

Thy Neighbor as Thyself

The Torah asks us to do the right thing, even if it is not always the easy thing. As a country, Israel has mastered this concept, especially with respect to the ethic “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Despite decades of hostility from its northern neighbor, Israel has responded to Syria’s humanitarian crisis by quietly opening its world-class hospitals to those marred by the violence.

Yet, as the situation worsens and the death toll rises, the task of providing aid to Syria’s victims has become increasingly difficult. More than 2.1 million Syrian refugees have flooded transient camps throughout the region—the majority of whom depend entirely on aid for survival.

To provide such aid, Israel’s humanitarian agencies are engaging in comprehensive relief efforts beyond state lines. In Jordan, where 500,000 refugees have poured in from the north and an estimated 3,000 Syrians are entering the country daily, IsraAID (the Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid) is quietly providing vital help to refugees in need, something the organization has been doing all over the world for more than a decade.

For example, tens of thousands of Syrians have sought refuge in what are now overcrowded, disease-filled and crime-ridden camps. Outside the refugee camps, Syrians stand in line waiting to be greeted by truckloads of purple bags, delivered by Jordanian NGOs that have partnered with Israeli agencies. Each bag is filled with lentils, rice, sugar and other dry foods—a small but critical byproduct of charitable donations from Jewish groups around the world.

The political sensitivities between Israel and its neighboring countries have made Israel’s quest to “love thy neighbor” all the more difficult. Several Jordanian NGOs, for instance, are forced to remain silent about their involvement with Israeli aid organizations because they fear the Syrian government’s retributions upon refugees’ family who remain in Syria. In many cases, individuals have faced gruesome punishment once their relatives’ support from Israel is discovered.

Amid the constant threat of regional neighbors seeking its destruction, and despite the challenges presented along each of its borders, the Jewish state remains steadfast in its commitment to human rights, bettering the world and preserving life. The tireless work of IsraAID across Israel’s eastern border is proof of this reality, demonstrating that Israel truly does love its neighbors—even those whose government’s oppose Israel’s existence—as it does itself.