

# TO HEEL THE WORLD

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

Our reading this week begins with an unusual word in its opening verse: "And it will be that as a consequence [*Eikev*] of listening to these judgments, guarding and doing them, that HaShem your G-d will guard for you the Covenant and the kindness which He swore to your fathers" [7:12].

Literally, the word *Eikev* is best translated as the "heel." This is how our forefather Yaakov received his name, because he emerged from the womb with "his hand holding onto the heel [*Eikev*] of Esav" [Gen. 25:26 — The name "Yaakov" prepends a *Yud* to the three-letter root *Eikev*]. The blessings of the Covenant follow on the heels of listening. As soon as we listen, the blessings are there.

But this also means that the blessings are not guaranteed on their own, regardless of our actions. As we see so frequently in the Torah, when we turn away from the path, we are pushed back towards it, and often with painful events — such as the destruction of Temples — as tragic consequences of our misbehavior.

So we must listen... and to what must we listen? "To these judgments" — the voice of a Higher Power, the Supreme Being, a voice greater than our own. We don't make the rules, we *follow* the rules. We guard and do these judgments, because we want the blessings of the Covenant. The blessings come on the "heels" of our following the Divine Command. We must "heel" — using our intelligence and capabilities, but following the Torah as surely as a dog follows its Master.

Recently, I was sent a review copy of a book called "[To Heal the World?](#)" It is an elaborate critique of a popular school of thought which the author digests down to a single phrase: *Tikkun Olam*, healing the world. It asserts that the "Jewish left" is both "corrupting" Judaism and endangering Israel.

Without getting into his politics, when it comes to Judaism he has a good point. The authentic Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* found in our tradition has no practical consequences, other than following certain rules that our Sages set out to help other people perform the Commandments. [Whenever the Sages instituted a *Takanah*, it was to help us fulfill the Commandments (or to commemorate events such as Purim, Chanukah and Fast Days). When it helped other people fulfill the Commandments, rather than the person directly affected by the *Takanah*, it was *Tikkun Olam* — for the benefit of the world.]

As you see, this has little to do with the way that the phrase "Tikkun Olam" is used today. Rather, today we are told that any number of causes (universally with a particular bent, as he emphasizes) are not merely worthwhile, but actually *mandated* under the Jewish concept of "healing the world."

And, of course, we are the ones to determine what is or is not *Tikkun Olam*.

It is not merely that this is not true Tikkun Olam... it's not even *Judaism*.

Judaism is not about determining for ourselves what is right, but submitting to a greater judgment than our own. We are not promised blessings for finding a new ideal and associating it with repair of the world. We are promised blessings if we *listen*.

Our Torah is about listening, listening to judgments from a Higher Power. Our mission is not to "heal" as much as it is to "heel." That is what brings the blessings of the Covenant, for which we must strive.