Reflecting on Justice and Compassion in Crisis Response

Responding in Times of Disaster



Repair the World

This resource explores Jewish teachings on compassion, justice, and our responsibility to the earth, guiding your response to crises like the Los Angeles wildfires. It offers reflections on balancing immediate relief with long-term recovery, inspiring service work that embodies both care and accountability. Use this guide to spark meaningful discussion and action in times of need.

Framing

As the city experiences ongoing devastation, we are reminded of humanity's interconnectedness with the natural world and our collective responsibility to respond with care and action. The texts we are about to engage with challenge us to reflect on the ethical dimensions of crisis response, emphasizing the need for balance. The balance between addressing the causes of environmental devastation and supporting those directly impacted, between justice and compassion, and between grief and hope. How we respond to these crises shapes, not only the immediate recovery but, also the values and systems that define our society. We are reminded as stewards of the earth, that in moments of disaster, we must show up as compassionate allies to our neighbors and community at large.

Prayers for Los Angeles—Rabbi Seth Goldstein

In the story of Creation in the Torah, we are told that God creates the world successively, growing more detailed each day. God begins with light and dark, day and night, then moves on to sky and ground, land and ocean. Then those are populated with plants and animals, birds and fish, and finally humans. On the one hand, one can read this as showing that humanity is the summation of Creation, that we stand above, what makes it complete. On the other hand, a better read is that it reminds us that we are but one part of a greater whole. We are not above nature, we are of nature.

These fires remind us of the two main obligations that we hold as human beings: protect each other, and protect the earth. So let us grieve with all those who have lost–lost lives, lost their homes, lost their important possessions and places. Let us reach out to those whose physical and spiritual foundations have crumbled. Let us hold in our hearts and prayers those whose futures are uncertain and struggle to find hope. Let us extend support to meet immediate needs and future rebuilding.

1. Rabbi Goldstein emphasizes the importance of "reaching out to those whose physical and spiritual foundations have crumbled." How can service work play a role in addressing both the immediate needs and long-term recovery of communities impacted by wildfires?
2. With the concept of grieving alongside those who have lost so much in mind, what does it look like to offer emotional support to those affected by the wildfires while also addressing practical needs?

Rashi on Genesis 1:1

Originally God planned to create the world through the attribute of justice but saw that it could not survive on that basis alone. Therefore God prefaced it with the attribute of compassion, joined with that of justice.

1. Rashi's teaching that creation requires justice and compassion suggests a balanced approach to relief efforts. How can service work embody accountability (justice) and care (compassion) in wildfire recovery?
2. How might service efforts that prioritize equity and inclusion help address systemic inequalities that are often exacerbated by environmental disasters?

Framing

Service-learning work is a tangible way to transform values into action, allowing individuals and communities to respond to crises with justice and compassion. When we are called upon to support those impacted by the wildfires, we must answer that call, to help rebuild what has been lost physically and emotionally and also to strengthen the bonds that sustain us all. May these efforts serve as a testament to our shared humanity and commitment to a more resilient, compassionate world.

Reflection

How can we ensure that our actions during wildfire relief efforts reflect compassion, humility, and respect for those directly affected by the disaster?