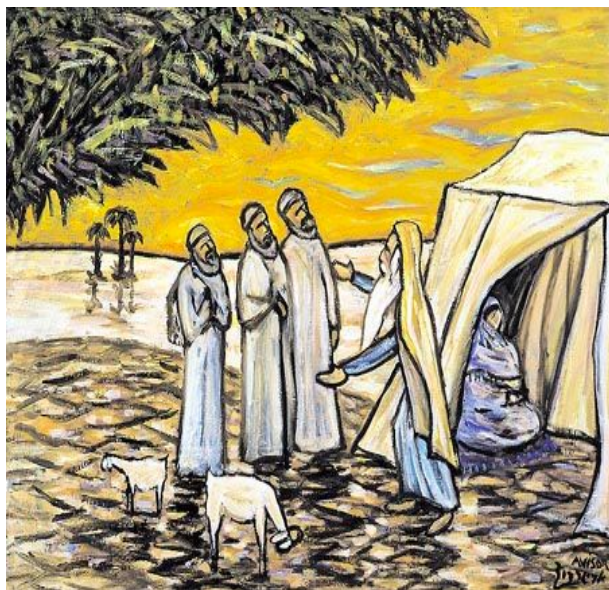


Vayera

א וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאַלְנֵי מַמְרֵא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: ב וַיֵּשָׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרָץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה:

Genesis 18:1-2 *And Adonai appeared to him [Abraham] near the trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*



The opening verses of this week's portion say that Abraham was interacting with G-d when three men approach him. Abraham gets up, bows low to the ground in front of his three guests, and states, "My Lord, if now I find favor in your sight, do not pass over, I pray you, from your servant." It is understood by many commentators that Abraham is addressing the strangers, but Talmudic sages also propose that Abraham is in fact in the midst of a conversation G-d. When the strangers approach Abraham puts his conversation with G-d on hold to attend the three men. Therefore, these sages suggest, being of service to desert-weary guests actually takes precedence to communing with G-d." (*BT:Shabbat 127a*)

In the latter interpretation of the text, Abraham establishes the precedent of attending to the needs of others even above spiritual communion with G-d. Today, this serves as an example for the way the Jewish people and the organizations in the State of Israel should respond to those in need, not just within the country itself, but globally.

The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid, IsraAid, is a well known (yet seldom mentioned in the secular press) organization that supports the efforts of local communities affected by war, natural disaster, acute poverty, and massive displacement. This NGO, founded in 2001, goes beyond disaster relief by assisting those in need in moving toward sustainable living. Maintaining a cohort of professional medics, search and rescue squads, post-trauma experts, and community mobilizers, IsraAid dispatches teams of first responders. In the fourteen years since its inception, they have been on the front lines, responding to nearly every major humanitarian global crisis.

Empowering local populations to establish and maintain response centers for ongoing relief efforts is vital to IsraAid's mission. Additionally, they have been resolute in forming partnerships with other international relief organizations to maximize their efforts. Reporting on their own involvement, IsraAid

states that they have responded to crises in twenty-nine countries, treating over one million individuals in places including Kenya, Sierra Leone, Philippines, and Syria. They have delivered over one thousand tons of medical supplies and food and trained over five thousand locals who can respond to future crises. From their own ranks, IsraAid has sent out over 150 medical workers and 600 volunteers.

Israel has numerous non-government organizations that are immediate responders to global crises. IsraAid is a particular one that has served on the front lines of the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe; numerous IsraAid workers have, for over two years, assisted those fleeing the bloody conflict in Syria. They have helped deliver people from rickety boats to safety on dry land in Serbia, Croatia, and Greece and then ensure access to medical treatment, food, and clothing. Their efforts extend to the political realm as well. One year ago, Yotam Polizer, IsraAID's Development Director, presented on the organization's holistic approach to providing psychosocial support and relief for Yazidi refugees in Greece and Germany. The event was hosted by the Israeli mission to the UN, featuring United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agency representatives.

In the aftermath of hurricane Matthew, Nippes, Haiti was left without access to clean water. A team from IsraAID was quick to respond - national and international professionals are working together with community leaders to restore pipelines and access to potable water. These pipelines will restore clean water to over 10,000 people. IsraAID will engage in ongoing efforts; their next goal is to restore water and electricity to hospitals and clinics so that the most vulnerable Haitian citizens can receive proper care.

Ultimately, Jewish tradition teaches that human need takes precedence over religious observance. In fact, it could be argued that the very point of one's relationship with G-d is to strengthen bonds with fellow human beings both within and outside our own communities.

Discussion Questions:

Beyond the text of this week's portion, what additional Jewish values might have led to the creation of organizations like IsraAid?

How might the events that preceded the establishment of the State of Israel have affected the psyche of the Jewish population vis à vis international relief work? Why might they wish to be first responders to crises all over the world?

Additional Resources:

History and mission of IsraAid: <http://www.israelgives.org/amuta/580472959>

IsraAid's efforts for [Syrian refugees in Germany](#), May 14, 2016

Gavin Rabinowitz, [When Israeli volunteers help Syrian, Iraqi and Pakistani refugees](#), Times of Israel, September 23, 2015

To follow IsraAid on Facebook, see: <https://www.facebook.com/israaid>