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## Jewish roots of humanitarian assistance

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Founded in 1881 originally to assist Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, HIAS<sup>1</sup> was formed to provide meals, transportation and jobs for the new arrivals to Manhattan. The Old Testament and the Talmud are the pillars on which our practice and our ethics are built, and in them are specific injunctions to give priority to assist and protect strangers so that they can build their lives with dignity, and to assist one's neighbour.

Putting this together with the long history of migration and persecution of the Jewish people, HIAS' humanitarian programmes are inspired by these values which have been sustained through many generations. We benefit from the knowledge of our forefathers who had to uproot themselves, leaving behind the places they were born and taking with them sadness for the deaths of those who could not leave. They too had to re-start their lives with the belief that it is possible to build a better world. While liberty and security are principles for HIAS that give direction to its practices in general,

welcoming the stranger derives from our basic texts, and the protection of refugees is our main mission.

HIAS now works to resettle the most vulnerable refugees of all faiths and ethnicities from all over the world. As an organisation, HIAS does not claim to transmit its faith through its humanitarian work, nor does it attempt to spread its faith to beneficiaries or to partners. Our staff training is only aimed at humanitarian professionalism, and our global experience is of assistance to people of other faiths and religions. We are clear that faith is not needed for solidarity; the act of assistance is an act of respect for the humanity of others and is not the preserve of any one faith.

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1. Originally Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, now known only as HIAS.