

Toward a *Tikkun Olam* Policy for World Jewry and Israel

Eli Fried

Policy Researcher and Projects Director, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Roger Bennett

Vice-President, Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, New York

Charles Keidan

Director, Pears Foundation, London

This article posits a policy of international development for world Jewry and Israel—a *Tikkun Olam* policy—aligning Jewish philanthropy and Israeli government policy with global efforts to overcome poverty, hunger, and disease. The policy represents a quantum shift for the Jewish world and Israel insofar as it involves their joining forces for the betterment of humanity and presents a values-based, outward-looking identity for the Jewish people. The article explores the rationale for such a policy and the critical role for Jewish philanthropy—alongside the State of Israel—in putting it into practice.

The prevailing attitude toward international development in both Israel and the Jewish world is reflected by the Hebrew maxim, *aniye ircha kodmim*—translated as “the poor of your town come first.” The government of Israel spends approximately 0.06% of the state’s gross national income on official development assistance, half of which relates to the absorption of Jewish immigration into Israel. This amount represents less than 10% of the internationally accepted target for developed countries. On this matter there is little perceivable political divide in Israel, making it one of the few issues where the Israeli establishment is in almost complete consensus.

In relation to Jewish philanthropy outside Israel, the vast bulk of giving is focused locally, with an additional portion directed toward Israel. The exact level of Jewish philanthropy toward non-Jewish beneficiaries in the developing world is the subject of current research. However, indications from the British Jewish community and elsewhere are that Jewish philanthropic assistance to the poorest two and a half billion people on earth who live on less than \$2 a day is marginal, both in absolute terms and relative to other Jewish communal spending priorities.

This article explores why both Israeli government and Jewish philanthropic spending on these issues is so low, posits a tripartite rationale for reversing this shift, and ends with a set of recommendations for Jewish philanthropy to play a historic role in helping forge a new philanthropic contract between the Jewish people and Israel and between Israel and the world.

Eli Fried’s principal current endeavor is designing a world Jewish service corps, in consultation to major Jewish foundations. This comes in the context of his broader work focusing on the intersection among the Jewish world, Israel, and international development.

ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY AND JEWISH VALUES

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Israeli government prioritized international development as part of its foreign policy. This approach was initiated by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, who had both a keen awareness of Israel's diplomatic imperatives to the newly established African states and a strong sense of Israel's "Jewish mission." For example, in relation to the application of Jewish values to Israeli development cooperation, Ben Gurion stated,

It is the messianic vision, which has lived for thousands of years in the heart of the Jewish people, the vision of national and universal salvation, and the aspiration to be a "covenant of the people" and a "light of the nations," that has preserved us to this day, and only through loyalty to our Jewish and universal mission will we safeguard our future in the homeland and our standing among the nations of the world (Rodin, 1969, p. 108).

The Jewish mission laid out by Ben Gurion played a key role in shaping Israel's early identity and, in turn, its international conduct, which was directed to developing countries in the postcolonial period, particularly in the fields of agriculture and public health. However this aspect of Israel's foreign policy has waned significantly since the early 1970s, primarily due to what was perceived in Israel as the betrayal of the African states that had until then benefited from Israeli assistance, but chose to break ties with Israel around the time of the Yom Kippur War.¹ Ever since, Israeli leadership, despite periodic rhetorical statements to the contrary, has abandoned the notion of Israel as a "light unto the nations" as a utopian dream. This skepticism has been exacerbated by ongoing conflict with the Arab states, including having to adopt a long-term posture of diplomatic self-defense. However, such skepticism is not fully shared by the Israeli public according to a 2008 public opinion survey that revealed ambivalent attitudes toward the principle of Israel's contributing to humanitarian relief and international development (Maagar-Mahot Research Institute, 2008).

ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY AND THE JEWISH WORLD

Although Israel's Jewish mission as envisaged by Ben Gurion has substantially evaporated over recent decades, to the extent that the Jewish dimension of Israel's foreign policy has survived, world Jewry has played an important role in setting the agenda. The issues that have been pursued in this context have been primarily of a defensive nature, reflecting the challenges of the time, such as rescuing Jews from troubled countries, bringing Nazi war criminals to justice, and fighting against anti-Semitism.

The Jewish world traditionally limits its involvement in Israeli foreign policy matters, and attempts at intervention, for example in the peace process, are usually met by strong Israeli opposition. However in relation to Jewish-values-oriented foreign policy, such as the struggle to free Soviet Jewry, the Jewish world's influence and partnership have been tolerated and often welcomed. The explanation lies in a combination of the policy substance, in particular its foundations in Jewish values, as well as its separation from existential matters of state. In addition, the phenomenon can be explained by what expert Prof. Yossi Shain (2008) describes as the Diaspora being "outside the State but inside the People" and therefore being a legitimate player in shaping national identity and international conduct in relation to certain issues.

¹Further explanation of the reasons for this shift is beyond the scope of this article. For more, see Fried (2006) and Inbal & Zahavi (2009).

The *tikkun olam* policy falls squarely within the type of action in which the Jewish world can and should partner with the state of Israel. The subject matter is entrenched in Jewish values, although instead of the Jewish dimension being defensive, it reflects the positive value of *tikkun olam*. Further, because the policy does not ostensibly deal with Israel's security and survival, it is unlikely that Jewish world involvement will be opposed by Israel's political echelon. And practically speaking, world Jewry maintains relationships that can be of much benefit when it comes to establishing international development projects and partnerships throughout the world.

Thus for many reasons—historical, ethical, and practical—the *tikkun olam* policy holds promise for the establishment of a new kind of partnership between the state of Israel and world Jewry.

TIKKUN OLAM POLICY RATIONALE

The allocation of resources, whether state or philanthropic, is a factor of the relative prioritization of needs. The following is a policy rationale for advancing international development on the priorities ladder of the Jewish people and, in turn, justifying increased expenditures for this purpose.

Jewish Global Responsibility

The Jewish people are in a unique position to appreciate the importance of assisting the world's least fortunate people. Just over a half-century ago Jews endured tremendous suffering, but have managed to emerge from this catastrophic period and develop new forms of social and economic capital. The *tikkun olam* policy could enable the transfer of some of that capital to help fulfill the Jewish people's responsibility to make an authentic contribution to international development. This element of the policy encourages the deepening and intensification of Jewish participation in global efforts to assist societies in need.

A question mark sometimes leveled at the "universal nature" of *tikkun olam* is that it lacks an essential "Jewish quality." This claim is usually repudiated by reference to Jewish textual sources that have much to say about the Jewish obligation to the outside world. However this debate tends to revolve around whether Jewish texts prescribe *tikkun olam* a priori or whether Jewish texts are sought ex post facto to justify present-day endeavors.

Although we suspect that this debate will never be completely resolved, the demands of a younger generation of Jews, many of whom consider *tikkun olam* to be at the cornerstone of their Jewish identity, mean that 21st-century Judaism will need to find the space for them to make a meaningful contribution to the greatest challenges of humanity through a Jewish prism or risk losing them.²

Strengthening Jewish Peoplehood

The connections between the Jewish people are gradually loosening—as is a unity of purpose. Israelis and Jews from around the world speak different languages and revere different cultural icons. Religious customs—from eating *challah*

²For example, a 2006 study found that making the world a better place was one of the most important factors in defining Jewish identity for Generation Y Jews – see *Grande Soy Vanilla Latte with Cinnamon, No Foam: Jewish Identity and Community in a Time of Unlimited Choices* (Greenberg, 2006). A 2001 study found making the world a better place ranked highest as the most personal meaningful activity (http://www.jewishservice.org/learn_aboutus.html) Also see Chertok & Samuel (2008a, 2008b) and Kopelowitz & Lewin (2008).

The tikkun olam policy holds promise for the establishment of a new kind of partnership between the state of Israel and world Jewry.

to attending synagogue—are becoming increasingly incapable of serving as the glue for Jewish peoplehood. And the traditional paradigms of the Israel-Jewish world relationship, such as fiscal support, Jewish education, and defending Israel, are becoming less relevant to the young generation.

Programs such as Birthright Israel have made great inroads in connecting Jews and Israelis to each other. However, despite the positive effect of such initiatives on mutual identification, what remains missing is a sense of collective mission. This requires stepping outside the immediate needs of Jewish survival and developing a broader universal role for the Jewish people in the world. The *tikkun olam* policy will ignite a collective challenge for Jews and Israelis, shifting the current paradigm of support for, and defense of, one another to one of working and dreaming together for a better world.

Enhancing Soft Power

The third rationale underlying the *tikkun olam* policy is the enhancement of Jewish and Israeli soft power. Soft power refers to the ability to attract others by the legitimacy of one's own policies and the values that underlie them (Nye, 1990, 2004a, 2004b). International development can be an important tool of soft power, in that it represents a “diplomacy of values” and thereby enhances credibility, trust, and leadership in the world (Lancaster, 2000).

International development practitioners are sometimes reluctant to refer to soft power as a motivator for assistance work, out of fear that it will be seen as undermining the authenticity of the activity. However, this is a misunderstanding of the nature of soft power, which by definition is about honest and value-laden conduct. In this sense soft power is highly relevant to *tikkun olam*, which is entirely motivated by Jewish values.

The *tikkun olam* policy could enhance Jewish and Israeli soft power by exposing developing countries to the generous nature of the Jewish people, as well as broadening cooperation and forging partnerships with other states, nongovernmental organizations, and international bodies. In the absence of such engagement, it is unrealistic to expect the world to know Israeli society or world Jewry—it simply does not have the attention span, and there are too many conflicting messages. The effect would not and should not be automatic sympathy for the Jewish people or Israel, but it would encourage non-Jews and non-Israelis to see nuance rather than the one-dimensional approach sometimes taken. By rolling up our sleeves and making *tikkun olam* a vital interest, the truths of Jewish *hesed* (kindness) and *tzedek* (justice) can be opened to the world.

FUNDING THE *TIKKUN OLAM* POLICY

To achieve these policy rationales, a significant shift in Jewish funding priorities is required. We believe that Jewish philanthropy is potentially well placed to play a major role. The remainder of this article considers this role in more detail. We address two questions: What is unique about the role of Jewish philanthropy? How can Jewish philanthropy help put the *tikkun olam* policy into practice?

What is Unique About the Role of Jewish Philanthropy?

Jewish philanthropy, as with philanthropy in general, is freer than either government or business to make decisions based on values without the constraints of

By rolling up our sleeves and making tikkun olam a vital interest, the truths of Jewish hesed (kindness) and tzedek (justice) can be opened to the world.

electoral opinion or shareholder interest. Consequently, their risk capital and ability to innovate are higher. The economic power of philanthropy, although far smaller than government, can be used to advance bold goals and has a record of leveraging both funding and partnerships across governmental and nongovernmental sectors.

Acting alone, neither the Israeli government nor the host of relatively small Jewish international development agencies are likely to have the ability, means, or will to achieve the ambitious objectives set out in this article. What the intelligent deployment of philanthropic capital can do is lead the way by being a catalyst for action and stimulating initiatives that would otherwise not be realized.

Of course, there are risks. Perhaps the most current is the effect of a global recession not just on the overall level of philanthropic giving but also in creating a reluctance to embrace an additional priority at this time.

Equally, in the context of increasingly scarce resources, it will be crucial to achieve an effective alignment between Jewish philanthropy and the Israeli government on a *tikkun olam* policy. They should be joint funding partners, but at the same time, the partnership must involve more than financial collaboration. Each side will need to work cohesively to mobilize its resources to support Jewish and Israeli organizations, practitioners, and volunteers to work side by side in international development.

This collaboration is likely to require a renewed discourse between the Jewish world and Israel in pursuit of its shared objectives. The experience of negotiations between Jewish philanthropists and the Israeli government over Birthright Israel may prove relevant to some of the practical proposals set out later.

Finally, there is also the risk of rivalries among the funding community and NGOs undermining the focus and intensity that will be required to maximize the collective impact of the Jewish people and Israel on the problems of the developing world. Philanthropy has a special responsibility here to avoid turf wars and seek to identify strategies to lift the tide for all boats.

In some ways, a policy of tikkun olam is already in operation. But what we believe is needed is a more concerted and focused approach led by Jewish philanthropy to bring cohesion and build capacity.

Getting Started: How Can Jewish Philanthropy Help Put The *Tikkun Olam* Policy into Practice?

In some ways, a policy of *tikkun olam* is already in operation. It is reflected in the growing number of individuals and organizations in the Jewish world and Israel giving expression to their Jewish values through work ranging from volunteering in Ghana or Nepal, to collecting testimony from survivors of the Rwandan genocide, to campaigning against the current genocide in Darfur.

But what we believe is needed is a more concerted and focused approach led by Jewish philanthropy to bring cohesion and build capacity. There are three priorities for this approach.

A *Tikkun Olam* Research Program The field needs an improved research platform for decision making. There is an academic literature on the relationship between faith and international development (see, for example, Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007), but far less research into the Jewish world and Israel's engagement with the issue. In particular, there is a need for more and better academic research into the Jewish world and Israel's engagement with international development as

well as convening conferences and seminars that bring together academics, NGOs, and policymakers to explore issues addressed in the research. An early example of such a conference—co-hosted by Stanley Bergman, chair of the international board of the Tel Aviv University's Hartog School, and the Pears Foundation in New York in June 2006—gathered 60 Jewish development professionals from seven countries across four continents together with Israeli practitioners and officials and has helped energize the field. The Hartog School is currently playing a role in filling this academic deficit, and research on the trajectory of Israel's development cooperation and on mapping of Jewish development NGOs will be published in 2009.

A Task Force for Jewish Commitment to International Development In March 2008, the Hartog School held a workshop on “Faith and International Development,” which attracted 120 delegates, including development experts, philanthropists, academics, and spiritual leaders, from more than 50 organizations. In response to the desire for ongoing collaboration expressed at the Hartog workshops, some delegates recommended the establishment of a “Task Force for Jewish Commitment to International Development.”³

If established, a task force could serve as a focal point for Jews and Israelis concerned with international development. The aims of a task force could include the following:

- To advance Jewish and Israeli involvement in international development at all levels
- To serve as a hub for greater thought on linking Jewish values, texts, and culture to the practical work of Jewish and Israeli development organizations
- To facilitate information exchange among the task force members, as well as between them and the broader international development community
- To encourage project collaboration by providing a real-time, updated clearing-house for ongoing activities
- To match Jewish and Israeli professionals and volunteers to available opportunities in international development
- To support practitioners in their advocacy efforts

The task force's primary ongoing interface could be an interactive Web portal, which suits the nature of the member community, as it is spread throughout the world. In addition, an international conference on international development could be held each year providing a physical space for the members to meet and gain renewed energy. With a moderate investment, the task force could serve as an organic home for world Jewry's international development endeavors and as a catalyst for continued expansion.

A World Jewish Service Corps The creation of a world Jewish service corps has been frequently referred to in the context of calls for a major new *tikkun olam* initiative (for example, see Burg, 1995; Fried & Tor, 2007). In particular, A. B. Yehoshua wrote in 1999 as follows:

This must be a shared Jewish project led by Israel, with the aim of establishing an expeditionary corps composed of Israelis (Jews and Arabs) and Diaspora Jews that will offer

³ Research underway at the Hartog School is consulting Jewish and Israeli NGOs about the demand for, and feasibility of, such a task force.

to needy third-world countries teachers in various fields, such as English, mathematics, chemistry, physics, music, and so forth, as their needs require. This will make an important contribution in the educational and intellectual realms, in which the Jewish world and Israel are blessed with experience and abundance.

Within the context of such a corps, we will make our contribution to the world and realize our purpose. It is crucial for a state to have a purpose, like the French who seek to disseminate their culture, like the Americans who are concerned with democracy throughout the world, like the Scandinavians who are heavily involved in advancing human rights in different countries. In general, it is important that nations take concrete measures throughout the world to advance values that are important for them and, of course, be willing to pay for them out of their own pocket.

The expeditionary corps will be an especially appropriate contribution for Israel, since its creation will bestow upon us a mix of honor and duty: honor, that after the terrible, bloody century we have endured, we have not despaired, and instead have chosen to spread progress and hope throughout the world, and duty, that after having rehabilitated ourselves, thanks in no small measure to the help we received from the rest of the world, we will now begin to give to others.

Over the past year, a number of studies have been conducted into Jewish service, and their conclusions provide excellent resource material for creating a major new Jewish service initiative. Several studies found that the demand for Jewish service far exceeds current participation and available places in existing programs (Chertok & Samuel, 2008a, 2008b; Kopelowitz & Lewin, 2008; Rehnborg, 2008). They also pointed out that the positive benefits for recipients and meaningful impact on volunteers seen in other service programs should be replicable for Jewish service, provided the same standards are met.

Our view is that the critical factor in designing a large-scale Jewish service program is to align the program within a broader vision and conceptual framework, such as that expressed by the *tikkun olam* policy rationale set out in this article.

First, this alignment means that the program should provide authentic and effective volunteer assistance to people in need, thereby contributing positively toward human development. If not, it will be rejected by host communities, partner organizations and volunteers themselves. For example, the majority of existing Jewish service programs last less than one month (Rehnborg, 2008). Such short-term programs have a questionable capacity to deliver effective assistance to needy communities. Particular care should be taken to avoid claiming authentic assistance as an organizational goal but then placing volunteers for short periods or with minimal professional skills or preservice training.

Second, the program should have a strong *mifgash* (meeting) element, reinforcing the sense of common purpose and peoplehood between Jewish and Israeli counterparts. This means providing ongoing Jewish educational programming, which is designed to suit volunteers' backgrounds and expectations, in parallel to the volunteer service. One study found that Jewish educational curricula in existing Jewish service programs are often mismatched with the needs of volunteers (Chertok & Samuel, 2008b). Another found that the impact on the Jewish identity of volunteers in existing Jewish service programs has been found wanting (Rehnborg, 2008). In this regard the educational programming must be thoroughly formulated and focused on the *mifgash* and its impact on volunteers' connection to each other, as well as on textual study.

Finally, by serving the world to the best of their abilities and being a living embodiment of Jewish values, volunteers will become outstanding global ambassadors for the spirit of Judaism and for the entire Jewish people.

CONCLUSION

The *tikkun olam* policy aims not to reinvent the wheel but to add value and provide a framework for navigating this new horizon of Jewish philanthropy. These recommendations represent the beginning of a process, the outcome of which will ultimately be to establish the Jewish people's full participation in the international development field.

To achieve success, the policy must be adopted at the highest levels of Jewish philanthropy and the Israeli government; there must be the establishment of an appropriate governing body and implementing infrastructure and the allocation of a sufficient budget. Whichever projects are ultimately pursued, they should remain within the parameters of the overall policy approach.

By infusing the Jewish people with a greater sense of collective purpose, we believe that the *tikkun olam* policy can have a remarkable impact on Israel, world Jewry, and the world at large.

REFERENCES

- B. T. W. **Informing Change** (2008, May). *Jewish service learning: What it is and what could be*. Retrieved from http://www.ujcinteroffice.org/local_includes/downloads/28603.pdf.
- Burg, A. (1995, June). *Brit Am: A covenant of the people*. Jerusalem.
- Chertok, F., & Samuel, N. (2008a, May). *Assessing interest in long-term Jewish service options for young adults*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Chertok, F., & Samuel, N. (2008b, October). *Learning to do good: Evaluation of UJA-Federation of New York's Break New Ground Jewish service learning initiative*. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Retrieved from http://www.ujcinteroffice.org/local_includes/downloads/28604.pdf.
- Fried, E. (2006, May). Soft power and Israel's policy of development cooperation. In *Israel and Africa: Assessing the past, envisioning the future*. Tel Aviv: Africa Institute of the American Jewish Committee, and the Hartog School of Government and Policy, Tel Aviv University.
- Fried, E., & Tor, A. (2007, March). *The World Jewish Service Corps*. Tel Aviv: Hartog School of Government and Policy.
- Greenberg, A. (2006). *Grande soy vanilla latte with cinnamon, no foam: Jewish identity and community in a time of unlimited choices*. New York: Reboot.
- Inbal, A. B., & Zahavi, S. (2009, January). *The rise and fall of Israel's development cooperation: 1958–2008*. Tel Aviv: Hartog School of Government and Policy, Tel Aviv University.
- "The Jewish State: The Next 50 Years." (1999, Winter). *Azure*.
- Kopelowitz, E., & Lewin, E. (2008, September.) *Long term Jewish volunteer services: Assessing interest among Jewish Israeli adults*. Jerusalem: Research Success Technologies.
- Lancaster, C. (2000, September/October). Redesigning foreign aid. *Foreign Affairs (Council on Foreign Relations)*, 79(5), 74–88.
- Maagar-Mahot Research Institute. (2008, February). *Public opinion survey on Israel's international development assistance*. Tel Aviv: Author.
- Marshall, K., & Van Saanen, M. (2007). *Development and faith*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Nye, J. S. (1990). *Bound to lead: The changing nature of American power*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nye, J. S. (2004a, May/June). The decline of America's soft power. *Foreign Affairs (Council on Foreign Relations)*, 83(3), 16–20.
- Nye, J. S. (2004b). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Rehnberg, S. J. (2008, October). *Young, Jewish and working for change, Jewish service learning – An analysis of participant Jewish identity and program characteristics*. Austin: RGK Center for Philanthropy

By serving the world to the best of their abilities and being a living embodiment of Jewish values, volunteers [in a world Jewish service corps] will become outstanding global ambassadors for the spirit of Judaism and for the entire Jewish people.

and Community Service. Retrieved from http://www.ujcinteroffice.org/local_includes/downloads/28544.pdf.

Rodin, T. S. (1969). *Political aspects of Israeli foreign aid in Africa*. PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska.

Shain, Y. (2008). *Kinship and Diasporas in international affairs*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How can a new vision that harnesses Jewish energy and skill to help the world's poorest people encourage a new sense of Jewish purpose?
- How do we design programming that emphasizes service to non-Jews and links to the broader world, but simultaneously strengthens participants' connections to the Jewish people?
- How do we reconcile the "soft power" element of Jewish volunteerism without feeling guilty or that it taints the authenticity of the endeavor, and what can we learn in this regard from the approaches taken by other countries such as the United States (Peace Corps), Germany (Weltwärts), United Kingdom (Platform 2), Australia (Youth Ambassadors for Development), and many others?