

Tikkun and its Place in Human Agency

Tikkun (repair or mending) provides a good vehicle to illustrate human relationship with the Divine as well as the rest of the creation. This Jewish mystical concept was introduced by Rabbi Isaac Luria as part of the Kabbalistic tradition. The idea was then adopted and popularized in Hasidic thought. In the present time, in addition to the Hasidic practice of this concept, the Jewish Reform movement has further popularized the term to refer to the *mitzvot* (commandments) that enhance social and environmental repair. Most of us have heard the expression *Tikkun Olam* (literally, world repair or heal the world). As this section shows, the notion is that holiness exists in a broken yet potential form in everything, and it is the role of human agency to reintegrate and repair the sparks of holiness.

The idea of Tikkun used in the theme of this book comes from the captivating Lurianic theory of creation. According to the proposition, before the creation of this world/universe, *Ein Sof* (The Infinite) occupied the complete space of existence. To facilitate the emanation of the world/universe, Ein Sof withdrew itself from some of that “space.” The term “*Tsimtsum*,” literally contraction, signifies that Ein Sof withdrew⁶⁷³ “from itself to itself.” Ein Sof then emanated a ray of light into that “vacuum” through channels into vessels (*kelim*).

Some of the vessels could not withstand the light and shattered.⁶⁷⁴ Along with the shards, some “sparks” also fell within this new creation and became trapped in material existence. As humans, our task is to liberate these sparks and raise or restore them to divinity. Even the most mundane action we take in our lives either promotes or impedes Tikkun, thus influencing our discovery of God. As the Tikkun theory clarifies, the emanation responsible for creation resulted in these “sparks.” Human endeavor—to free these sparks, restore them to divinity—is how the concept makes actionably tangible a subtle and mystical understanding introduced centuries ago.

Tikkun as human responsibility is ubiquitous because every human action “reacts somewhere and somehow on this complicated

process of Tikkun.”⁶⁷⁵ We have to be mindful here of something critical the concept leads to: the act that promotes Tikkun is being performed vis-à-vis the creation. The path to God through Tikkun, therefore, is through the rest of the creation.

Then, our disconnection (separation) from the creation is the source of our disconnection from God, and the attenuation of the former reverses the latter. As the *First Epistle of John* would tell us, the way to discover God—better yet, to have “[God’s] love perfected in us”⁶⁷⁶—is to realize, reinstate, and reclaim our mutual connection with humans and then with the rest of the creation. There really is no “other” except the illusion that creates this disconnection from God’s creation and thus from God. This realization brings forth not just a doctrinal obligation; it becomes a spiritual reservoir emanating responsibility and agency wherein “we are not only masters of our own destiny ... but we also fulfil a mission which reaches far beyond that.”⁶⁷⁷

Understanding Spiritual Agency as Responsible Action

Viktor Frankl’s experience of captivity at various Nazi concentration camps gave him a unique way of looking at life’s lessons. In his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Frankl emphasized the importance of responsibility in today’s world and declared it to be an integral component of the very concept of freedom:

Freedom, however, is not the last word. Freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibility. In fact, freedom is in danger of degenerating into mere arbitrariness unless it is lived in terms of responsibility.⁶⁷⁸ That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast.⁶⁷⁹

Frankl’s observation was not just a theoretical understanding. It was about the prevalent state of mind as he observed in the middle of the last century. From the viewpoint of spiritual agency also the