



**RECONSTRUCTING  
JUDAISM**



**Reconstructionist  
RABBINICAL ASSOCIATION**

## Repairing the World Through a Reconstructionist Lens

### Text used or cited in this discussion

תקון העולם (Tikkun HaOlam – Repair of the World)

#### In Rabbinic Texts

##### [משנה גיטין ד':ב'-ג'](#)

בראשונה היה עושה בית דין במקום אחר ומבטלו. התקין רבן גמליאל הזקן שלא יהו עושין בן,

**מפני תקון העולם**

בראשונה היה משנה שמו ושמה, שם עירו ושם עירה. התקין רבן גמליאל הזקן שיהא כותב

. איש פלוני וכל שם שיש לו, אשה פלונית וכל שם שיש לה, מפני **תקון העולם**

.הלל התקין פרוזבול מפני **תקון העולם**...

##### [Mishnah Gittin 4:2-3](#)

At first, a man [who had sent his wife a divorce via messenger] would set up a religious court in a different place [from where the wife lived] and cancel [the bill of divorce]. Rabban Gamliel the Elder enacted that they not be able to do this, due to **Tikkun HaOlam**.

At first, a man could change his name and her name, the name of his city, or the name of her city. Rabban Gamliel the Elder enacted that one would write: "The man, So-and-so, and any other name that he has, and the woman, So-and-so, and any other name that she has," due to **Tikkun HaOlam**.

...Hillel instituted the *prozbul* [a court-issued exemption from the Sabbatical year cancellation of a personal loan] due to **Tikkun HaOlam**.

##### [משנה גיטין ד':ו'](#)

המוכר עבדו לגוי או לחוצה לארץ, יצא בן חורין. אין פודין את השבויין יותר על כדי דמיהן,

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל. ואין מבריחין את השבויין, מפני **תקון העולם**. מפני **תקון העולם**

אומר: מפני תקנת השבויין. ואין לוקחים ספרים תפלין ומזוזות מן הגוים יותר על כדי דמיהן,

**מפני תקון העולם**.

### [Mishnah Gittin 4:6](#)

[With regard to] one who sells his slave to a non-Jew or to someone outside Eretz Yisrael, [the slave automatically] goes free. We do not ransom captives for more than they are worth, due to **Tikkun HaOlam**. We do not help captives escape, due to **Tikkun HaOlam**. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: "[It is] due to the enactment of the captives. We do not buy *sefarim* [Torah scrolls or holy books], tefillin, and mezuzot from the non-Jews for more than their worth, due to **Tikkun HaOlam**.

## **In Kabbalah**

*At the beginning of time, God's presence filled the universe. When God decided to bring this world into being, to **make room for creation, He first drew in His breath, contracting Himself**. From that contraction darkness was created. And when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3), the light that came into being filled the darkness, and **ten holy vessels came forth, each filled with primordial light**.*

*In this way God sent forth those ten vessels, like a fleet of ships, each carrying its cargo of light. Had they all arrived intact, the world would have been perfect. But the vessels were too fragile to contain such a powerful, divine light. **They broke open, split asunder, and all the holy sparks were scattered** like sand, like seeds, like stars. Those sparks fell everywhere, but more fell on the Holy Land than anywhere else.*

***That is why we were created – to gather the sparks**, no matter where they are hidden. God created the world so that the descendants of Jacob could raise up the holy sparks. That is why there have been so many exiles – to release the holy sparks from the servitude of captivity. In this way the Jewish people will sift all the holy sparks from the four corners of the earth.*

*And when enough holy sparks have been gathered, the broken vessels will be restored, and tikkun olam, the repair of the world, awaited so long, will finally be complete. Therefore it should be the aim of everyone to raise these sparks from wherever they are imprisoned and to elevate them to holiness by the power of their*

## In Liturgy

### Second Paragraph of the Aleynu

על פן נקוה לך יי אלהינו לראות מהרה בתפא  
עצך להעביר גלולים מן הארץ והאלילים פרות יפרתו לתקן עולם במלכות שדי: וכל בני בשר  
יקראו בשמך להפנות אליך כל רשעי ארץ: יכירו וידעו כל יושבי תבל כי לך תכרע כל בשר  
תשבע כל לשון: לפניה יי אלהינו יכרעו ויפולו ולכבוד שמך יקר יתנו: ויקבלו בלם

Therefore we put our hope in You, Hashem our G-d, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor, removing detestable idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off, when the world will be perfected (*I'takein olam*) through the Almighty's sovereignty. Then all humanity will call upon Your Name, to turn all the earth's wicked toward you. All the world's inhabitants will recognize and know that to You every knee should bend, every tongue should

#### Quotes referenced

*"Although to every individual the achievement of personal salvation is his supreme quest and responsibility; it is unattainable without devotion to the task of social salvation."* Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in the Jewish Religion*

*"There can be no personal salvation so long as injustice and strife exist in the social order; there can be no social salvation as long as the greed for gain and the lust for domination are permitted to inhibit the hunger for human fellowship and sympathy in the hearts of [humanity]"* Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in the Jewish Religion*

*"The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what the lives of the Prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible."* Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *"The Reasons for my involvement in the Peace Movement (1972)*

*"True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967)

*"You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it;"* – Rabbi Tarfon, *Pirke Avot*

*"Justice, Justice you shall pursue"* Deuteronomy 16:20

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For further Reading: "Community, Gemilut Hesed and Tikun Olam" in [A Guide to Jewish Practice](#), RRC Press

Evolve writings on Justice: <http://evolve.reconstructingjudaism.org/category/Justice>

## Speaker Bios, Texts and Sources

### **Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Executive Director, Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association**



Rabbi Wechterman came to the RRA as Executive Director in the fall of 2015. She has brought a commitment to social justice, a passion for interfaith and inter-communal partnership and a deep respect and love for her Reconstructionist colleagues to the position.

Rabbi Wechterman was a founding faculty member of Camp JRF in the Poconos (now called Camp Havaya) and served on their summer faculty for many years. Before coming to the RRA, Rabbi Wechterman served as spiritual leader of Congregation Agudas Achim in Attleboro, Massachusetts from 2001 to June of 2014. Additionally, she has taught at the college and adult level in many settings and worked broadly with children and families with special needs to create inclusive communities for Jews of all abilities and backgrounds.

A 2000 graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Rabbi Wechterman brings an open and inclusive approach to teaching Jewish life and traditions. She is committed to empowering Jews and fellow travelers on their individual and unique Jewish journeys.

During her tenure at Congregation Agudas Achim, Rabbi Wechterman has pursued a number of continuing education and rabbinic growth opportunities and was a member of the second cohort of START PEER (Program for Excellence and Education in the Rabbinate). She is also a graduate of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality's Rabbinic training program and received the Hassenfeld Award for Jewish Service from the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island for her leadership work in providing social services in the context of Jewish community. In 2014, Rabbi Wechterman traveled to India with the American Jewish World Service as part of a rabbinic delegation building social justice partnerships and in 2020 traveled with AJWS to Guatemala as a Global Justice Fellow. Rabbi Wechterman has also been active in anti-hunger campaigns, gun violence prevention, advocating for reproductive freedom and in immigration issues. Most recently, she has been an active member of the Poor People's Campaign against Poverty and has travelled to the US/Mexico border to work with and learn from immigrants and asylum seekers.

Rabbi Wechterman holds a BA in International Relations and BS in Journalism from Boston University. She lives in Abington, PA with her husband David Nerenberg and is the parent of two children, Avi and Sharon.

## Ruth Messinger, Global Ambassador, American Jewish World Service



Ruth W. Messinger, President of American Jewish World Service (AJWS) from 1998 to July of 2016, is currently the organization's inaugural Global Ambassador. In this role, Ruth is continuing her crucial work of engaging rabbis and interfaith leaders to speak out on behalf of oppressed and persecuted communities worldwide.

Ruth's remarkable 18-year presidency at AJWS began after a 20-year career in public service in New York City as a City Council member and Manhattan Borough President. Under Ruth's leadership, AJWS grew exponentially—granting more than \$270 million to promote human rights in the developing world and launching campaigns to end the Darfur genocide, reform international food aid, stop violence against women and LGBT people, end land grabs and respond to natural disasters around the globe.

A tireless advocate and social change visionary, Ruth mobilizes rabbis and faith-based communities throughout the U.S. to promote human rights. She previously sat on the State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group and is currently a member of the World Bank's Moral Imperative Working Group on Extreme Poverty.

Ruth is also currently doing international human rights work for AIDS Free World and serving as the inaugural Social Justice Fellow at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Additionally, she is the Social Justice Activist-in-Residence at the JCC of Manhattan.

Ruth has been honored for her leadership with awards from many national Jewish organizations and honorary degrees from five major American rabbinical seminaries. In 2015, she was the recipient of the Julia Vadala Taft Outstanding Leadership Award. Ruth was named one of the 10 most inspiring women religious leaders of 2012 by *The Huffington Post*; the sixth most influential Jew in the world by *The Jerusalem Post*; and was listed annually on *The Forward's* "Forward 50" for nearly a decade.

Ruth is an active member of her congregation, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, and serves on the boards of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Hazon, Aegis Trust and Surprise Lake Camp. She holds a B.A. from Radcliffe College and an M.S.W. from the University of Oklahoma. She is married to Andrew Lachman and has three children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.