



## Curriculum utilizing Jewish Texts

### Responses to Catastrophe

The texts:

1. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Taaniyot*, Chapter one
2. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat*, 84b-85a

Framing:

#### **Current Darfur Statistics**

The death toll has reached up to **400,000** people since February 2003

More than **500** people die each day, **15,000** each month

More than **2.5 million** people have been driven from their homes

More than **200,000** have fled to refugee camps in neighboring Chad

As many as **1 million** civilians could die in Darfur from lack of food and from disease within coming months

**80%** of the children under five years old are suffering from severe malnutrition and many are dying each day

Humanitarian aid organizations have access to only **20%** of those affected

The class:

I. Rambam in *Mishneh Torah* outlines one model of response to catastrophe—"attacks upon Israel, war..."—blowing trumpets, fasting crying out to God for mercy as a community in a public way.

II. The Talmud in *Shabbat* 84b-85a presents another model—the obligation to protest any wrongdoing one sees whether in one's household or one's city or anywhere in the world.

- Rashi's comment stresses the fact that the protest needs to be by one whose protest makes a difference. Read this in the context of democracy and not feudalism and that means everyone.
- Meiri's comments stress the absolute obligation to protest

III. The two models seem to be contradictory—model I is a passive crying out to God to intervene in the world and stop the tragedy (which is also not completely consistent with Maimonides' view of the way God works in the world) and model II is an active interventionist model.

IV. **Rather**—understand the model of crying out as a public performance of the pain of those suffering. This hearing of their pain and broadcasting it is the first step to redemption (cf. Exodus 2:23-25). When focus is brought on to the catastrophe then all are obligated to protest against it, to intervene so that it will stop.

This curriculum was developed for Jewish World Watch by Aryeh Cohen, PhD, Professor of Bible, University of Judaism. November, 2005