissue and vessels. The first time that anyone has successfully engineered and printed an entire heart complete with cells, blood vessels, ventricles and chambers, this trailblazing achievement promises to transform the lives of many people in the future.

From creating “streams in the desert” to medical breakthroughs, Israel remains on the forefront of technological advancement and continues to make new discoveries that are changing the world as we know it for the better every single day.



For instance, Israel is always among the first on the scene at international disaster sites.. The IDF medical and rescue teams have responded to earthquakes in every corner of the globe including Mexico, Armenia, Turkey, El Salvador, India, and Nepal. In August 2018, IsraAID, the leading Israeli humanitarian NGO, sent a response team to the southern Indian state of Kerala which had been hit by record flooding. IsraAID's team distributed 450 relief kits, including hygiene and cleaning items, soap, hand sanitizer, and water purification sachets.



In January 2019, a dam at an iron-ore mine collapsed on a large crowd of employees. At least 40 people were confirmed killed, 23 hospitalized and at least 300 were missing. Buildings were damaged from the mud rushing out of the dam which also caused many residents of the town to flee. In response, about 130 naval, engineering, firefighting and medical experts of IDF Home Front Command as well as Israeli ZAKA Search and Rescue volunteers were sent to Brazil to assess damages and locate and tend to the injured.

Whoever destroys a single life is considered by Scripture to have destroyed the whole world, and whoever saves a single life is considered by Scripture to have saved the whole world."

- Talmud

In 2013 when Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines, Israel sent humanitarian and medical aid. When hurricanes Irma and Harvey ravaged Florida and Texas in 2017, Israel was one of the first responders on the ground as well.



Furthermore, Israel consistently shares its innovative technologies with the world not only when disaster strikes but as a way to improve people's day-to-day lives. For example, Israel developed Babysense, a breathing monitor that has helped protect over 600,000 infants from sudden infant death syndrome, and the PillCam, a disposable miniature video camera that patients can swallow now utilized by doctors in more than 60 countries worldwide.

Additionally, Israeli company OrCam developed eyeglasses that help the visually impaired see. The device has a camera and "reads" aloud what it sees to the user. Israel's Emergency Bandage has been used by American soldiers in Iraq and has saved countless lives by preventing hemorrhaging.

Finally, Save A Child's Heart is an Israeli non-profit organization that performs heart surgeries for free on children in need from developing countries. As part of the process, Save a Child's Heart also brings in medical personnel from the patients' countries and trains them in lifesaving pediatric cardiac care. This organization is also training up the first pediatric heart surgeons from developing countries so they can go back home and perform surgeries for their own people.



Tikkun olam lies at the very heart of Israel. Though Israel is a tiny country, it does a tremendous amount of good in the world. From being one of the first responders whenever a natural disaster strikes across the globe to sharing life-saving medical technologies with communities all over the world, the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam* has developed in Israel into a practice of doing good through manifold technological and medical innovations that are repairing the world.