“If you believe it’s possible to ruin, you should believe it’s possible to repair/l’takein.” — Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan

Tikkun olam, in the earliest texts, means establishing order and balance whether in Nature or Creation, as God does when balancing the forces of compassion and judgment, or in society, as the rabbis do when they amend the laws of the Torah. The social meaning of tikkun olam, which became primary, refers to acts that establish and repair or improve society (that is, the present world) in the course of our normal lives and institutions. An emergent meaning that has roots in the combining of these themes is that humanity is responsible for repairing the natural world that we have despoiled. (See especially the text from Ecclesiastes Rabbah and the second quote from Rav Kook.)

None of the earlier midrashim, nor the Mishnah, nor the two Talmuds, know the meaning of tikkun olam as something for which one strives in order to bring redemption, nor do they know the meaning of tikkun olam as the end of idolatry. These two motifs derive from the Aleinu prayer, which, though written as early as the 3rd century or earlier, probably did not use the term לתקן l’takein until around the end of the first millennium. However, this word change soon became accepted in the liturgy of almost every Jewish community, the concept of tikkun olam transformed to include those meanings as well.

Tikkun olam includes the many actions people take to help each other and to create a society. From the earliest texts of Jewish philosophical thought (also starting around the turn of the first millennium), tikkun olam explicitly includes concepts of justice and loving one’s neighbor. A messianic conception of social justice naturally flows out of the convergence of eschatological motifs derived from the Aleinu and ideas about sustaining and improving society found in the Mishnah and midrash.

The influence of humanism brought the integration of these concepts to its fullest fruition. A fairly complete expression of the idea that tikkun olam includes what we think of as social justice can already be found as early as 1797 in Pinchas Hurwitz’s Sefer Habrit. Full-throated expressions of messianic social justice appear in Zionist writing at least by 1859 (Natan Friedland, Kos Yeshu’ot), and this becomes a central motif in Palestine in the thought of Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook and Rav Yehuda Ashlag. Youthful socialist pioneers in Palestine even aspired to be “m’taknei olam,” world-shapers and reformers.¹

Perhaps surprisingly, the idea that everyday ritual acts specifically bring about tikkun ha’olam is also somewhat newer, being developed furthest by Kabbalists like Moshe Chaim Luzzato (also 18th century), though this idea has roots in the Zohar’s interpretation of the sacrifices.² The claim that the association of tikkun olam with the observance of traditional ritual mitzvot is ancient, while social justice tikkun olam is recent, is not supportable.

¹ Interestingly, there were those who critiqued the idea of being a m’takein olam since the late 1800s both in Europe and Palestine—some because it was used by socialists who did not root their ideology in Torah, and some because it was not focused enough on the political practicalities of building a state. (See Yehuda Ashlag, second quote.)

² In earlier texts, mitzvot are done for the tikkun of divine worlds, tzorekh gavoha. See e.g. terms like tikkun hakavod or hatikkun ha’elyon (unifying/rectifying the divine presence/upper realm) in Meir ibn Gabbai, Avodat Hakodesh 18.
Historically the texts below go as far as pre-state Palestine. What happened in America after these texts is fairly straightforward: Mordecai Kaplan’s student, educator Alexander Dushkin, made *tikkun olam* (as activist world-repair) a central pillar in his design for Jewish educational programs in America in the 1940’s, and the same principle was popularized by Shlomo Bardin through his Brandeis Camp Institute in the 1950’s. Both Dushkin and Bardin were deeply involved in developing the Israeli educational system, so it was natural for them to bring this meaning from Zionist culture to America. The Reform movement ran with this idea to create what people call “*tikkun olam*” Judaism, inspired (at its best) by prophetic principles of justice. However, Mordecai Kaplan himself already pointed out in 1934 the dangers of separating *tikkun olam* from national identity and from other mitzvot like Shabbat or Torah study.

While it is clear that *tikkun olam* was connected to social justice long before its advent in North America, it also includes much more than social justice. Furthermore, *tikkun olam* does not equate with liberalism or any other single political ideology. In fact, a few of the actions designated as *tikkun olam* in the past are distinctly contrary to a liberal agenda (see the second quote from Rambam). Moreover, the enormous significance of *tikkun olam* in liberal Judaism blossomed after World War II and the Shoah, and the historical relation of this phenomenon as a response to the cataclysmic destruction of European Jewry has not been fully explored. (*Tikkun olam*’s theological relation to the Shoah, however, has been deeply explored in the work of authors such as Emil Fackenheim and Yitz Greenberg.)

Following the texts, I give a list of the many meanings and translations of *tikkun* and *tikkun olam*, and terms that are parallel to *tikkun olam* (I). I also discuss how the texts were selected and outline some other uses of the term *tikkun* that are not necessarily connected with *tikkun ha’olam* (II), and give a brief bibliography (III). It feels important to acknowledge that because we are only looking at texts written before World War II (and the subsequent viral explosion of *tikkun olam* in America), none of the authors are women.

We live in a time where it is no longer possible to imagine the *tikkun* of the people Israel apart from *tikkun* of the human species, or the *tikkun* of the human species apart from *tikkun* of the more-than-human world we call Nature. How this will affect the evolution of *tikkun olam* from this point on is something each reader of these texts can help decide. May this evolution bring us ever closer to true *tikkun olam*.

Though the task is great, Rebbe Nachman urges us to persist, saying, “If you believe it is possible to ruin, believe it is possible to repair *l’takein.”

Table of Contents


One who is half slave and half a free person, he serves his master one day and then himself one day — the words of Beit Shammai. Beit Shammai said to them: You set it right (tikkantem) for his master, for himself you didn’t set it right. To marry a maidservant isn’t possible because half of him is free. [To marry] a free woman isn’t possible because half of him is still slave. — So [would you] cancel [his obligation to reproduce]? But isn’t it true that the world wasn’t created except for bearing fruit and reproducing — as it says, (Isaiah 45:18) “Not to be waste did God create her (the Earth); to be settled upon did God form her”! Rather, because of setting right the world (mip nei tikken ha-olam), they force his master, who [must] make him a free person and write a contract for [him to redeem the remaining] half of his value. And Beit Hillel turned to teach according to the words of Beit Shammai.

**Aleinu prayer, originally from Rosh Hashanah Musaf, ~ 3rd cent.**

It is on us to praise [the One]…for You didn’t make us like the nations of the Earth…for they pray to what is emptiness… and we bow before the Sovereign of sovereigns, the Holy One, blessed be, who spread out heavens and founded an earth…therefore we hope for You, YHVH our God, to see quickly the manifest glory of Your strength, to cause the idols to pass away from the Earth and the unbreathing gods to be cut off, to establish a world under the reign of the Almighty/All-nourishing (l’takein olam b’malkhut Shaddai), and all people of flesh will call on Your name, to cause all the wicked of the Earth to turn toward you.

**Genesis Rabbah 4:6, ~ 4th cent.**

The word *tikkun* has been translated in different ways throughout — see note (2).

Tradition attributes *Aleinu* to Joshua, while most scholars consider Rav (3rd cent. Babylon) as its author or compiler. Note: the original wording of *Aleinu* might have been בְּמַלְכוּת שֶׁכְּבָר (b’malkhut she’ker). If so, the standard wording of the midrash texts might date as late as 1000 CE or later. If so, then its place as a *tikkun olam* text would be after the midrash texts that follow.

---

3 The word *tikkun* has been translated in different ways throughout — see note (2).

4 Tradition attributes *Aleinu* to Joshua, while most scholars consider Rav (3rd cent. Babylon) as its author or compiler. Note: the original wording of *Aleinu* might have been בְּמַלְכוּת שֶׁכְָבָר — if so, the standard wording of the text would be after the midrash texts that follow.

Why is it not written about the second day [of Creation], “for it is good”? Rav Chanina says: Because on [that day] division/argument was created, as it is said (Gen. 1:6): “Let there be a separation between waters (above) and waters (below).” Said Rav Tavyomo (Rabbi “Good Day”): If a division that was created for the sake of ordering the world and settling it / l’tikuno shel olam ul’yishuvo doesn’t have an “it is good” in it, any division to disturb [the world], all the more so.

4. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:13, ~ 5th cent.

“See the work of God—who can fix what he\(^5\) twisted?” (Eccl. 7:13) — In the time that the Holy One created the first human, He took him and brought him around all the trees of Gan Eden, and said to him: See My works, how lovely and praiseworthy they are, and all I created, for your sake I created [it]. Put your mind [to do this], that you don’t ruin or destroy my world /olami, for if you bring ruin, there is no one who will set [the world] right (y’takein) after you.

5. R’ Bachya ibn Pakuda (1050-1120, Spain), Chovot Hal’vavot (Duties of the Heart) 8:3

[C]oncerning the one who believes in taking account with oneself concerning what one is obligated [to do] for God blessed be… I will explain thirty ways [to do this]… And the twenty-second is: one’s account with oneself concerning one’s involvement with people in establishing the world (takanat ha’olam), from plowing and harvest [to] buying and selling and [such] matters through which some people are helped by some [others] in [the process of] settling the world (yishuv ha’olam) — namely, that one should love for them [to receive] what one would love for oneself from them, and that one should hate for them what one would hate for oneself from them, and should have compassion for them, and according to one’s ability [one should] push away from them whatever would harm them, as it’s written (Lev. 19:18), “And you will love your neighbor like yourself.”

6. Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204, Spain, Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Sanhedrin 23:9

In the verse “He” refers to God, but the midrash interprets it as referring to Adam, who is “the work of God”.

Every judge who judges truth unto its [deepest] truth, even for one hour, it’s as if he fixed the whole world entirely (tikein et kol ha'olam kulo) and caused the Shekhinah to rest upon Israel, as it is said (Ps. 82:1), “God stands in the council of the divine.”

7. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot M'lakhim* 3:10

Commandment #232: To not cause a naive/unaware person to stumble on the road — as it is said (Lev. 19:14), “And before a blind person don’t place a stumbling block”… The root of the mitzvah is known, for [the way of] setting right the world and settling it (tikkun ha’olam v’yishuvo) is to guide people and to give them in all their actions good advice… and so did [the sages] say (Talmud *Avodah Zarah* 15b), that it is forbidden to sell weapons (instruments of war) or anything that has in it [the capacity to] harm many to non-Jews, except if it is to sell them so that they can defend us, and so too is it forbidden to sell them to a Jew who sells to non-Jews, or to Jewish criminals, and all of it is forbidden because of the command “before a blind person [don’t place a stumbling block].”

8. *Sefer Hachinukh* (13th cent., Spain), 232 (240)

Any who kill people without being clearly seen or without [being given] warning even with one witness… [since there isn’t enough evidence for them to be found guilty by a court,] the king has authority to execute them and to [thereby] fix the world (l’takein ha’olam), according to what the hour needs.

9. Rabbeni Yonah Gerondi (1200-1263, Spain), commentary on *Pirkei Avot* 5:10

“[There are four types of people… The one who says,] ‘What’s mine is yours and what’s yours is mine’ [is] a ‘people of the land’ (am ha’aretz = an ignorant peasant)” (*Pirkei Avot* 5:10) — Because this one wants the betterment of the world (tikkun ha’olam), he is called an am ha’aretz (= one who cares about the people), for he wants [people] to take and to give, because through this the love among them increases. And even though this is a good quality for organizing the world (tikkun ha’olam), it does not come from wisdom, for the one who hates gifts [and doesn’t accept them] is the one who will [truly] thrive, and the best type is [one who wants] to give and not to take.

---

6 At the request of *Protocols*, pronouns referring to every human that are in the masculine are kept so in the translation.

10. Sefer HaZohar⁷ (13th cent., Spain), 1:38a

Said Rabbi Yitzhak: All the generations that developed from Seth (the third son of Adam and Eve), all of them were righteous and pious. Afterward they spread out and bore children, and they learned crafts and wisdom of the world, [how] to finish off [each other] with spears and knives, until Noah came and made for them a reparation of the world (itkin lun tikuna d’alma = tikkun ha’olam), to farm and to prepare the earth (l’atkanah ar’ah), for in early times there was no sowing and reaping, [but] after they needed this, as it’s written (Gen. 8:22), “Unto all the days of the Earth [sowing and reaping and summer and winter…won’t stop].”⁸ Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One prepares for fixing the world (l’tak’na alma), and repairing the spirit (l’atkana rucha) of humanity, so that they may extend [their] days forever—that is what’s written (Isaiah 65:22): “For as the days of the tree are the days of my people…”

11. Sefer HaZohar, 1:242a

[T]he awakening [caused by] sacrifices is restitution for the world / tikuna d’alma and blessing for all the worlds.

12. R’ Menachem ben Moshe Habavli (d.1571, Hevron, Eretz Yisrael), Sefer Ta’amei Mitzvot (Book of the Reasons for the Commandments)

One shouldn’t cause a naive person to falter through advice that isn’t sensible, as it says (Lev. 19:14), “before a blind person don’t put a stumbling block”. The reason for this mitzvah is “And you will love your neighbor like yourself” — what is hateful to you don’t do to your friend (Talmud Shabbat 31a), and this [brings about] repair of the world and its settlement (tikkun olam viy’shuvo).

13. R’ Menachem Azariah DeFano (1548-1620, Italy), Asarah Ma’amarot (Ten Utterances), 3:34

Whether the Zohar arises out of more ancient sources was once hotly debated among scholars, and tradition associates the Zohar with the 2nd century sage Shimon bar Yochai. Generally, scholars presume the Zohar to be authored by Moshe deLeon or those of his circle. Regardless of its author or authors, its historical impact on Jewish thought begins in the 13th cent.

The idea that Noah invented the tools of agriculture is found in Midrash Tanchuma (B’reishit 11).

---

⁷ Whether the Zohar arises out of more ancient sources was once hotly debated among scholars, and tradition associates the Zohar with the 2nd century sage Shimon bar Yochai. Generally, scholars presume the Zohar to be authored by Moshe deLeon or those of his circle. Regardless of its author or authors, its historical impact on Jewish thought begins in the 13th cent.

⁸ The idea that Noah invented the tools of agriculture is found in Midrash Tanchuma (B’reishit 11).
14. R’ Shlomo Marini (d. 1670, Italy), Sefer Tikkun Olam (Repair of the World), on Isaiah 60:18

“No more will violence be heard in your land, destruction and shattering in your borders, and you will call salvation your walls, and your gates, praise.” (Isa. 60:18) The character of humanity will be repaired and all the people of the city will pursue justice and uprightness, these with those, and even [when they are] outside the city they will be secure from destruction and cataclysm, in the manner of God’s salvation and the world’s restoration (tikkun ha’olam).

15. R’ Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746, Italy), Derekh Hashem (God’s Way) 2, “Israel and the Nations”

Upon the actions of Israel did the Lord blessed be hang the restoration of all Creation (tikkun kol hab’ri’ah) and its elevation…and made God’s behavior consequent upon their work to shine and to make [blessing] flow, or to close off and to be hidden, God forbid, according to their actions.

16. R’ Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, Da’at T’vunot (Knowing Understanding) 225

The person who is commanded (by Torah/God) has power in his hand, given from the One who is blessed, that he may repair with his actions the repairs needed by Creation, which is not the case for one who is not commanded. And the proof of the matter is the priesthood, for the priest (kohen) doing service is repairing the whole world (m’takein kol ha’olam), and (yet) the stranger who does service profanes, and is subject to death.
One finds, since the world is created for my sake, I need to see and look in every moment into repairing the world (b’zikun ha’olam), and to replenish what the world lacks, and to pray on their behalf.


The essence of loving neighbors is that a person would love all members of the human species, from whatever people they are from and from whatever language they speak, for each is a person in [God’s] image and in [God’s] likeness like him/herself, and engaged in settling the world or building or plowing or sowing or distributing or selling or whatever kind of craftsperson, or one who figures out how to attain the needs of the world with wise designs and inventions…for by means of these things the world is established according to its proper form (ha’olam oneid k’tikuno) and is sustained in its wholeness (umikveyim bishleimuto), and all things [come to] exist “which God created to do” (Gen. 2:3), and which he has done, and “behold it is very good” (Gen. 1:31) for all humanity.


It is said after deep inspection [that] the way of giving through [using one’s] body is more glorious and praiseworthy than giving through the pocketbook… However, just because this type [of giving] is more glorious, a person should not abandon the second type [of giving], for truly the second type is more needed for repairing the community of humanity (l’takanat kahalat min ha’enoshi). And it’s better in the eyes of God and humanity to furnish the poor from the blessings of one’s house, to supply the poor from one’s own money and to free the captives and give ransom for their lives and not feel [the loss of] the ransom money, to give one’s bread to the hungry and to cover the naked with clothing, to loan money to the poor, and things like this. And the essence of fulfilling the obligation of loving one’s neighbor is of this second type, even though “both of

⁹ Sefer Habrit was one of the most important and widely read books ever published in the modern period among religious Jews.
them as one are good” (Eccl. 11:6) for the fixing of the world (l’takanat ha-olam), and for the value of joining together the human species…

And now let us explore how many levels there are in these three kinds of doing good [through ideas, through one’s body, and through property], and they are: 1) that one should help a single person… 2) that one should do this for many, for example if there were a town without a source of water… and one dug with one’s strength a well for them… 3) that one does good for all the people in the world, for example, one used one’s body and one’s strength to make a bridge for a road that many pass through… or that one would hire workers to dig with one’s strength a well for them…

20. R’ Pinchas ben David Soshis (1770-1841), Pardes Hamelekh (The King’s Orchard), 107b

The purpose of Creation was for the sake of the human being to have free choice in order for him to be punished or rewarded. And the reward and the punishment is not from the perspective of the Holy One, God forbid, that there would be some benefit or harm to God from the actions of a person … rather it is from the perspective of fixing the world and settling it (tikkun ha’olam viy’shuvo), for the righteous are restoring the world (m’taknim ha’olam) through their actions, and the wicked are destroying it and turning it back into chaos and void, and limiting the divine flow [of abundance].

21. R’ Natan Friedland (1808-1883, Breslau)¹⁰, Kos Yeshu’ot (The Cup of Salvation, Amsterdam 1859),
13a

Thus said YHVH of hosts, the [fast days] will become for the house of Judah joy and gladness...and you, love Truth and Peace” (Zech. 8:19)—for these days were the beginning for the troubles and the exile. And all will be fixed (y’tukan) and the days will be turned into joy and gladness, only if you will do this, “love truth and peace”... All this will Truth and Peace bring about in Israel, because of [Israel fulfilling] the obligation that they conduct themselves in truth and peace with every person in the world...

And so one finds explained in Tana DeVeit Elyahu (ch.15), that Eliyahu the prophet said [this] to one Jewish man, who sold four kor of dates (= 6 bushels) to a non-Jew and measured out for him in a dark place only half and gave it to him, and Eliyahu said to him, My son, it’s written, “Don’t oppress your neighbor.” Behold your neighbor (non-Jew) is like your brother (Jew), and your brother is like your neighbor...

And neighbor is what the [person] who joins himself [with you] is called, your brother in nearness of spirit/consciousness and in humanistic values, who will be whomever he will be (from whatever race or tribe or country or religion)—[the] only [qualification is] that he should be in the category of lovers of humanity and the upright of heart, doing justice for the oppressed and engaging in the settling of the world (yishuvah shel olam). For this you were warned by the Torah concerning loving him, and he is your neighbor like yourself, and you also [must] conduct [yourself] with these exalted qualities.

And by means of this all the world will reach the truth, for peace brings truth, and they will stand upon truth in the end, and the world will be prepared in its entirety (y’tukan ha’olam bikh’lalah) to serve [as with] a single shoulder YHVH the God of truth, and thus will be established what the singer said (Ps. 148:7-13): “Praise YHVH from the earth... kings of the earth and all the nations, nobles and all earth’s judges... Praise the name of YHVH, for the name alone is exalted”, and not the name of others.

¹⁰ Friedland was a co-founder of Hibat Zion, one of the earliest religious Zionist organizations.
And concerning that same time David said, “And now kings will become enlightened and judges of the earth be instructed” (Ps. 2:10)—the intent is that the judges will receive moral instruction (musar) from the world and they will become enlightened as to how to do righteousness for their people and justice for the nations. And this is the proper/pleasing order for [reaching] the redemption of the world (tikkun ha’olam), which is this: in the beginning, love of neighbor and peace, and from this one will come unto the truth, and from this one will come unto righteous justice, for the judges will find a world mended (olam m’tukan), and according to [the nature of] the world, so will be the laws.

22. R’ Chaim Yudah Leib Litvin (1840-1903, Ukraine, Lubavitcher), Sha’arei De’i’ah (The Gates of Knowledge, Lemberg, 1878), §57, 27a

We find in the matter of charity/tzedakah [that if one says,] “This rsa coin is for tzedakah on the condition that my son will live,” behold this [person can still be considered] a completely righteous person (tzadik gamor)… even though in general, [acting] in this manner would transgress a prohibition, that you should test YHVH… because [in order to strengthen] enactments (takanot) [on behalf] of the poor, the Torah is not meticulous about the intention with [respect to tzedakah], and this is also [true] for all the commandments between a person and their fellow human being, for their essence is because of setting aright the world (mipnei takanot ha’olam). And [since] the Blessed One wants through this to benefit His creatures, we are not concerned with intention at all…

23. R’ Ben Zion Eisenstadt (1873-1951, New York), Or Lifnei Hadorshin (Light before Seekers, 1916), 10

We return and dug the wells of water...and the Philistines had stopped them up” (Gen. 26:18): Isaac digs and brings forth (invents/develops), improves the world (m’takein olam), and the Philistines stop up the wells, strive for the destruction of the world and its depletion.


11 Rav Kook was the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Palestine from 1921-1935.
The holiness that is in Nature is the holiness of the Land of Israel, [while] the Shekhinah that descended into exile with [the people] Israel [has] the capability of preserving holiness [even] in opposition to what is natural. But holiness battling against Nature is not holiness [that is] whole — it needs to be absorbed into its highest essence, in supernal holiness, which is the very holiness of Nature herself, which is the foundation of repairing the world in its entirety (tikkun olam kulo) and its complete rapture, and [then] the Holy in the exile will be joined to the Holy of the Land… Then war will stop completely, the attribute of judgment will be enraptured, and all will incline toward lovingkindness.

The national purpose of Israel…is distinguished by its hope for itself not being for the sake of itself—rather, it’s for the sake of the general enlightened good, which is the goodness of morality and true uprightness, which is impossible to build except through establishment of a world under the reign of the Almighty/All-nourishing (tikkun olam b’malhut Shaddai)… However, all the nations, for each one of them there is a purpose and aim that joins itself [to this purpose] as a unique expertise that is needed for repair of the world (l’tikkun ha’olam)… However, the unique thing about the wisdom of Israel, the wisdom of the Torah, is that it brings enlightenment [about] how all the work of the peoples in the fields of wisdom converges to one place, to knowing God, and to making straight paths through the general tracks of righteousness, which will cause peace to come into the world…


12 Rav Ashlag is known as Ba’al Hasulam, after the title of his complete translation and commentary on the Zohar.

It is not possible to repair the world ("l'takein et ha'olam") in religious matters before securing for the world economic reparation ("hatikkun hakalkali").

28. R' Yehuda Ashlag, “Peace in the World” I

R' Yehuda Ashlag, "Peace in the World" I

Everything there is in reality, whether good or bad, and even the most evil and harmful in the world, has a right/merit of existing, and it’s forbidden to destroy and eradicate it from the world completely. Rather, what is laid upon us is only to mend it ("l'takno") and bring it to [the side of] goodness…

And this is the key to an understanding of the incapacity of [so-called] world-reformers ("m'taknei olam") that arose through the generations. For they saw a human being in the image of a machine that is not working properly and needs repair ("tikkun"). This means, to remove the corrupted parts and replace them with others that are fixed ("m'tukanim"). And that is the whole tendency of these world-reformers – to eradicate anything bad and harmful in the human species – and the truth is were it not that the Creator was standing against them, they would certainly have already had enough time to sift humanity like a sieve, and to leave only [what is] good and useful. But because the Creator watches over all the elements in [the divine] Creation with such great care… no allowance is made for anyone to destroy a single thing in [God’s] Domain—but only to turn it and transform it to be good…

29. R' Yehuda Ashlag, “Peace in the World” II

R' Yehuda Ashlag, "Peace in the World" II

Indeed, good attributes and bad attributes, good deeds and bad deeds, are valued only according to the good of the community… And what has been spoken about up to here is only to show the point of weakness, that is, the place requiring correction ("tikuno"), and [the correction] is that each individual would understand that his own good and the good of the community are one, and through this the world will come to its full correction ("yavo ha'olam al tikuno hamalei").
APPENDICES

I) There are many meanings and possible translations for *tikkun olam* and for the term *tikkun* in its own. Here is a listing of many of those meanings and translations, as well as synonyms.

- **Tikkun/l’takein תִּקּוּן | לְתַקֵּן** can be translated as: to arrange, establish, fix, mend, repair, heal, reinforce, restore, prepare, perfect, set up, set right, order, ordain, invent, make, rectify, improve, reform, organize, accomplish, complete, make whole, straighten, dress, adorn, dress up; embodiment, structure, infrastructure, preparation, unification, establishment, remedy, reparation, correction, betterment, restitution, restoration, rectification. (And this list is not exhaustive!) While I usually translate concordantly (using the same root in English for the same root in Hebrew), I have taken the opportunity herein to demonstrate *tikkun’s* breadth of meaning by using an array of these terms.

- **Tikkun/l’takein** is associated with *t’shuvah* (repentance), *yichudim* (unifications), *tovah* and *hatavah* (goodness or benefit), *sh’leymut* (wholeness), *l’hashlim* (to make whole), *l’heitiv* (to do good for), *l’takein* לְתַכֵּן with a kaf (to establish, to balance, to measure), and with activities such as plowing, pruning, circumcision, adornment, cooking, praying, mending, performing a *mitzvah* (commandment), making tools and vessels (*keilim*).

- **Tikkun/l’takein** can mean the opposite of: evil, disorder, chaos, crookedness, to ruin, distort, twist.

- **Tikkun ha’olam**, *tikuno shel olam v’yishuvo*, *takanat ha’olam*, and *tikkun olam* are all interchangeable terminologies. Other terms that function as synonyms for *tikkun ha’olam* include: *yishuv ha’olam*, *kiyum ha’olam*, and *hashlamat ha’olam*.

- Terminology using the word *tikkun* that is closely related to or synonymous with the understanding *tikkun ha’olam* as final redemption or as the completion of the natural world/Creation includes: *tikkun k’lali*, *tikkun haklal*, *g’mar hatikun*, *hatikkun hashalem*, *hashlamat hatikun*, *takhlit hatikun*, *tikkun hateva*, *tikkun hab’riyah*, *tikkun ma’aseh v’reishit*.

- Terminology using the word *tikkun* that is closely related to or synonymous with the understanding of *tikkun olam* as the repair of society or the proper ordering of society includes: *tikkun m’dini*, *tikkun ham’dinah*, *tikkun hakibutz ham’dini*, *tikkun seder ham’dinah*, *tikkun hachevrah*, *tikkun chevrati*, *tikkun ha’adam*, *tikkun min* מִיָּם ha’adam.

II) How were the texts selected?

Most of these texts were selected from a collection of several hundred that I gathered to see how far back one could trace the idea that *tikkun olam* signifies social justice. I also supplemented those texts here with a handful of other texts that represent different streams in the evolution of *tikkun ha’olam*.

Where a stream of meaning is quite well-known, or where the understanding is relatively static, fewer examples are given. For example, I only included one case from the larger set of rabbinic rulings that are explained as being “*mip’nei tikkun ha’olam* / because of *tikkun ha’olam.*” Those rulings include laws related to *gitin* (divorce), *pidyon shvuyim* (freeing captives), freeing the half-slave (the case included), fair pricing, *prozbul* (a mechanism for allowing loans to outlast the sabbatical year cycle), returning a lost object, etc. There are also many thousands of examples in the halakhic literature where the phrase *mip’nei tikkun ha’olam* is cited as part of the discussion of these laws, but only rarely do these texts tell us anything about the meaning of the term *tikkun olam* or its evolution.

What is left out? In general, if *olam* or *ha’olam* does not modify *tikkun*, then that use of *tikkun* should not be counted as related to *tikkun olam* (unless it influences later authors writing about *tikkun olam*, or is a term used as a synonym for *tikkun olam* by that author, like *takanat ha’olam* in Bachya or *tikkun kol hab’ri’ah* in...
in Luzzatto). One of the confusions in many studies on the history of tikkun olam has been that texts about other types of tikkun were incorporated as evidence.

Here are some examples of the many other uses and valences of tikkun that do not refer to the world as a whole — tikkun hanefesh (repairing the soul), tikkun hamidot (character improvement), the tikkun of tefilah (prayer) or of a particular prayer service (which means the institution of a prayer or liturgical recitation), of korbanot (sacrifices), avodah (labor), t’shuvah (repentance), etc. In particular, there is a multitude of kabbalistic uses for the term tikkun. One may find authors who draw connections between these activities or goals and tikkun olam, but they are not equated with each other. A few examples of this are found in the texts above.

Despite the fact that tikkun is such a central concept in Lurianic Kabbalah, only a very small number of texts in Lurianic works deal with tikkun ha’olam or the tikkun of Creation as a whole. Lurianic Kabbalah is therefore not very influential in the evolution of the idea of tikkun olam until later authors like Moshe Chaim Luzzatto use the term tikkun olam in the messianic sense of redemption for this world. More often, Kabbalah talks about the tikkun of one particular world among the many many worlds and levels that are believed to exist (e.g., tikkun olam ha’atzilut, repairing the first world of Emanation, or tikkun haShekhinah, restoring the divine presence). Other unrelated uses of tikkun in Kabbalah also include discussion of tikunim (ritual or liturgical practices; also, material from the book Tikunei Zohar), or olam hatikkun (the repaired/redeemed world, which is contrasted in Lurianic Kabbalah with olam hatohu, this world of chaos).

III) Here is a brief bibliography drawn from literally dozens of articles and works on tikkun olam and its evolution and meaning — the vast majority of other articles are referenced in one or more of these resources. Whichever articles you read, you will notice that there are texts included above that contradict one or more of their conclusions.


Lawrence Fine, “Tikkun: A Lurianic Motif in Contemporary Jewish Thought” in From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism IV (1989) 35-53. Fine’s work was the first effort to identify some of the sources of tikkun olam in America, and the first to focus on the question of Lurianic influence on the contemporary concept of tikkun olam.

Mitchell First, “Aleinu: Obligation to Fix the World or the Text?” in Hakirah 11 (2011) 187-197, online at www.hakirah.org/vol%2011%20first.pdf. First marshals evidence that י”ת may have appeared in the Aleinu prayer only after the classical period of rabbinic literature.

Jill Jacobs, “A History of Tikkun Olam,” in Zeek (June 2007), online at www.zeek.net/706tohu. Jacobs’ work starts from the periodization of four completely different meanings of tikkun olam accepted by most scholars (i.e., Mishnah, Aleinu, Luria, liberal Judaism), and suggests a way to integrate them.

Jonathan Krasner, “The Place of Tikkan Olam in American Jewish Life” (Jewish Center for Public Affairs, Nov. 1, 2014), online at http://jcpa.org/article/place-tikkun-olam-american-jewish-life/. Krasner is one of the few to identify Rav Kook and Zionist thought as an important source for tikkun olam. (See also Aubrey Glazer in Tikkan Olam: Judaism, Humanism & Transcendence.)

Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility (Random House, 2005). Sacks was the chief rabbi of Great Britain from 1991 to 2013.