

**Humanitarian Aid:  
Altruistic Jewish Value or Enlightend Jewish Self Interest?  
A closer look at Mipnei Darchei Shalom.  
Compiled by Mordechai Harris**

**Framing Question:**

In the wake of the massive earthquake in Haiti, it's hard not to feel for those who've experienced suffering and loss. Moreover, we have a natural human impulse to help those living in the aftermath, to provide them with water and food, administer to their sick, and even to help bury and mourn their dead. But is this a purely secular human value that we as Jews simply share with the rest of mankind, or is there also, perhaps, a uniquely Jewish imperative to provide assistance regardless of religion and nationality to those in need? (Following that, what difference does it make either way?)

**Obligation to Help:**

<p><b><u>Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 73a</u></b></p> <p>How do we know that if a person sees another person drowning, mauled by beasts, or attacked by robbers, s/he is bound to save him? From the verse, "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor!" (Leviticus 19:16).</p>	<p><b><u>תלמוד בבלי, סנהדרין עג.</u></b></p> <p>מניין לרואה את חבירו שהוא טובע בנהר, או חיה גוררתו, או לסטין באין עליו, שהוא חייב להצילו - תלמוד לומר לא תעמד על דם רעך (ויקרא י"ט).</p>
<p><b><u>Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 7:2</u></b></p> <p>And any who sees a poor person begging and hides his eyes and does not give him charity transgresses a negative commandment, as it says (Deuteronomy 15:7), "Do not harden your heart or close your hand from your poor brother."</p>	<p><b><u>רמבם, משנה תורה, הלכות מתנות עניים ז:ב</u></b></p> <p>וכל הרואה עני מבקש והעלים עיניו ממנו ולא נתן לו צדקה עבר בלא תעשה שנאמר (דברים טו:ז) לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפוץ את ירך מאחריך האביון.</p>

- What do these sources teach us about helping those in need? Is it simply a morally good thing to do, or is it a full religious obligation?
- Who does the language of "Neighbor" and "Brother" used in the quoted biblical verses refer to?

### Extending the Obligation:

<p><b><u>Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 61a</u></b></p> <p>Our Rabbis taught: We sustain the non-Jewish poor with the Jewish poor, visit the non-Jewish sick with the Jewish sick, and bury the non-Jewish dead with the Jewish dead, <u>for the sake of peace</u>.</p>	<p><b><u>תלמוד בבלי, גיטין סא.</u></b></p> <p>ת"ר: מפרנסים עניי נכרים עם עניי ישראל, ומבקרין חולי נכרים עם חולי ישראל, וקוברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל, <u>מפני דרכי שלום</u>.</p>
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- What is meant by the words “for the sake of peace”? Are these words of intrinsic obligation or practical suggestion? What implications does this have?

### Defining Darche Shalom:

#### Other Places of Use:

<p><b><u>Mishna, Gitten 5:8</u></b></p> <p>And these things did they prescribe <u>for the sake of peace</u>: A priest was to read first, and after him a Levite, and following him an Israelite – <u>for the sake of peace</u>. They put up the Eruv in the old house – <u>for the sake of peace</u>. The pit which is nearest to a water-course is filled up first – <u>for the sake of peace</u>. Traps for wild animals, or birds, of fishes come partly under the law of theft – <u>for the sake of peace</u>. R. Jose says, This is definite theft. Aught found by a deaf mute, a mentally defective person, or a minor comes under the law of theft partly – <u>for the sake of peace</u>. R. Jose says, This is an undoubted theft. If a poor person beat the top of an olive tree, whatever is beneath him comes under the law of theft, <u>for the sake of peace</u>. R. Jose says, This is complete theft. They must not prevent the poor among the non-Jews from gathering <i> gleanings</i>, the <i> forgotten sheaf</i>, and the <i> field-corner</i> – <u>for the sake of peace</u>.</p>	<p><b><u>משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ה משנה ח</u></b></p> <p>ואלו דברים אמרו מפני דרכי שלום: כהן קורא ראשון ואחריו לוי ואחריו ישראל - מפני דרכי שלום. מערבין בבית ישן - מפני דרכי שלום. בור שהוא קרוב לאמה מתמלא ראשון - מפני דרכי שלום. מצודות חיה ועופות ודגים יש בהם משום גזל - מפני דרכי שלום. רבי יוסי אומר גזל גמור מציאת חרש שוטה וקטן יש בהן משום גזל - מפני דרכי שלום. ר' יוסי אומר גזל גמור. עני המנקה בראש הזית מה שתחתיו גזל - מפני דרכי שלום. ר' יוסי אומר גזל גמור. אין ממחין ביד עניי גוים בלקט שכחה ופאה מפני דרכי שלום:</p>
<p><b><u>Mishna, Gitten 5:9</u></b></p> <p>A woman may lend to her neighbor suspected</p>	<p><b><u>משנה מסכת גיטין פרק ה משנה ט</u></b></p> <p>משאלת אשה לחברתה החשודה על השביעית נפה וכברה</p>

<p>of transgressing the <i>Sabbatical Year</i> law a fine sieve, or a coarse sieve, or a handmill, or an oven, but she must not sift nor grind with her. The wife of a <i>fellow</i> may loan to the wife of an <i>illiterate man</i> a fine sieve, or a coarse sieve, and she man winnow, or grind, or sift with her; but when she pours out the water she must not touch it with her, because they must not assist such as commit transgression. And all these have they enjoined <u>for the sake of peace</u>. And they may encourage non-Jews in the <i>Sabbatical Year</i> but not Jews; and they may offer them greetings <u>for the sake of peace</u>.</p>	<p>ורחים ותנור אבל לא תבור ולא תטחן עמה אשת חבר משאלת לאשת עם הארץ נפה וכברה ובוררת וטוחנת ומרקדת עמה אבל משתטיל המים לא תגע עמה לפי שאין מחזיקין ידי עוברי עבירה. וכולן לא אמרו אלא מפני דרכי שלום. ומחזיקין ידי גוים בשביעית אבל לא ידי ישראל ושואלין בשלומן מפני דרכי שלום:</p>
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- What can we glean from these other contexts where “for the sake of peace” is used as an explanation? What is the goal implied by its usage.

### The Minimalist View:

<p><b><u>Rabbi Dr. Azriel Hildesheimer:</u></b> (May 20 1820 – July 12 1899) He was a German rabbi and leader of Orthodox Judaism regarded as a pioneering modernizer of Orthodox Judaism in Germany and as a founder of Modern Orthodox Judaism.</p> <p>[Asked about whether or not one also says a eulogy for non-Jewish dead...] ... That in this matter, there is only a [religious] obligation to bury [the dead] because of <u>enmity</u> but not to give a eulogy since this is not included in the category of “<u>for the sake of peace</u>”.</p>	<p><b><u>שו"ת רבי עזריאל הילדסהיימר חלק א - יו"ד סימן רנט ד"ה ועוד י"ל</u></b></p> <p>... דבזה אין חיוב רק לקבור משום איבה אבל לא להספיד דלא שייך דרכי שלום.</p>
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- In this view, what is the purpose of “for the sake of peace”?
- What does this imply about our religious obligation to relief efforts for non-Jews?

### The Maximalist View:

<p><b><u>Rambam, Laws of Kings, 10:12</u></b></p> <p>And it would appear to me that we act towards a resident-alien with courtesy and acts of lovingkindness as we do with a Jew, for behold</p>	<p><b><u>רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק י"ב</u></b></p> <p>וכן יראה לי שנוהגין עם גרי תושב בדרך ארץ וגמילות חסדים כישראל, שהרי אנו מצווין להחיותן שנאמר לגר אשר בשעריך תתננה ואכלה, וזה שאמרו חכמים אין</p>
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<p>we are command to sustain their lives, as it says, “To the resident-alien who is in your gates you should give it and he should eat.” And when our Sages said that we do not repeat words of peace to them – they were referring to [regular] non-Jews, not to the resident-alien.</p> <p>Even regarding the non-Jew, our Sages have commanded us to visit their sick and to bury their dead alongside the Jewish dead, and to feed their poor amongst the Jewish poor, because of ways-of-peace. Behold the verse says, “God is good to all and His compassion is on all of his creatures.” (Psalms 145:9) And it says, “Her [the Torah’s] ways are ways of pleasantness and all of its paths are peace.” (Proverbs 3:17)</p>	<p>כופלין להן שלום בגויים לא בגר תושב</p> <p>אפילו הגויים צוו חכמים לבקר חוליהם, ולקבור מתיהם עם מתי ישראל, ולפרנס ענייהם בכלל עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום, הרי נאמר טוב ה' לכל ורחמיו על כל מעשיו(תהילים 145:9), ונאמר דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום. (משלי 3:17)</p>
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<p><b><u>Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a</u></b></p> <p>R. Hama son of R. Hanina further said: What means the text: "You shall walk after God" (Deuteronomy 13)? Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after God; for has it not been said: "For God is a devouring fire" (Deuteronomy 4)? But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One. Just as God clothes the naked, as it says, "And God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them" (Genesis 3), so do you also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be God, visited the sick, for it is written: "And God appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre" (Genesis 18), so do you also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be God, comforted mourners, for it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son" (Genesis 25), so do you also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be God, buried the dead, for it is written: "And God buried him in the valley" (Deuteronomy 34), so do you also bury the dead. [Soncino translation]</p>	<p><b><u>תלמוד בבלי, סוטה יד.</u></b></p> <p>ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא, מאי דכתיב (דברים יג) אחרי ה' אלהיכם תלכו? וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר (דברים ד) כי ה' אלהיך אש אוכלה הוא! אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה, מה הוא מלביש ערומים, דכתיב (בראשית ג) ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם, אף אתה הלבש ערומים; הקב"ה ביקר חולים, דכתיב (בראשית יח) וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא, אף אתה בקר חולים; הקב"ה ניחם אבלים, דכתיב (בראשית כה) ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו, אף אתה נחם אבלים; הקב"ה קבר מתים, דכתיב (דברים לד) ויקבר אותו בגיא, אף אתה קבור מתים.</p>
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- In this view, what is the purpose of “for the sake of peace”?
- What does this imply about our religious obligation to relief efforts for non-Jews?

## **Closure:**

Leaving aside the discussion of whether or not we assume one has a specific religious obligation towards providing disaster relief for non-Jews, we nevertheless can express an inherent human value in doing so. The quote below comes from the most famous figure of American Modern Orthodoxy and one of the greatest Jewish Philosophers of the last hundred years, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

*The Modern Jew is entangled in the activities of the Gentile society in numerous ways - economically, politically, culturally, and on some levels, socially. We share in the universal experience. The problems of humanity, war and peace, political stability or anarchy, morality or permissiveness, famine, epidemics, and pollution transcend the boundaries of ethnic groups.*

- Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, from A. Besdin, "Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav" (New York: Ktav Pub Inc, 1989)

# Prayer in Response to Natural Disaster

Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>

*Adon ha-olamim*, Sovereign of the universe,

We join our prayers to the prayers of others throughout the world, for the victims of the earthquake which this week has brought destruction and disaster to many lives.

Almighty God, we pray You, send healing to the injured, comfort to the bereaved, and news to those who sit and wait. May You be with those who even now are engaged in the work of rescue. May You send Your strength to those who are striving to heal the injured, give shelter to the homeless, and bring food and water to those in need. May You bless the work of their hands, and may they merit to save lives.

Almighty God, we recognize how small we are, and how powerless in the face of nature when its full power is unleashed. Therefore, open our hearts in prayer and our hands in generosity, so that our words may bring comfort and our gifts bring aid. Be with us now and with all humanity as we strive to mend what has been injured and rebuild what has been destroyed.

*Ken Yehi Ratzon, ve-nomar Amen.*

May it be Your will, and let us say Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Sacks originally wrote this prayer following the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004. The current wording is slightly modified to respond to the recent earthquake in Haiti.