

The Far-Reaching Power of Loving-Kindness

Responding in Times of Disaster

Repair the World

This resource is designed to guide your exploration of Jewish teachings on loving-kindness and their relevance to the challenges we face today. Through the texts and reflections provided, you'll delve into the profound impact of individual actions and how they ripple through our communities. Use this guide to spark thoughtful discussion, inspire meaningful service, and deepen your commitment to compassionate, collective care.

Framing

At the heart of Jewish tradition is the importance of acts of loving-kindness. What is meant by loving-kindness? It means going beyond what is strictly required; and performing acts of compassion, generosity, and goodwill toward others, especially those in need; essentially, embodying the concepts of love and kindness in action. We are given examples in our tradition of acts of loving-kindness, such as visiting the sick, comforting mourners, welcoming guests, helping the needy, and offering support to those going through difficult times. The rabbis go as far as to say that this is actually superior to, say, charity. We are going to now take a look at a few texts that talk about the impact our actions have on the world around us.

Tractate Sukkah 49b: 11

This text comes from Tractate Sukkah in the Talmud order Moed (referring to holidays and their celebration). This excerpt is found in a follow-up to a conversation surrounding what one does with the leftovers from a holiday celebration.

The Sages taught that acts of kindness are superior to charity in three respects: Charity can be performed only with one's money, while acts of kindness can be performed both with his person and with his money. Charity is given to the poor, while acts of kindness are performed both for the poor and for the rich. Charity is given to the living, while acts of kindness are performed both for the living and for the dead.

1. What does this teaching tell us about the importance of responding to crises in ways that go beyond monetary donations?
2. Think back to the examples of loving-kindness given before we read this text, what are other acts of kindness you would add to this list that would benefit our community most right now?

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, as quoted in Smiling Each Day by Rabbi Avraham Twerski

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz was a famous teacher of ethics in Belarus in the 1800s. Rabbi Avraham Twerski was both a rabbi and a psychiatrist who specialized in alcoholism and addiction, and combined Jewish ethics and the twelve-step program in much of his writings.

The seismograph has taught us that a tremor in any part of the world can be felt by a sufficiently sensitive instrument everywhere in the world. The same is true of a person's deeds. One should not think that his actions do not affect others. Everything one does in some way affects everyone else in the world.

1. We know that a natural disaster has a lasting impact well past its end, how can the work we accomplish today help to have a positive lasting impact?
2. How can we remain mindful of the far-reaching effects of our actions, both positive and negative?
3. What steps can we take to ensure that our deeds contribute to a broader ripple of kindness and support for others?

Framing

As these texts teach, individual actions not only create immediate impact but contribute to the broader interconnectedness of our community and the world. Embodying the principles of loving-kindness, justice, and compassion in our service work can too have an impact larger than what we can do individually. By cultivating an attitude of gratitude for our community, showing up to serve as our partners see fit, and simply being present and listening, we can go beyond providing material assistance. It is imperative as we do this work that we enter into the space with the mindset of support so that folks who are most in need can begin to restore their sense of hope, resilience, and connection amid a traumatic event.

Reflection

What is one way that you'd like to continue showing up for our community throughout the wildfires and the rebuilding process that will follow?