

Studying the Thought of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל

Timely Torah, November 14th 2021

This shiur is kindly sponsored by Lisa Friedman upon the yahrzeit of her mother Mrs. Doris Musikoff,
Doris bat Lewis and sister Mrs. Meryl Rubin Miriam Henia bat Tzvi



The Ways of Peace

The Jew in Exile

1. Jeremiah 29:4

ד כה אמר ה' צבאות, אלקי ישראל: לכל-הַגּוֹלַה--אַשֶּׁר-הָגָלֵיתִי מִירוּשַלַם, בַּבֶּלַה.

4 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem unto Babylon:

5 Build ye houses, and dwell in them, and plant gardens, and eat

ה בָּנוּ בָתִּים, וְשֵׁבוּ ; וְנָטְעוּ גַנּוֹת, וְאָכְלוּ אֱת-

לָבְנֵיכֶם נַשִּים וָאַת-בַּנוֹתַיכֶם תַּנוּ לַאַנַשִּים,

ו קחוּ נָשִׁים, וְהוֹלִידוּ בַּנִים וּבַנוֹת, וּקחוּ

the fruit of them; 6 take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not

ז וְדַרְשׁוּ אֱת-שָׁלוֹם הַעִיר, אֲשֶׁר הַגְּלֵיתִי אַתכם שָׁמָה, וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בַעַדַה, אֱל-ה': כִּי בַשְׁלוֹמַה, יָהְיֶה לַכֶם שַׁלוֹם.

ותלדנה בנים ובנות; ורבו-שם, ואל-תמעטו.

7 And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the LORD for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.

2. Ezra 6:8-10

וּמְנִי שִׁים טִעָם לָמָא דִי־תעַבְדוּן עָם־שָּׁבֵי יִהוּדָיֵא אָלֹךּ לְמִבְנָא בֵּית־אַלְהַא דֶּךְ וּמְנָכְסִי מַלְכַּא דִי מַדַּת עַבַר נַהַרָה אַסְפַּרְנָא נַפְּקְתַא מהנא מתנהבא לגבריא אלד די־לא לבטלא:

diminished.

And I hereby issue an order concerning what you must do to help these elders of the Jews rebuild this House of God: the expenses are to be paid to these men with dispatch out of the resources of the king, derived from the taxes of the province of Beyond the River, so that the work not be stopped.

וּמָה חַשֶׁחַן וּבָנֵי תוֹרִין וַדְּכָרִין וָאָמֶּרִין לָאֶלָה שַׁמִּיא חָנָטִין מָלֹח חַמֵּר וּמִשׁח פְּמָאמֶר פָהָנַיָּא דִי־בִירוּשׁלָם לְהָוָא מְתִיהֶב לְהֹם יום ביום די־לא שלו:

They are to be given daily, without fail, whatever they need of young bulls, rams, or lambs as burnt offerings for the God of Heaven, and wheat, salt, wine, and oil, at the order of the priests in Jerusalem,

דִי־לְהֵוֹן מְהַקְרְבִין נִיחוֹחִין לָאֵלָה שְׁמַיֵּא וּמְצַלִין לְחַיֵּי מַלְכֵּא וּבְנוֹהִי:

so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of Heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

Darkei Shalom

3. Mishna Gittin, 59b

: אין ממחין ביד עניי עובדי כוכבים בלקט שכחה ופאה מפני דרכי שלום

One does not protest against poor gentiles who come to take gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and the produce in the corner of the field, which is given to the poor [pe'a], although they are meant exclusively for the Jewish poor, on account of the ways of peace.

Praying for the Government

4. Mishna, Avos 3:2

רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה איש את רעהו חיים בלעו

5. Tosefta 4:17

ויום טוב האחרון של חג פייס לעצמו זמן לעצמו רגל לעצמו קרבן לעצמו שיר לעצמו ברכה לעצמה שנ' ביום השמיני שלח את העם ויברכו את המלך

6. Avudraham, Seder Shacharis shel Shabbos [R. David ben R. Yosef Abudraham. 13th century, Spain He might have been a student of R. Yaakov Ba`al Ha-Turim]

ואחר כך מברך את המלך גאת הקהל ואומר אשרי ומחזיר כשר סורה למקומו

7. Sefer Kolbo, Siman 20 [R. Aharon ben R. Yaakov ha-Cohen, Narbonne, France, In 1306 he was expelled from France together with all the Jews there, and he settled on the island of Majorca near Spain, lived 13th-14th century]

ובשבת שחרית נהגו לומר אחר ההפטרה מי שברך, ויש מקומות שמברכין המלך ואח"כ הקהל והכל לפי המנהג

8. Kedosh Yisrael, page 104 [Biography of R. Yisrael Salanter]

❖ בהיותי פעם אחת בעיר קרינקי ספרו לי שפעם אחת היה שם כשבת קדש (שבא לבקר את בתו) וראה שאין מברכין תפלת הנותן תשועה, הפך פניו אל הקיר ואמר הנותן תשועה בעצמו לקיים מה שאחז"ל: "והוה מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות".

9. To Heal a Fractured World, "The Kindness of Strangers" pages 102-103

Where does the idea come from? The rabbis derived it from the verse in the book of Proverbs, 'Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace' (Prov. 3:17). That is its textual warrant. Historically, however, it was born in the Jewish experience of exile. It emerged because Jews, having in the biblical era lived in their own land, were now dispersed minorities in pagan cultures. Definitive in this context was the letter written 2,600 years ago by the prophet Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon and Egypt: 'Build houses and settle down, plant vineyards and gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and have children. Seek the peace of the city to which you have been exiled. Pray to God on its behalf, for in its peace, you will find peace' (Jer. 29:5-7). This was a wise and far-sighted policy and shaped Jewish behaviour from then to the present. Jews were to maintain their identity as Jews but at the same time contribute to the societies to which they belonged - if 'belonging' is not too generous a word to describe the marginal and disfranchised existence to which Jews were often condemned.

Jeremiah was no less a utopian than Isaiah and Micah, but on this occasion his prophecy was pragmatic. Seven centuries later, so was the teaching of the sages. They had seen the failure of two other options. The first was assimilation – specifically Hellenization. This robbed Jews of their identity and led, as in the days of the Seleucids and the Maccabees, to the banning of religious practice. The second was rebellion, in the last years of the Second Temple, and again, 65 years later at the time of the Bar Kochba revolt. These were two of the most disastrous events of Jewish history, leading to defeat, disempowerment and dispersion. Remembering Jeremiah, the sages formulated a third way: to sustain their faith through institutions that (unlike the Temple) could be established anywhere - the synagogue, the school, the house of study and the home. In the meanwhile they would practise what today would be called active citizenship in the countries of their dispersion. They would give to others in need as well as to the members of their own community. 'The ways of peace' were not peace. Israel was in exile. The times were out of joint. But

Diaspora Jewry could none the less create, if not peace, then at least the ways that led to it. They could perform acts of kindness. They could contribute to the common good. Without relinquishing their ultimate hopes of return and the messianic age, they could create at least a fragment of peace in the here-and-now. This was a vision no less noble for its modesty. Sometimes modest ideals change the world more benignly than their more revolutionary counterparts.

No less influential than Jeremiah were two other ethical insights. The first was the command - stated, as the rabbis noted, no fewer than 36 times in the Pentateuch - to love 'the stranger'. To be sure, rabbinic law had given two precise interpretations of the term. 'The stranger', they ruled, meant either the convert or the resident alien. Yet in these biblical texts there are not only laws but a sentiment, a moral sensibility. In the book of Exodus the Israelites are commanded not to afflict the stranger because 'you know what it feels like to be a stranger; you were once strangers in the land of Egypt' (Ex. 23:9). The Israelites in Egypt were neither resident aliens nor converts to Egyptian culture, but they knew what it was to be marginal and isolated, to suffer and be treated like pariahs. Jews never lost that memory. Each year on Passover they ate the unleavened 'bread of affliction' and the bitter herbs of slavery. 'The ways of peace' belong to that sensibility. They are an expression of the fact not halakhic, but psychological - that those who remember suffering can be sensitized, and respond, to the sufferings of others.

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The Three Models

10. A Judaism Engaged with the World, 2013



Assimilation made sense in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a Jewish world traumatised by antisemitism. It makes no sense at all today, either in Israel or in the multicultural democracies of the West. In the United States, where outmarriage continues at the rate of one-in-two, Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam has shown that Jews are the group more respected and admired than any other.

Segregation made immense sense after the Holocaust, when the heartlands of tradition in Eastern Europe had been almost entirely obliterated. But today, by a miracle of rebirth, the Haredi community is stronger than it was before the start of the Second World War. It has won the battle. We are in its debt. By sheer commitment and dedication it has brought the worlds of Jewish learning and practice back to life.

Now is the time to turn outward and share its energies with the rest of the Jewish world. The battle of the twenty-first century is the one Jews have been waiting for, for at least two thousand years. What if we had a Jewish state and could do what Jews have

been commanded to do since the days of Moses: build a society based on Torah values of righteousness, justice, kindness and compassion, the great prophetic virtues? What if non-Jews no longer looked down on Judaism as inferior to Christianity, Islam or enlightenment universalism? What if they actually respected it as a source of wisdom and inspiration?

Tikun Olam

11. Liturgy, Aleinu

Therefore we hope that You, Lord our G-d, that we may see the glory of Your power, to remove abominations from the earth so that the idols are utterly cut off, to perfect the world (*letaken olam*) under the sovereignty of the Almighty. Then all humanity will call in Your name...

עַל כֵּן נְקַנֶּה-לָּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, לְרְאוֹת מְהֵרָה בְּתִפְּאֶרֶת עֻזָּךְ, לְהַעֲבִיר גִּלּוּלִים מִן הָאֶרֶץ, וְהָאֱלִילִים כָּרוֹת יִכָּרֵתוּן, לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שַׁדַּי, וְכָל-בְּנֵי בָשָׂר יִקְרְאוּ בִשְׁמֶךְ...

12. Mishna, Gittin 4:5-6

Someone who is half a slave and half a free person shall work for his master one day and for himself one day. These are the words of Beit Hillel. Beit Shamai asked him: 'You have appeased the master but the slave himself you have not sorted out. He cannot marry a servant lady since he is half free, but he cannot marry a free woman since he is still half a

מי שחציו עבד וחציו בן חורין עובד את רבו יום אחד ואת עצמו יום אחד דברי בית הלל אמרו לו בית שמאי תקנתם את רבו ואת עצמו לא תקנתם לישא שפחה אי אפשר slave. Should he not marry? Surely the world was created to settle it, as it says (Isiah 45) "Not for emptiness did He create it, rather to settle and develop it." Rather because of *tikun olam* we force the [remaining] master to free the slave ...' Beit Hillel retracted to adopt the opinion of Beit Shamai.

שכבר חציו בן חורין בת חורין אי אפשר שכבר חציו עבד יבטל והלא לא נברא העולם אלא לפריה ורביה שנאמר (ישעיה מ"ה) לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה אלא מפני תקון העולם כופין את רבו ועושה אותו בן חורין ... וחזרו בית הלל להורות כדברי בית שמאי:

One cannot redeem hostages for much more than their value because of *tikun olam*.

אין פודין את השבויים יותר על כדי דמיהן מפני תקון העולם



13. To Heal a Fractured World, "Mending the World" pages 76, 78

In choosing the phrase *tikkun olam*, Rabbi Luria was thus bringing together two ideas, one from Jewish law, the other from Jewish prayer, neither of which had the sense that he attached to it. None the less, Lurianic kabbalah does express an idea fundamental to Judaism, spanning the whole of history from creation to the 'end of days'.

...

One thing I must make clear. Tikkun olam as R. Isaac Luria conceived it, is a mystical and spiritual idea. It is not social action. For the kabbalists, we mend the world not by healing the sick and feeding the hungry, but by prayer and the observance of the commands. Jewish mysticism is about the commands linking us to God, not those relating us to other people. To be sure, each of our acts has an effect on the 'upper worlds', the deep structure of reality, but this is not through normal channels of causation. Tikkun olam in the Lurianic sense is about the soul, not the world; the spirit, not the body; metaphysical fracture, not poverty and disease. Lurianic kabbalah is at best a metaphor, not a prescription, for the forms of social action I have described in this book. But it remains a compelling metaphor none the less. It suggests that our acts make a difference. They repair fractures in the world. They restore a lost order. They rescue fragments of the divine light. They mend the damage done by the evil men - even the imperfections that are part of creation itself. Our moral imagination is shaped by such metaphors. 9 Lurianic kabbalah is not afraid to look at catastrophe without concluding that the world is irreparable, evil endemic, that history is a meaningless sequence of events and the human situation irredeemable. Out of broken fragments, it shapes a mosaic of hope.

