

**Tikkun Olam – Through the Video Lens**  
**Amy Atkins**

**Subject Area:** Values and Art

**Single/Multi-unit lesson plan:** Multi Unit Plan

**Target Age:** High School

**Objectives:**

1. Students will understand the concept of Tikkun Olam.
2. Students will be able to identify acts of Tikkun Olam.
3. Students will be motivated to perform acts of Tikkun Olam and will be able to understand their potential impact.

Activity

**Unit 1**

Show students the movie “Pay It Forward”.

**Unit 2**

Prior to class

1. Cut out the silhouette of a dove out of construction paper or, to be environmentally sound, out of old cereal boxes. On a piece of poster board or butcher paper, draw an outline of an olive tree.
2. Figure out how many students are in the class. If there are 16 students, pull the Aces, 2’s, 3’s and 4’s from a deck of cards (for more students, pull more numbers).

Class

1. Hand out the cards. All of the “hearts” go to one table, all of the “spades” go to another table, all of the “diamonds” go to another table and all of the “clubs” go to the final table.

2. Engage a discussion on Tikkun Olam. Ask the students what they think Tikkun Olam means. Follow up with: Why is it important? Why should we care about other people? The planet?

3. Then have them turn to their individual groups.

4. a. *Ask the first question:*

What is something you believe to be absolutely true? It can be a statement, a value whatever. Students answer their question in the

small group. Once each group is finished, they share with the rest of class. (If the group is too large, you can omit this step.)

*b. Then, have the students holding “Aces” rotate one table to the right.*

*5. a. Ask the second question:*

What is something you know you can contribute to the world that has meaning? Ask it in this way as well. What is some talent or ability that G-d gave you by your unique birth that you can use to contribute to the world?

*b. Then, Aces rotate one table and 2’s rotate one table in the same direction.*

*6. a. Ask the third question:*

What is the most worthwhile, positive thing you have done in your life so far? Why did you do it? Why did you choose that thing?

*b. Then, Aces move one table, 2’s move one table, and 3’s move one table, all in the same direction.*

*7. a. Ask the fourth questions.*

What is something – a book, a play, a movie, an event that was so powerful it made you change the way you see the world. What was it and why was it so important to you?

### **Unit 3**

1. Hand out the “dove” paper and markers – one per person.

2. Have each student write one thing they want to do before the end of the year to contribute to repairing the world onto their dove. Have each student tape their dove to the poster.

3. As they are finished, ask the students the significance of the dove and olive tree.

4. Have them read their accomplishments aloud and share how he or she wants the other members of the class to support him/her in accomplishing the task. The other students act as witnesses and help hold each other accountable.

5. Hang the poster in the classroom. As students accomplish their project, have them write the date on the paper. Throughout the year, check in with students to see if they are accomplishing their goals.

**Homework:** For next class, have each student look for “you tube” videos that inspire them to create change in the world. Have the students write down the URL and bring it to class.

#### **Unit 4**

1. Talk to students about what keeps us from being able to contribute more Tikkun Olam in the world. Examples: Time, Money, Motivation, Feeling like your contribution won't change anything, lack of transportation, lack of decision making power in their lives as teens.

2. Explain that today we are going to work on two of these obstacles – motivation and feeling like you can't make a difference.

3. Have each student explain why he or she chose this piece and watch each of the “you tube” videos.

4. At the end, show one of the inspirational videos from the list of suggestions in the “resources” section of this lesson plan.

#### **Materials**

Deck of cards

4 tables with 4 chairs at each table

Computer, DVD player, projector and screen

Paper and markers

Poster board with a picture of the earth on it, and the words Tikkun Olam in Hebrew or English (or both) at the top

Tape

#### **Author's Notes**

1. The cards are a fun way to create discussion groups. Students tend to go with their friends when dividing into groups and are resistant when a teacher picks groups for them. The cards create a randomization of groups that happens organically. They don't blame the teacher for splitting them up, and they don't end up with their friends the whole time.

2. You are welcome to use media other than youtube, although students are really used to this form of media and understand it. They could watch an endless amount of clips as long as they were about 3 minutes or less.

### Resources

#### 1. You Tube Suggestions

Anything developed by Free Range Studios

<http://www.youtube.com/user/FreeRangeStudios>

Environmental Crisis in Israel:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SGaft5TEBA>

Ted Talks – found on You Tube. I particularly like Chris Jordan.

My students found this one set to a heavy metal version of Genesis’s song Land of Confusion (Warning: very graphic. Watch first.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6KXgjLqSTg>

Another take on the same song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-24miFxc5Q&feature=related>

Beautiful clip about how you see the world:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYMnKRv4TH0>

#### 2. Explanation of the significance of olive trees and doves in Judaism:

- Excerpt from “Olives, Judaism, and the Land of Israel” by Rabbi Jo David, the Executive Director of the Jewish Appleseed Foundation

Olives and olive branches are an ancient symbol of peace. In Genesis 8:11, a dove brings an olive branch to Noah after the flood. This is a symbol that the waters of the flood are receding and that life is returning to earth. Two olive branches with fruit combined with the seven branched menorah are a symbol of Modern Israel and project its hope for peace.

Olives grow in many different places in Israel, and can survive in poor soil that is not hospitable to other types of plants. Olive trees are also very long-lived. There are some olive trees in that are thought to be over 1,000 years old.

According to the Book of Judges, the olive tree was aware of its special relationship to the Jewish people. In the Yotam parable in which different trees are invited to leave their relationship with human beings to become “king of the trees,” the olive tree refuses to deprive humans Perhaps one of the most enduring contributions of

the humble olive is the Talmudic story of the little jar of olive oil that was used to light the ner tamid in the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of its rededication by the Maccabees. Interestingly, the literary documents that tell the story of Chanukkah – Maccabees I (written in Hebrew) and Maccabees II (written in Greek about 50 years later) say nothing about the “miracle” of the little jar of oil. Rather, both these books stress the military might of the Maccabees and they describe an eight day festival (Sukkot) during which the entire city was lit by huge oil lamps. So much olive oil was burned during this festival that we are told that even the night was as bright as the day. of the oil that they use to worship God.

- Anonymous article submitted to the Shalom Center and Rabbis for Human Rights:

"The dove which brought an olive branch in its beak to Noah brought light to the world."

- Excerpt from Rabbi Joshua Shmidman in an article written for ou.org “Jewish Beauty and the Beauty of Jewishness:

The midrash quotes the verse in Jeremiah (11:16): "The Lord called thy name (Israel) a leafy olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit," and the midrash asks, why is it the olive tree with which Israel is identified? The answer given is that Israel is uniquely similar in many of its essential characteristics to the fruit of the olive tree. The olive is beaten, pressed, ground down, and then it produces its oil which gives rise to glowing light. So, too, the people of Israel: despite all the oppression, cruelty and exile visited upon them, they are not destroyed; rather, they continue to shine on magnificently, ever brighter. It is significant that in the passage quoted, Jeremiah declares not only the dauntless character of Israel's persistence in the face of every hardship, but defines this quality as being the very source of Israel's beauty -- "leafy olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit."

- Excerpt from Rabbi Dr. Raymond Apple posted this commentary on No'ach on Or Chadash.org.

Only when the dove came back with an olive branch in its mouth was Noah sure the waters had receded and the community of the Ark could emerge onto the earth. Why is the olive leaf important? The rabbis say that the dove told Noah, "It is better that my food comes from God than from flesh and blood". The symbolism? When there isn't enough to eat and food can be withheld in order to make

others suffer, there can be no peace. But if economic prosperity is assured there is no need or desire for war. Note that the Hebrew for war is "milchamah", and central to "milchamah" is "lechem", bread.

The episode tells us two more lessons. One is that like the dove with its yearning for a quiet life, people need to *\*want\** peace. Another: that as the dove flies from place to place in the interests of peace, so the peacemakers need to leave no stone - or olive leaf - unturned.

- Excerpt from Menachem Posner writing for chabad.org  
"Just as the dove is only saved by her wings, so, too, the Jews are only saved by the merit of their mitzvot."<sup>1</sup>

"The dove said before G-d: 'Master of the universe; let my food be bitter like an olive, but from Your hands, and not sweet as honey but dependent on the hands of flesh and blood.'"<sup>2</sup>

"All other birds rest on a rock or a tree when they tire, but when the dove tires she pushes off the ground with one wing and flies with the other."<sup>3</sup>

"Just like a dove once she meets her mate never leaves him for another... just as a dove whose fledglings are taken from her nest still doesn't abandon her nest..., so are the Jewish people faithful to G-d."<sup>4</sup>

1. Talmud Brachot 44a. For the connection between mitzvot and wings, see Tanya ch. 40.

2. Talmud Sanhedrin 108b -- in reference to the olive leaf which the dove brought back to Noah's Ark..

3. Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 39.

4. Midrash Rabbah, Song of Songs 1.

- Excerpt from Moshe Bogomilsky writing for chabad.org  
Afterwards, Noah sent the dove, who consented without protest. She did not permit her personal interest and desires to interfere with her mission, and ultimately she returned with an olive leaf in her mouth, bringing good tidings to all those in the ark.