

## English translation of lecture “Die Welt ist unsere Aufgabe“

*"The world is our task. It does not live up to our expectations. But if we work for it, this world will be beautiful. If we do not, it will not be."*

Ruth Cohn is 62 as she writes this. She has just been named **Psychologist of the Year** in the USA.






Ruth Cohn has become famous, she has received many awards, two honorary doctorates. She was born in Berlin in 1912, on August 27, almost exactly 111 years ago.

In a conversation late in her life, she said of her family:

*"My parents were quiet people, not revolutionaries. They were middle class. My mother [Elisabeth Heiden-Heimer] had studied music and was a pianist. She came from a family with many artists, especially musicians. My great-grandfather was a rabbi or board member in Mainz."*

Her Jewish identity was important to Ruth Cohn; she was proud of her great-grandfather, who played an important role in the Jewish community.

   (Kurt Weill: Threepenny opera)

Her father Arthur Hirschfeld was a banker who had his own banking house. He died in 1930, much too early, but left his daughter a big inheritance which later enabled her to flee Nazi Germany.

   (We Shall Overcome)

*"We shall overcome"* – a song that stands like no other for social movements, for socio-political commitment, for the peace movement, for the civil rights movement, for the 1960s in the USA.

This commitment can also be called *"tikkun olam"* – and I would like to explain this term to you now:

(עולם תיקון *tikkun olam*)

*Tikkun olam* is a Hebrew term. One possible translation is "improvement or repair of the world". Elisabeth Goodman-Thau renders it as "mending the rift, sewing up the tear that is in the world".

The term does not appear in the Bible, but in the Talmud and in the liturgy, *tikkun olam* is also an important concept in the Kabbalah. And what exactly it means has changed from time to time over the centuries.



I see humanistic psychology, and therefore TCI, as an approach that translates Jewish values into something generally human - and thus makes them accessible to everyone.

*Quote: "Can't we use psychoanalysis and psychodynamic insights to help large groups of people, the educational and organisational world – instead of just individual patients?"*

She works more and more with groups. She leads teams and other non-therapeutic groups. Not always, but most of the time these groups are successful. She must be doing something right, but she can't put her finger on it.

*"I clearly felt that I was working methodically and that it had to be teachable; but I wasn't yet clear about the What and How of the method."*

She observes herself even more closely and finds out: she sets a theme, she observes what

the individuals say, she encourages statements from all the participants, she participates herself, she pays attention to time and space.

In the summer of 1964, she came to this realisation in a dream:

*"One night [...] I dreamt of an equilateral pyramid. When I woke up, I immediately realised that I had 'dreamed' the basis of my work. The equilateral pyramid of my dream meant to me: four points determine my group work.*

*They are all four connected and equally important. These points are:*

- *the person who turns to themselves, the others and the topic (= I);*
- *the group members who become the group through their attention to the topic and their interaction (= We);*
- *the topic, the task that the group is dealing with (= It);"*  
[which has nothing to do with the Freudian It and]
- *"the environment that influences the group and is influenced by it - that is, the environment in the closest and broadest sense (= the Globe)."*



This pyramid, a three-dimensional image, then becomes the triangle in the circle and later the symbol for TCI and the logo of the Ruth Cohn Institute.

♪ ♪ ♫ (Yedid nefesch – Semirof)

Ruth Cohn is described by others as a politically very alert and attentive person. Her attention to the Globe led to her early escape from Nazi Germany. And it led to her sense of responsibility. She became concerned about ecological issues early on.

TCI's values can be summed up in a few sentences. "Take responsibility for what you do and what you don't do – personally and socially." This is linked to the idea that each person is autonomous, but at the same time interdependent, in relation, connected.

♪ ♪ ♫

I believe that Ruth has been so well received in the church context precisely because her approach has helped to overcome a Christian and theological narrow-mindedness. In contrast to the old model of "one person interprets the Bible and the others have to believe it" (to put it bluntly), with TCI she sets up a democratic model in which everyone has something to say.

♪ ♪ ♫

In conclusion, I would like to explain again where I see the connections between TCI and Jewish thinking, Jewish values.

One point concerns **ethics**, which I think has become clear, the responsibility for others, for our neighbours, for strangers, ultimately for the world – in other words: *Tikkun Olam*.

Without this larger framework, without responsibility for the globe, TCI and humanistic psychology are inconceivable.

Ruth coined the phrase: *"I am not powerless, I am not omnipotent, I am partially powerful."*

Let us use our partial power together – and repair the world together, sew up the cracks in our different places together.

♪ ♪ ♫ (Chopin)