

Hurricane Harvey Action Steps
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In my sermon on September 1st, 2017, I outlined a four-part action plan that we can all embark on to help the victims of Hurricane Harvey. That outline follows below.

1. Give. It is almost instinctive that, in America, we do not rely solely on the government for disaster response, and many of us have already opened both our hearts and wallets. In the days and weeks immediately following the storm, the single most effective way we can help is to support organizations working on the ground, providing immediate relief across Texas and Louisiana. We should donate thoughtfully and generously, [making sure that our dollars work as hard as possible](#) to help the victims in the storm's path. Earlier this week Rabbi Friedman shared in a congregation-wide email links to articles from the [New York Times](#) and [Union for Reform Judaism](#) with some ideas for where to begin. Organizations such as the [Houston Community Foundation](#)¹ and the [Houston Food Bank](#) already have infrastructure and procedures in place, so donations to them will help with some immediacy. If you're wondering about an organization seeking your dollars, [CharityNavigator.org](#) is a wonderful place to learn more. They grade many non-profit organizations on several dimensions to better gauge the impact your money is making.

2. Give to the Jewish Community, and mostly the broader community.

Nothing could be more natural than wanting to support our fellow Jews who have suffered in the storm. And we must. Our sister congregations Emanu El and Beth Israel have both been affected, most profoundly the latter. Beth Israel's Senior Rabbi David Lyon has put out a request². Our Union for Reform Judaism summer camp in Texas brilliantly and spontaneously opened a [day camp for children](#) while their parents navigate the mess. Unfortunately, local Conservative and Orthodox congregations suffered [catastrophic damage](#). Yet, the majority -- and I do wish to

¹ As Administered by the Mayor's office

² OUT-OF-TOWN friends, Congregation Beth Israel will be assisting hundreds and hundreds of families in coming days and weeks. They'll need gift cards to assist in meeting immediate needs and expenses for replenishing clothing, toiletries, household items, school supplies for children, etc. You can send them safely to Congregation Beth Israel (5600 N. Braeswood Blvd, Houston, 77096). We will be distributing them at once to area residents and congregants. Hurt has no shame and no label; we just need to heal one another.

stress *the majority* -- of the Jewish population has insurance, internal communal support, and resources, and can access means of rebuilding. One of my friends who is a rabbi in Houston intimated to me that this is an important time to help those with less. Catastrophes like this tend to disproportionately affect immigrants and communities of color. We should give in a way that primarily benefits the broader communities of Houston; as well as the many smaller towns devastated by the flooding.

3. Join us as we develop a longer - term strategy. In the days to come we will consider partnerships with local congregations and Jewish communal services as they assess and respond to the needs of the community. In the medium term, we hope to arrange service trips to aid in the rebuilding. We are planning both a general mission in the fall and one specifically for teens in the spring. If you would like to support or participate in such a trip, please keep these in mind. Please also keep an eye out for further communications after the holiday weekend about ways to help in the nearer term through Temple Israel.

4. Remember how you are feeling about Harvey, right now. The most challenging thing about responding to disasters, from a philanthropic point of view, is that the depth and specificity of need only becomes clear after the immediate aftermath of the storm. Think back to the first images you saw of the damage; the first stories you heard of death and devastation. Did your heart break? Did you feel angry that such a thing could happen in our world? We must honor and preserve these feelings so that they inspire us to help not just now, but in the coming months and even years. As Hurricane Katrina taught us, devastation like this gives rise to systemic challenges that require action as generous as in the time of acute need. Let's keep our hearts open as the need becomes clear. This is a challenge for all of us; and I invite you to please hold me to this standard, as well.

One image from this past week stays with me. As the waters rose on a Houston interstate, an elderly man sat stranded in his truck, in grave danger of sinking to his death. But then a [human chain](#) began to form: men and women linked hands and stood firm, chest deep in the water, until he was saved.

Even in the darkest days, we have the ability to bring goodness and light. Let us band together to resist and rebuild. In coming days, may our deeds exceed our speech.

Shabbat Shalom.