

A Covenant of Compassion and Responsibility

Resources to Extend Our *Chesed* (Compassion) and *Achrayut* (Responsibility) to Those Who are Starving in Gaza

The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza – Statistics from May 2025

- Over 9,000 children treated for malnutrition this year; at least 29 children and elderly dead from starvation in recent days.
- 22% of Gaza's population (~470,000 people) are at IPC Phase 5: Catastrophe.
- Aid is entering Gaza, but distribution remains blocked due to conflict and insecurity.
- Hospitals like Nasser Hospital face severe shortages of food, medicine, and infant formula.

Jewish Response: *Achrayut* and *Chesed*

The coming months of *Av* and *Elul* are months where we acknowledge the trauma of what has befallen the Jewish people throughout time, and then take time to acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed others and how we can work to use our own experiences of trauma and our introspection to move forward in the coming year with more compassion, a commitment to justice, rooted in our sacred responsibility to not just ourselves but all humanity.

As Jews who have known hunger, exile, and despair, we are called to extend compassion to all who are starving—including in Gaza.

Being in covenant with God invites us to embrace both self-preservation and care for others: *Gam V'Gam*—we can and must do both.

Biblical Texts

- Deuteronomy 10:18-19 – 'God upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.'
- Exodus 23:4-5 – 'When you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying under its burden, and would refrain from helping it, you must help with it.'
- Proverbs 24:17 – 'Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when they stumble.'
- Proverbs 25:21 – 'If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.'

Rabbinic Sources

- Sotah 14a – 'Just as God clothes the naked, visits the sick, comforts mourners, and buries the dead, so must you.'
- Pirkei Avot 1:2 – 'The world stands on three things: on Torah, on service, and on acts of lovingkindness.'
- Gittin 61a – 'We support the poor of the non-Jews along with the poor of Israel... for the sake of peace.'
- Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim 9 – 'Helping your enemy teaches you to let go of hatred and make peace.'
- Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 103:8 – 'Just as God is merciful and slow to anger, so should you be. God's kindness is greater than God's punishment.'

Medieval Teachings

- Maimonides – 'Just as God is compassionate, so too should you be compassionate.'
- Bahya ibn Pakuda – 'Compassion is the bond of humanity... it connects us to the sufferings of others as if they were our own.'
- Yehuda HaLevi – 'The closer a person comes to God, the more merciful they become toward all creatures.'
- Nachmanides – 'Hardening one's heart against the poor violates the Torah's essence.'
- Sefer Hasidim – 'When one hardens their heart to suffering, they remove themselves from God's presence.'
- Zohar – 'The world is sustained only through compassion and acts of lovingkindness.'

Modern Voices

- Moses Mendelssohn – 'The sublime virtue of humanity consists in compassion for the suffering of others, regardless of their religion or nation.'
- Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch – 'Human beings are not means to an end, but ends in themselves, each bearing the image of God.'
- Rabbi Israel Salanter – 'The material needs of your neighbor are your spiritual obligation.'
- Ahad Ha'am – 'Compassion is the soul of Judaism. Without it, Judaism ceases to be true to itself.'
- Martin Buber – 'The human being is a promise. In the face of the other, we are called into being.'
- Rav Kook – 'Compassion for all creation must be deeply rooted in the soul of every Jew.'

Contemporary Jewish Voices

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks – 'Can I recognize God's image in someone not in my image?'
- Rabbi Jill Jacobs – 'Compassion is not limited to those within our own community. Jewish tradition obligates us to see the image of God in every human being—even, and especially, in those with whom we disagree.'
- Rabbi Rick Jacobs – 'Our Jewish values command us to care not just for our own but for all who are vulnerable.'
- Rabbi Donniel Hartman – 'Being a light unto the nations begins with remembering that those outside our covenant are still inside God's moral concern.'
- Rabbi Sharon Brous – 'To be Jewish is to stand with the vulnerable, to speak out when others are silenced, and to love beyond borders.'
- Rabbi Yehuda Kurtzer – 'The Torah's most repeated command is to love the stranger.'
- Rabbi Yohanna Kinberg – 'Compassion in Judaism is not a sentiment—it is a commandment. It is how we bring Torah into the world and how we survive it.'

Renewing the Covenant of Compassion and Responsibility: Take Action

1. FEED – Give to support food aid to Gaza. World Kitchen.
2. EXPERIENCE – Try a rolling fast at 350 calories/day in solidarity.

More Information About the Texts and Scholars Cited:

Biblical Texts (c. 1200–500 BCE)

- *Deuteronomy 10:18–19 – Likely written during the 7th–6th centuries BCE (First Temple period).*
 - *Exodus 23:4–5 – Traditionally attributed to the time of Moses (c. 1200 BCE); text compiled by the 6th century BCE.*
 - *Proverbs 24:17 & 25:21 – Attributed to King Solomon; composed c. 10th–6th centuries BCE.*
-

Rabbinic Era (c. 200 BCE – 600 CE)

- *Pirkei Avot 1:2 – From Mishnah (~200 CE), reflecting early rabbinic values.*
 - *Talmud Bavli, Sotah 14a – Compiled c. 500 CE in Babylonia.*
 - *Talmud Bavli, Gittin 61a – From the Babylonian Talmud, c. 500 CE.*
 - *Midrash Tanchuma, Mishpatim 9 – Midrashic collection compiled c. 5th–9th centuries CE.*
 - *Midrash Tehillim (Shocher Tov) on Psalm 103:8 – c. 9th–11th centuries CE, possibly Palestine.*
-

Medieval Period (c. 900–1500 CE)

- *Bahya ibn Pakuda (11th century, Spain)
Chovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart), c. 1040 CE.*
- *Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi (c. 1075–1141, Spain)
Kuzari, c. 1140 CE.*
- *Maimonides (Rambam) (1135–1204, Spain/Egypt)
Mishneh Torah (1170s); Guide for the Perplexed (c. 1190).*
- *Nachmanides (Ramban) (1194–1270, Spain/Israel)
Torah commentary written in the mid-13th century.*
- *Sefer Hasidim (Book of the Pious)
Authored by Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (Germany), c. 1170–1217.*

- *Zohar (Attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai; compiled in 13th-century Spain)*
Zohar III, 118b – c. 1280–1300.
-

Modern Period (1700s–1900s)

- *Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786, Germany)*
Jerusalem, published 1783.
 - *Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888, Germany)*
Horeb published in 1837.
 - *Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810–1883, Lithuania)*
Founder of the Musar movement in the mid-19th century.
 - *Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsberg) (1856–1927, Ukraine/Palestine)*
Writings in the 1890s–early 1900s.
 - *Martin Buber (1878–1965, Austria/Israel)*
I and Thou, published 1923.
 - *Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935, Latvia/Palestine)*
Orot HaKodesh – writings compiled posthumously.
-

Contemporary Voices (20th–21st Century)

- *Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972, Poland/USA)*
Civil Rights era; major works in the 1950s–60s.
- *Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020, UK)*
The Dignity of Difference, published 2002.
- *Rabbi Jill Jacobs (b. 1975, USA)*
Executive Director of T'ruah; active 2000s–present.
- *Rabbi Rick Jacobs (b. 1956, USA)*
President of the URJ since 2012.
- *Rabbi Donniel Hartman (b. 1963, Israel)*
Active scholar and leader, 2000s–present.
- *Rabbi Sharon Brous (b. 1973, USA)*
Founder of IKAR, Los Angeles; active since 2004.

- *Rabbi Yehuda Kurtzer (b. 1980s, USA)*
President, Shalom Hartman Institute of North America; active 2010s–present.
 - *Rabbi Yohanna Kinberg (b. 1974, USA/Israel)*
Senior Rabbi at Kol Ami in Kirkland, WA since 2014; active in interfaith, education, and justice work.
-