

RH Day 2

Oct 4, 2016

God's Partner in Tikkun Olam When did the 7th day of creation occur?

One of my favorite midrashic interpretations of Torah is related to the Genesis story of creation. The teaching focuses on the concept of time. The rabbis questioned our notion of a day. Instead of understand that each day of creation took place in a 24-hour block rather the rabbis believed that a day of creation represented a large period of time. Therefore showing the evolution as a developmental process of creating the world. And thus this way of thinking argues that we are currently experiencing the 6th day of creation, as humans. And that humanity is still waiting for the 7th day, Shabbat. With the idea that we will reach the day of rest when the messiah comes and there is peace on earth.

Building upon this concept, is the Luria mystical tradition that teaches humanity is God's partner in repairing the world. Rabbi Isaac Luria preached that when God was creating the world, God had to go through the process of tzimtzum, contraction, allowing for unoccupied space in order to have room to create. This doctrine holds that God's divinity withdrew from the world at the beginning of the creative process and was placed in special vessels.

Unfortunately these cylinders shattered because God's spirit was too powerful. But there are positive consequences resulting from this act, which were sparks of divinity that scattered and filled the earth, which we associate with the holiness of humanity. Where within each human being there is a divine spark. There are also negative impacts associated with the shards of the shattered vessels littering the earth, which represent all that is bad in the world, like violence and pain.

The kabbalistic tradition concluded from this theory of contraction and withdrawal that a process of mending and restoration had to take place in heaven and on earth. God is responsible for the eternal-heavenly layer, and humanity is tasked with the responsibility to be God's partner on earth, thus repairing the world. Each of us has the obligation to fix "the broken" to "the restored." Therefore transforming the unjust world, as it is known to us, to its ideal world of just order, which we call the messianic age.

As modern Jews, many of us resonate deeply with this message of helping fix and improve the world through the act of *Tikkun Olam*. It helps us to have a spirituality that goes beyond worship and routine observance of *mitzvot*. We use this theology to support our social action. As a congregation we collect food items for the food bank, work at the soup kitchen on Christmas, and do other acts of kindness. And today, I make a personal ask. Our local Monroe warming station needs volunteers to sleep over once a month. There is a need here in our backyard because the closest homeless shelter is in Middletown. This is a huge challenge for

the working poor. Because if one is paid 10/hr he or she likely does not have personal transportation. Therefore, if someone has a job in the area with no car they cannot make it back and forth the shelter in Middletown. Can you devote one night a month from November to April? Please join me in this sacred act of *Tikkun Olam*. This way we can make sure that our local homeless men and women have a safe and warm location to sleep.

In a world of infinite need, how do we fulfill our obligation of *Tikkun Olam*? Rashi, our great sage, teaches, when charity is done to truly take care of another, in a compassionate manner at a time when the poor needs it, he or she has brought *chesed* to the act of charity. This mercy is fulfilled when you give your heart and mind to the well-being of one in need be it financially, emotionally or inter-personally. So we can begin by looking beyond a quantitative approach which focuses solely on the numbers of people helped; and rather focusing more qualitatively, realizing that we can make huge differences in individual lives. Like the rabbinic teaching “The one who saves a life, it is as if he saves the entire world.”

And thus our rabbis of old taught that acts of kindness help to sustain the world. By acting in an ethical and compassionate way the virtue of *chesed* has the ability to bring God’s will into the world. And this is readily apparent when we volunteer and perform good deeds. For we feel blessed as both the giver and as the recipient. For not only are we partners in helping, but we also are reminded about the holiness in others’ lives, even those in need. As well as the divine gifts in our lives that we can take for granted.

Therefore, when we act with care we bring forth justice in the world. Because in Jewish thought, we believe that all we possess is but lent to us from the divine. For in the end, it was God’s gift of intellect, talent, and ability that enabled us to achieve our successes. Furthermore, in regards to business and commerce, we understand that our lives are interdependent on others. Be it workers, distributors, and customers; as well as the infrastructure of roads, mail, electricity, and fiber optic cables that help make us successful. We are not alone in our achievements, and therefore have a responsibility to make sure others have livable wages, health care, and other basic societal needs.

And unfortunately we know that this is not the current standard in America today. As the book of Deuteronomy cries out, “Justice, Justice shall you pursue.” So we know there is work to be done. Social justice is more than volunteering. We make powerful and lasting social change by understanding institutional inequalities as well as shaping policies and laws to acknowledge and fix these endemic problems. It is important to get involved, especially when we are not personally affected by the injustice. We might not be able to fully solve the plagues that hurt our world. But we can improve individual lives, and take steps forward to promote social awareness. And thus fulfilling our sacred calling to be God’s partner in *Tikkun Olam*, repairing our world.

As a Temple, and as individuals, we have a responsibility to get more involved/ by using our social capital to improve the lives of those who do not have the same level of power. Be it in regards to working class Americans, issues of poverty, education, and even clean water. We are to make sure that all who live in America, documented or not, work in safe conditions and are not subjugated or mistreated. Another heart breaking social issue of our day is the abuse and addiction of drugs and alcohol. It is a problem that is bound by no race, socio economic statues, or religious beliefs. And these are the only some of the issues we face domestically. There is a great amount of work to be done.

We are challenged to look around and own the faults and despair of our generation; we, Jews, descendants of immigrants, who were discriminated against, mistreated, and exploited. It is our ethical obligation to shine the Divine light of justice. We have a moral imperative to not rest until the Messianic Age has come where peace and justice fill the earth. During these days of Awe, we are reminded, even if we are not perpetrators of specific actions, we are responsible as members of society that has allowed the sins to take place. We as individuals, and as a temple, have resources and the ability to influence those with power, helping to heal this world.

Sir Rabbi Sacks of England summarizes our responsibility well, "Judaism is a complex and subtle faith, yet it has rarely lost touch with its simple ethical imperatives. We are here to make a difference, to mend the fractures of the world...to make it a place of justice and compassion where the lonely are not alone, the poor not without help; where the cry of the vulnerable is heeded and those who are wronged are heard [...] If someone is in need, give. If someone is lonely, invite them home. If someone you know has recently been bereaved, visit them and give them comfort. If you know someone who lost a job, do all you can to help them find another." Or more simply, Rabbi Sacks is reminding us to be *mensch*s.

As we live in the 6th day of creation as God's partner, may we be inspired to never give up hope helping to create the dawn of the 7th day, Shabbat. A metaphorical Shabbat of peace and tranquility on earth. Only then we will be able to rest, once our job is done.

Ken Yehi Ratzon, may this be God's will.