

## Duh!

This principle has proven to be the most common one in my entire list. (Simply add the word Duh! at the end of each example:)

1. Everyone should have food, clothing, and shelter.
2. Everyone should have access to affordable health care.
3. No one anywhere — neither child nor adult — should die of dehydration, dysentery, or *any* easily-preventable threat to life.
4. No human being should go without shoes that fit, Menschlich shoes.
5. Elders in nursing homes have wishes and dreams. We should ask residents what those dreams are, and make them come true. Duh! That's exactly what an organization called Second Wind Dreams does in more than 300 nursing homes.
6. A study conducted in nursing homes reached the following conclusion: Elders who have plants to care for and nurture live longer than those who don't have plants. An additional significant factor in that study: when they divided the residents into two groups, one group was told that they were free to choose *how* to care for the plants, while the other group was told that the plants would be cared for entirely by the staff. Let's get more life-saving plants into nursing homes and let's let the Elders themselves care for them, as they should have been caring for them all along. (Duh!) Let's hand over freedom, choice, and responsibility to the people to whom it rightfully belongs. (Duh!) "Acquired helplessness" is a familiar term in psychological circles. Let's do away with this plague and re-empower our Elders.
7. Adult emotions in hospitals can range from loneliness to fright and utter boredom. That's why chaplains, clowns, and sports heroes come to visit. Recently, my friend, Gary Gondos, was in the hospital and among the visitors were members of the Washington Redskins team as well as the cheerleaders, the Redskinettes. According to Gary, the visit certainly hastened his recovery.
8. Children experience the same boredom, stress, and fear in hospitals — but to a much greater extent than adults. So Connie Netherton, first officer of a United Airlines A320 jet, founded Pilots for Kids. Particularly in December, pilots in the Chicago area make the rounds of children's wards in local hospitals. Imagine: right by their bedside, the men and women who fly the big jets!...and all it took was this one person, Connie Netherton, to make it happen.

***Duh!***

## Wow! → Duh!

When I describe grand Tikkun Olam to others, I often hear half-words and an assortment of exclamations: Wow! (the most common sound), Ah!, Oh!, Oh my!, Oy!, Ugh!, Feh! (a Yiddish word expressing extreme disgust), or sometimes a sigh or simple gasp. The Wow! → Duh! principle simply states: *Through the power of Tikkun Olam, that which is astonishingly radical can become the common rule.* In retrospect, all of it makes sense; this is the way things should be, most certainly can be.

1. David Levitt's Bar Mitzvah Project: urging public schools to donate leftover food from the cafeteria. First his own county's school system agreed, and ultimately the entire state has joined the effort. (More than 600,000 pounds of food in the first three years.) Why not *every* state?

2. John Beltzer and friends have written more than 1,300 individual personalized songs for children with life-threatening diseases. His program is called "Songs of Love". Why doesn't *every* child in such a catastrophic situation have his or her own song?

3. An organization called Casting for Recovery organizes retreats where they teach women who have had breast cancer surgery how to fly fish. It is wonderful and appropriate exercise, and provides a means to get away and talk in a sheltered, comfortable environment.

4. Naomi Berman-Potash's Project Debby finds hotels that have unoccupied rooms which may be used to provide safe haven for victims of domestic violence.

5. A most extraordinary project called "Dying with Dignity" illustrates the Wow! → Duh! principle exceptionally well. One aspect of the program is "Five Wishes", an eight-page document that a person may fill out long before dying seems a possibility. Part of the third wish states:

*I wish to have warm baths often...to be kept fresh and clean at all times...I wish to have personal care like shaving, nail clipping, hair brushing and teeth brushing, as long as they do not cause me pain or discomfort.*

*I wish to have a cool moist cloth put on my head if I have a fever.*

*I wish to have religious readings and poems read aloud when I am near death.*

A section of the fourth wish states:

*I wish to have pictures of my loved ones in my room, near my bed...I wish to be cared for with kindness and cheerfulness, not sadness.*

*I wish to have my hand held and to be talked to when possible, even if I don't seem to respond....*

This document, or a similar one written in the same spirit, should be made available to everyone. In retrospect, it is such an obvious and necessary part of Life.

6. In Albemarle, NC, the residents of Stanly Manor Nursing Home regularly party with members of the local Harley-Davidson biker club. (Think of the postcards and e-mails to friends: "Having a wonderful time. Wish you were here!")

7. Synagogues distribute balloons to their deaf members on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, so they can grip the sides and feel the vibrations when the Shofar is sounded.

8. Why don't hospitals keep a supply of hearing aid batteries on hand? If a patient's battery wears down, he or she might not respond properly to questions or could miss some critical instructions for their present and future recovery.

9. A photography teacher gets a request from blind people to teach them how to use a camera. At first glance, this doesn't make any sense. Among the reasons for the request: People ask them out on dates — they want to know what they look like. Photography for blind students....Why not?

10. Petting a cat or a dog can relieve stress. My student and teacher, Samantha Abeel, suggests that such common pets be made available to students at exam time (or any other time when they get stressed out). Why not?

11. Joe Lejman of Gas City, IN, dressed in a tuxedo, borrowed fine china and crystal, and served as a butler for a day in a shelter for battered women. To quote Lejman, "The ladies have such low self-esteem. Some of them have never felt special for any reason. During the course of the day, I was serving

one of the clients coffee, and then lighted her cigarette, and she started crying. She said, ‘This is the first time I could ever cry because someone’s been so nice to me.’”

12. Voice mail for homeless people — to help them find work. A free service provided by Chris Petty of Littleton, CO.

13. All those people who did a stint in the Peace Corps and VISTA back in the Sixties...They were wowed, for sure, about how much of a difference they could make in the lives of other people. When they came home, if you asked them, “Did you make a difference?” the response would have been clearly, “Duh!” (Now we should commission a study to see how much those experiences play a part in their lives *today*: how much are they presently involved in active Tikkun Olam work and in their commitment to protest against All Things Wrong in the World?)

14. Once upon a time on Wall Street, a young clerk misplaced \$900,000,000. He knew exactly where he had put it, but it was the wrong place. His immediate problem was how to correct the situation. The young man’s boss, known as “a screamer”, had ruled her division of the corporation by intimidation and fear. So, understandably afraid to admit the error, the clerk began to move the money over several days — \$50,000,000 at a time — to the appropriate account. The problem was: the flow of money crossed into the next calendar month. Government regulators discovered the irregularity and reported it to my friend, Marc Sternfeld, the young man’s boss’s boss’s boss. Sternfeld fired the woman and kept the young clerk on the job. His reasoning, *the clerk* had made an honest (if rather enormous) mistake. *His arrogant boss* was the flaw in the system.

15. A teen-ager arranges for leftovers from a bagel shop to be taken regularly to the waiting room outside the intensive care unit at the hospital...for all those people who need a pleasant diversion and bit of nourishment amid the horrible stress.

16. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 (desegregating the public schools), The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act of 1996, (providing liability protection for donors of food to non-profit organizations feeding hungry people), laws eliminating sex discrimination, and various child-labor laws — all thought to be radical when introduced into law, but now the norm.

17. At one point in his career, Abraham Maslow, k”z, the eminent psychologist, turned away from the study of pathological phenomena in the human personality and, instead, devoted years of research to investigating what makes people *good* human beings.

Let us not dwell on the embarrassment or dismay that these breakthroughs were not made long, long ago. Instead, let us place our creative and emotional energy into making more Tikkun Olam a matter of routine sooner, before it is too late or much too late.

**Wow! → Duh!**