



Mirna Funk

Learning from Jews

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Judaism today: what can we learn from 5780 years of history?

When it comes to Jewish life today, discussions usually revolve around the Holocaust, the Arab-Israeli conflict, or anti-semitism – particularly in Germany. Yet, Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic Abrahamic religions, making it a culture and philosophy that goes back thousands and thousands of years. In her latest book, Mirna Funk takes up eight theories from the history of Jewish ideas and brings them into dialogue with the present. These include, for instance, 'lashon hara', the prohibition of defamation, and 'tikkun olam', the duty to improve the world. In doing so, Funk opens up a fresh perspective on political debates, conflict, and personal development. Her account is down-to-earth and unique, with strong philosophical foundations.

- Mirna Funk demonstrates the potential of Jewish philosophy for our modern society
- Shitstorms, sex, self-determination – an unusual look at current topics



Mirna Funk, was born in 1981 in East Berlin. She studied philosophy and works as a writer and freelance journalist, amongst others for *FAZ*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die ZEIT* and various Israeli publications. For the past two years, her monthly column "Jewish Today" has appeared in *Vogue*. Her debut novel 'Winternähe' was awarded the Uwe Johnson Prize, her nonfiction books are also successful.

Sample Translation „Learning from Jews” (M. Funk)

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PROLOGUE

I emerged from the *Mikveh*, took a deep breath and shook my head. The water ran out of my ears and my nose. The *balanit*, the woman who sits on the edge of the bath during the ritual, smiled at me and nodded, encouraging me to join her in saying the Hebrew Shehecheyanu prayer, “Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higiyanu laz'man hazeh”. I'd had to be immersed under water precisely three times, and then it was done. She helped me up the steps, handed me a towel to wrap round myself and then she instantly vanished.

That's two and a half years ago now. Back then, in September 2021, I underwent the so-called confirmation of status. It's a *giyur* for those with Jewish fathers, simplified by the General Rabbinical Conference of Germany. It's nearly ten years since I first considered a *giyur* - the conversion to Judaism. At the time, I was sick of not being Jewish enough to join the congregation and at the same time too Jewish to just be considered German. For I have a Jewish father and a Gentile mother. A dilemma with which I'm not as alone as I'd thought for a long time. Transcultural relationships happen because despite the diaspora outside Israel, we no longer live in ghettos or shtetls, and people fall in love with people and not in the other's religion or ethnicity. The majority of Jews in Germany have partners who are not Jewish. The *Halacha*, the Jewish law, decrees you are Jewish when your mother is Jewish. However, that was not always the case.

In Judaism, we are currently in the year 5784. For the first 3,700 years, Jewish identity was passed down through the father. After the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, a pragmatic solution was needed for Jewish women had been enslaved or raped, and the fathers of their children were no longer clearly identifiable. As a result the matrilineal principle has been applied for around 2,000 years. Yet we've all heard of the Nuremberg Race Laws, and there the *Halacha* didn't matter. Everyone with Jewish roots was sent to the gas chambers. And since the 1950s the Israeli Law of Return, which presides over whom may be granted Israeli nationality, has been based on the Nuremberg Race Laws. You are eligible if you have a Jewish grandfather. Hence Jewish identity is evaluated according to different parameters depending on whether

you look at it from a constitutional or religious perspective.

As a result of these contradicting laws, individual perspectives and even differences within the religion, my identity was long defined externally. Everyone, who'd ever heard the word "Jew" felt entitled to tell me what I was: Jew or Gentile. Mostly, this decision was based on a smattering of knowledge and their personal like or dislike of me. Sometimes, I felt pushed from pillar to post. Sometimes, I felt weightless like a particle in space. I had no control of my own identity. I constantly wondered who or what I was without being able to give myself a satisfactory answer, and that hurt.

The *balanit* held the towel out to me. I climbed up the steps and dried myself off. Then she left me alone and I thought about the three Rabbis at the *beth din*, the rabbinical court in Berlin, where I'd had to present myself shortly before the *Mikveh* ritual. It had taken less than ten minutes. I thought how one of them had said, "We can't make you into something you aren't already anyway," and how important this sentence was for me. Maybe even more important than the *Mikveh*.

Then I blow-dried my hair and got dressed. In just two hours, I needed to leave for the airport and catch a flight to Stuttgart for a reading nearby. I'd been invited as a Jewish writer to speak about Jewish identity. That is also, at least in part, an external codification, a proclamation that has shaped me and my work for years. Again and again, I've had to explain that it's right in some respects and also wrong in some respects, because of the *Halacha*, but well, before the destruction of the temple and so on and so forth. This adjective that people kept ascribing to me always needed a whole string of explanations and that I of course kept on explaining to myself.

On the way home, I waited for a feeling of huge relief to set in. But it didn't come. Instead my heart raced and fear spread in my stomach. Is it all just a dream? I asked myself. I sent photos of the *Mikveh* to my friends so that they could confirm what had happened. *Mazel tov* messages decorated with cute emojis flooded my WhatsApp inbox. Once back at my flat, I quickly packed my suitcase, and called an Uber, "To the airport, please!"

Layla Echad by singer and rapper Atar Mayner blasted straight into my ears from my AirPods. I listened to the song at full volume on repeat. I looked out of the open window,

feeling a little lost as if I were a teenager in a film about growing up. The leaves were yellow, the air clear. Tears ran down my cheeks. That's it, I thought back then. That's the end of my journey.

A few weeks later, I wrote a column about this day for the ZEIT magazine and one of the rabbis from “my” *beth din* read it. He sent me a message on facebook, “Your journey is certainly not over ... Just like all Jews, it will go on until you are 120.”

This book is part of my journey. I didn't just write it for an audience, but also for myself. For me growing up in the GDR without Jewish traditions meant that I had to first learn what Judaism actually means beyond the Holocaust. That was a blank that I needed to fill. Actively and passively. Bit by bit. Consciously, but also unconsciously. And of course I didn't just start filling in the blanks on the day of my confirmation of status, but much earlier. Maybe it was the first trip to Israel in 1991, or the visit to the Beth Café in Tucholskystraße, Berlin that opened in the early nineties, maybe it was childhood visits to my Jewish family, maybe it was when I started having my own social life in Tel Aviv beyond just my relatives there, maybe it was reading the Jewish philosophers, maybe cooking the chicken soup that I perfected, maybe writing my first novel, falling in love with Jewish men, the birth of my child, making minced liver, reading the Talmud or praying to *HaShem*, something I'd begun in recent years. Maybe it was all of it together, or maybe none of it, or the jumping back and forth between all these events, scattered throughout my biography, if you looked at life like a montage à la Walter Benjamin.

I have never been to a *yeshiva*, a Jewish place of education that concentrates on studying traditional religious texts, in particular the Talmud and the Torah. Usually, these institutions play a central part in Jewish education and scholarship. *Yeshivot*, the plural of *yeshiva*, are different in their size, structure and style of education but their main focus is on interactive, often partnership-like, study (known as *chavruta*) with the lessons or discussions led by a rabbi or scholar.

I'd had to go this road alone and the result, a large part of which has gone into this book, is broken due to my own broken identity. It is the attempt to put what I've learnt, what I've read and what I've understood in a larger societal context. Others will judge whether I've succeeded in that, just as my identity was long judged. That's ok for me. I

will have developed new thoughts, which may have not yet been thought in that form, and I will have made mistakes because people make mistakes. But I have done something, which over the last 2,000 years has been predominantly done by men, Jewish men, and that is reinterpreting Jewish texts. And so I join the ranks of a Jewish tradition and I accept, or rather I wish, that my interpretations, theories and analyses too will be refuted by Jewish men and women because that too is part of the Jewish tradition. Anything else would be a thoughtless acceptance, blind followership or the merry bleating of a flock of sheep.

However, what distinguishes Judaism and what makes it so special, is the flexibility and the courage to doubt that came about with the Rabbinic Judaism. Those who believe the most important writing in Judaism is the Bible are suppressing what has happened since the destruction of the Second Temple. Namely the development of Judaism, which emanates from the rabbis. A Judaism that always adapts rules and laws to the situation. A Judaism that is shaped by the enjoyment of discussion and the questioning of supposed facts. A Judaism that is characterised above all by its flexibility and always looks to the modern world. We appointed female Rabbis when it was time to bid farewell to old, out-dated traditions. We allowed girls to celebrate *Bat Mitzvah* when it was time to bid farewell to old, out-dated traditions. And we were able to clarify relevant questions of sex and love when it was time to bid farewell to old, out-dated traditions. They are all reasons why the majority of Jews, who live a secular life, are nevertheless still able to identify with their religion. It is also because as a religion Judaism is not limited to answering transcendental and metaphysical questions but has always also considered the dilemmas of human existence. Namely, thanks to dialogic thinking, it has essentially divorced itself from a dichotomous claim to absoluteness. For in Judaism learning is a top priority along with dialogue, without which learning and understanding would not be possible in the first place. That means that rules, laws and systems of thought are always questioned and adapted to the changing world. Ultimately, the Jewish rules and commandments, the *Mitzvot*, were developed in order to enable a community life and to stabilise it in the long term. Naturally, that also includes considering and involving the development of humans and society. That means combining the past and present to ensure a better future.

My goal was to bring Judaism into the present day to ensure a better future. I conceived this goal in September 2022 and developed eight chapters in which I would bring eight Jewish concepts into dialogue with societal problems and find solutions to these problems with the help of Judaism. I started to write the texts for this book in May 2023, and I was in the middle of editing it when the present rained down on me, and each of the approximately 15.7 millions Jews around the world. The 7th October proves that history never ends. However, it also proves that the world cares less about us than we had hoped, and that we Jews mean more to each other than we were aware. The 7th October and the weeks that followed prove that Judaism with all its combined knowledge is more than just the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and the Arab-Israeli conflict, even if at first glance it appears that everything culminates in this triangle. The 7th October and the weeks that followed prove above all the basic argument of my book, namely that the answers to the most relevant questions of our times are to be found in Judaism on account of its anti-ideological and anti-missionary character. Those who dualistically divide the world into oppressed and oppressor, good and evil, man and monster have lost: in both the humanistic and intellectual sense. Those who position themselves on the right side and point their fingers at external evil, need the teaching of Judaism more than ever.

TIKKUN OLAM - ON IMPROVING THE WORLD

I was standing under the shower. The water pressure was fine but nothing special. Lykke Li sang from out of the speakers. Two years of pandemic, a bit of war in Europe, too little money in the account and the man had now also done a bunk. Maybe I should play the lottery and re-register on one of the countless dating apps? Maybe I should finally do an *aliyah*, meaning “immigrating to Israel”? There, the pandemic is over and war has been normality for over 100 years, so they at least have a different approach to it. Maybe I should just simply stay in the shower or go back to bed?

It was not a good day. Quite clearly. But like all not particularly good days, this day was also part of life and human existence, kind of the standard programme. Nevertheless, I suddenly heard myself praying to *HaShem*, the Jewish God. I said, “Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam” (we praise you, Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe), and then continued in German because my knowledge of Hebrew ends at “melech ha-olam”: “I need dosh, urgently, please, please send money and the *boi* should get back in touch, somehow. Doesn’t matter that I’ve blocked him everywhere. By letter, by homing pigeon or better still by floral delivery service.” I didn’t ask for the war to end. Not because I’m too egocentric for that but out of realism. *HaShem* still had influence on unimportant stuff like men and money. I was sure of it. He had long since lost control of everything else. History proves as much. It was certainly no longer a matter of course as a Jew to still say a “Baruch atah Adonai”. At the end of the day, 80 years ago the Jews of this world had to witness the hardest proof of an absent God: the Shoah. The ultimate opponent of Leibniz’s Monadology, in which he attempts to logically prove the existence of God. Accordingly, an elementary question has been asked for 80 years: does the “post-Shoah” God even exist? And if not, what now?

Yet, at the same time I like the Jewish God. I’m not completely devoted to him and I would also not claim to give all his decisions a hundred percent backing, let alone bet my life that he really exists. But in general, I value his capacity for dialogue, his humour, and naturally also that he so cleverly contrived the stunt in Paradise with Adam and Eve, the tree and the snake. He demands activity and not a passive inertia and the

illusory belief that somehow things will work out. Jewish belief is about impact. About actively changing the course of history and not falling into an inactive apathy. In the weeks and months after 7th October in Israel it was possible to see that this view of life is anchored deep in Jewish culture. As fast as lightening, civil society initiatives rose out of the ground to provide the aid needed. Restaurants were closed for normal business and used as mass kitchens where food was prepared for the survivors of the massacre and for the 100,000 plus soldiers, who were stationed in the North, South, East and West of the country in but a few days. Call centres for the families of the missing were set up and transport teams were mobilised to deliver food, clothing, medical help and everything else required to the area in the south of Israel that was destroyed in the terror attack. Around the world a poster campaign started to draw attention to the approximately 240 hostages. The families of these hostages demonstrated outside the Tel Aviv Museum of Art every Saturday evening for weeks. Jewish resilience proves that it's more than possible to still move up a gear and not fall into depression in a traumatising and what's more completely overwhelming situation. It's the absolute determination not to give up but also to survive. That is why the song goes, "Am Yisrael Chai" - The people of Israel live. The active character of this sentence is apparent in the verb "lives". The grammatical active form. And for that reason, it's not "will live."

For in Judaism, Paradise is not in the next world but in this world and the Messiah, for whom the Jews are waiting, without expecting him, is human not divine. The Jewish Messiah has a few important characteristics: firstly, he has not yet come and the Jewish people are still waiting for their salvation. Secondly, he is a very earthly Messiah. He is a human saviour, which is emphasised in particular in the origin of the word because *Maschiach* simply means *anointed* in Hebrew - a human saviour. The king used to be the only one who was anointed.

In Christianity, the Messiah already came to earth as Jesus. But even then, salvation has not happened. It only occurs when Jesus returns on Judgement Day. Thus, the Christian saviour is not an earthly figure. He died, rose again and will one day come again. He cannot be one of their own. Their hope is projected on a figure that is beyond human. The elementary difference between the earthly Jewish Messiah and the non-earthly Christian Messiah must be made clear because, by nature, it leads to a different

way of dealing with the present.

If the Jewish Messiah comes from our own ranks, then it is justifiable to ask whether I should stay miserably in my shower and then go back to bed for at the end of the day it could be me: I could be the Messiah incarnate, the one who will finally catapult everyone into the paradisaical state. For real? Like for real for real?

My impression is that it could actually all be a trick by the great, powerful and presumably very clever *HaShem*. Since the activity, impact and potential saviour attitude, which he plants on every Jew qua birth, requires above all self-responsibility. It's not about waiting for good things, it's about bringing good things into the world. It's not about making others responsible for bad things, but about actively combating bad things. It's also about uniting humanity and divinity in a certain sense, i.e., defining the synthesis of good and evil as the factory settings for humanity and the world. But how can Paradise actually be created from that, if all bad things are banished from Paradise? If only milk and honey flows there and nobody fights any more? In Christianity, it is all somehow clear. Christians are waiting for the return of a person, who died and rose again, and in doing so his abilities pushed the boundaries of normal humanity. Ergo, they're waiting for some kind of spirit, in any case an non-earthly figure. He will sort it all out and finally bring the world back to its original state, after Eve's mischief. According to Christianity anyway. That means everyone, who is currently living on this planet, can continue to be miserable in the shower because Jesus will come up with the money and the *boi* when needed, oh and stop the war. If!!! He!!! Wants!!! Of course!!!

But in Judaism it's just different. In Judaism, the notions of free will and impact lead to a concept called *tikkun olam*. It literally means, "repairing" or "improving the world." It's one of the most important components in Judaism, a central concept that emphasises the responsibility and obligation of the Jewish community to actively work for social justice, peace and charity in order to make the world a better place. The origins of the term are found in the early Rabbinic literature, in particular the *mishnah*, a collection of Jewish laws and traditions that was compiled around 200 years after Christ. In these texts, *tikkun olam* is discussed in the context of legal and societal rules, often in the

sense of measures that are taken to protect society or to improve social conditions. Over the course of time, the meaning of *tikkun olam* developed further and was expanded on, in particular in the context of the *Kabbalah*, Jewish mysticism. In the kabbalahistic tradition, which thrived in the Middle Ages, *tikkun olam* was understood as a metaphysical process concerning the reinstatement of an original divine order. In his book, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World*, Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff explains that the Jewish people instinctively understand *tikkun olam*. Even Jews, who do not believe in God or the importance of God, adhere to the obligation to make this world a better place. Dorff believes that is the essence of being Jewish. You cannot imagine Jewish life without *tikkun olam* because it is the promise to make the world a better place, and that is indeed part of the divine mission since in Judaism we understand ourselves as God’s partners. Equal. On a par. Simultaneously in dialogue and a relationship with each other. *Tikkun olam* is based on the conviction that the world is God’s creation and that the people bear the responsibility of contributing to improving this creation. It’s about healing and repairing the world through acts of goodness and empathy. It can be practised on an individual, community or societal level.

On an individual level, *tikkun olam* may mean using your time and resources to help those in need, to promote social justice or to be engaged in environmental protection. It’s about living ethical values and taking responsibility for others. On a community level, *tikkun olam* means that Jewish communities are involved in good causes, do voluntary work and support programs of social justice education and promotion. It’s about taking an active role in the community and driving social changes. On a societal level, *tikkun olam* means advocating social and political changes aimed at equality, justice and peace. It’s about unearthing injustices, fighting discrimination and standing strong for a just society.

Tikkun olam is an integral component of the Jewish ethos and emphasises the responsibility of every individual to contribute to improving the world. This individual ability to act, which is based upon the fact that the Jewish Messiah has firstly not yet appeared and secondly will come from our own ranks, is radically different from the

Christian image of the saviour. Accordingly, a deep activism underlies the Jewish being. Activist potency is absolutely necessary, however, in recent years it has been drastically overdone because the desire for moral superiority has led to the crazy idea that there could well be something such as heaven on earth. However, *tikkun olam* rejects this aspiration and remains realistic and free of ideology.

It appears to me as if the current societal activism that can be observed among Gen Z and Millennials is similar to *tikkun olam*. Namely, being able to actively change our world and not having to wait for anyone for its improvement. Bye-bye, Jesus. So far, so good. But there is a flaw in the logic: Paradise \neq humans. No real human in this world can create a paradisaical state. For various reasons. Firstly because as people we are per se good and evil and accordingly not in the position to be able to create a place that is exclusively good. And secondly, because the idea of an exclusively good place is in principal not human. Because those who believe we are heading towards a paradisaical state where in the end milk and honey flows, there's an endless supply of chicken legs, everyone has a pool and nobody needs to work any more, still believe in a dichotomous world that must be freed of evil so that in the end only the good remains. In this book I don't intend to discuss the great dictators of history, who also believed in this dichotomous world, not to mentioned existing or not longer existing ideologies that projected evil onto anything possible: groups of people, philosophy, art. But I want to at least mention that although radical dualism feels good, it is deeply ideological. In it there is only I and the others, the good place and the evil place, heaven and hell, justice and injustice, white and black. In doing so, everyone who believes in a dichotomous worldview naturally always places themselves on the positive, good, just and white side while the other side is accused of having all negative and bad characteristics. In doing so, their own negative characteristics, which absolutely everyone has, are removed. Of course this action initially leads to a feeling of superiority, but it always ends in an enormous loss of reality in which the *conditio humana* and the reality of the world completely disappear.

The question remains, how do we heal the world without becoming ideological. In The

Perver's Guide to Ideology Slavoj Žižek explains, “[Ideology is] our spontaneous relationship to our social world, how we perceive each meaning and so on and so on. We in a way, enjoy our ideology. To step out of ideology, it hurts, it's a painful experience. You must force yourself to do it. [...] Freedom hurts. Ideology is not forced upon us: we breathe it, we want it, we live it. It means that it is work to turn away from the archaic need for a simple answer, i.e., away from dichotomous thinking. It takes strength, but above all it hurts. Freedom hurts. Freedom is no fun. Freedom is just as little a noun as love is. Freedom is a verb. It also includes enduring other people's freedoms. However, that is what ideology seeks to categorically avoid. It determines who can do what and who is evil and why.

A little while I ago, I was at dinner party and was sitting opposite a female millennial. She was filled with the deepest desire to improve the world: “climate gluer”, feminist, anti-racism trainer. She defined herself completely through her endeavours for justice. I tried to enter into a dialogue with her, which was difficult. She met me with an initial spontaneous aggressiveness. Probably because she knew who I was. I stood firm against her aversion and asked her about her conception of humanity. It was pessimistic. She saw human beings as wolves. Better known as “homo homini lupus est”, which means “man is a wolf to man”. This statement is found in Thomas Hobbe's magnum opus “Leviathan,” published in 1651. Hobbe's philosophical theory was based on a pessimistic perception of humanity's natural state. He argues that without a strong central authority to rein them in humans are by nature egotistic, violent and rivalrous. The comparison with the wolf clearly illustrates his opinion that humans in their natural condition have a tendency to harm and fight each other, like predators in the wilderness.

For Hobbes, humans as social beings were dependent on a political order in order to guarantee peace and stability in society. He was in favour of an absolute monarchy or a similarly strong type of government that controls the people and limits violence. Even the *tikkun olam* seeking Millennial at dinner wanted authoritarian intervention: more laws, more rules and as little freedom as possible. She believed it was the only chance

we have to survive as humanity. Like Hobbes, she demanded a strong government and a lengthy list of restrictions. Restrictions, which would fundamentally limit individual freedom in the long term. A kind of *tikkun olam* from on high. It made me think of Frederick II, and how he'd led Germany into the Enlightenment, and from a historical perspective that this imposed enlightenment could also be interpreted as a reason for the emergence of National Socialism. For what Kant actually meant with Enlightenment was exactly the opposite of what Frederick II did. In his essay "What is Enlightenment?" Kant introduced liberalism and appealed to individual responsibility. In it, he defined the Enlightenment as humanity's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. He used immaturity to describe the state in which humanity finds itself when it does not make use of its own reason, and instead blindly follows other authorities and traditions. Kant argued that the Enlightenment means a freeing from this immaturity and places a focus on reason as the essential ability of humans. The Millennial at dinner would most likely hate Kant for his call for self responsibility because she denies humans any kind of ability to act with self responsibility. However, the Jewish *tikkun olam* stands for self responsibility - not the woke demands for a "healed world," which can be created through strict laws and systemic change. It starts with the individual. And does not point the blame at others.

At this point, it must be made clear that every societal system has been created by people and can only be changed by people. The system is not an entity independent of us that needs to be fought. Sayings like "smash the patriarchy" sound brave at first but blight the understanding that ultimately every woman and every man is part of this exact system. And therefore, to be able to bring about good and prevent evil, they should not give up their individual responsibility and point their finger at an entity allegedly separate from them.

In order to understand that and at the same time to internalise it, you have to take a closer look at the Jungian shadow. The Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875 to 1961) developed the concept of shadows to describe the dark and unconscious aspects of personality. It encompasses the parts of the psyche, that are repressed and separate from the conscious identity of a person. The shadow often

includes repressed desires, instincts, impulses and emotions, which are not consciously accepted or recognised by a person. Jung, whose statements about Jews have to be critically regarded, believed it was important to recognise and integrate the shadow in order to develop a complete and healthy psyche. By consciously addressing the shadow and integrating it into the conscious mind, the negative effects of the shadow can be reduced. In short, we can only bring about real enlightenment when we understand that all the bad things that are done to people are done by people. And only after this realisation are we able to leave our “wolfish” state as per Hobbes and to do serious good. No strict rules are needed, no harsher laws, it needs nothing more than self responsibility, which we use as a base to automatically make the world a better place without limiting the freedom of others.

The work with shadows, with which Jung himself potentially failed, is a central component in Jung’s individualisation process, in which a person develops their full potential and achieves unconscious aspects of their personality. It’s about accepting and understanding the shadow aspect and integrating it into your own self, instead of suppressing or denying it: I am good and evil, I am black and white, I am just and unjust, I am heaven and hell at the same time. The separation between me and the others as described at the start of this chapter would automatically no longer exist. The notion of a utopian condition in which evil is obliterated, would disappear.

A Rabbinic wisdom, which refers to the concept of *tikkun olam*, reads, “It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.” (Pirkei Avot 2:21).

Pirkei Avot, often simply called “Avot” is part of the *Mishnah*. The title can be translated as “Sayings of the Fathers” and is unique in the context of the *Mishnah* because the text concentrates less on the religious law and more general ethics and virtue. The quote emphasises the responsibility of every individual to contribute to the repair and improvement of the world. Every step that we take to ease suffering and to effect positive change is valuable and important. However, to do so we have to integrate our shadows, actively stand against the simplicity of ideologies and let go of the idea that at the end of day the our “healing work” will have created a utopian place, like Paradise.

At any rate, I was still in the shower. No money, and no *boi*. Lykke Li continued sing from the speakers. Of course, I wasn't going to go back to bed but would simply carry on with my life. And in doing so, accept that tomorrow will be better than today, and worse than the day after tomorrow and that any potential lottery win could never free me from the misery of human existence. From the misery based on the fact we die and are always good and bad at the same time. From accepting that without daily work there is no endless supply of chicken legs, milk and honey will never flow through Berlin instead of the filthy Spree and that we will never revel in pure happiness or live without disputes. And also that the society in which we live, can never be a place of plenty, of justice and absolute perfection because humanity, who has to first create this society, can also not be solely good. However, this recognition that we cannot achieve utopia may not lead to lethargy, just as the crazy belief in utopia may not be the driver for improving the world. The keyword here is “despite”. Despite the impossibility of a complete healing of the world, there must be activity. Despite the intrinsic demand for simple answers and a life shaped by ideology, freedom must be fought for. That can happen in different ways: through political engagement, civil-society initiatives, entrepreneurial spirit and technological developments. It is left to the individual themselves and their own talents. The big challenge is when carrying out these actions, during the *tikkun olam*, not to feel superior to the others, holier, juster or kinder. For no matter how much good we do, we are presumably also doing a lot of bad, whether we want to or not.