



Jewish Community Center of Paramus  
Congregation Beth Tikvah  
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## A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday February 24, 2023 ~ Parsha: Terumah

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

### Remember the Jews of Ukraine

Today marks the first anniversary of Russia's brutal, immoral and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Last year I wrote a [Shabbat message](#) about Ukraine on the second day of the war. I have devoted several Shabbat messages to the war, its implications for Israel, the world Jewish community, as well as asking for donations to outstanding Jewish organizations who are on the front lines providing all types of services to Ukraine's Jews as well as the general public. On this first anniversary, it's time for us remember the Jews of Ukraine and to dig deep on their behalf again.

Yesterday, I participated in a meeting sponsored by the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) for Rabbis and communal leaders to give us an update on relief efforts. The presentation was as inspiring as it was sad. You may know that Ukraine has one of the world's largest Jewish communities. What is less known is that it is among the most impoverished. That was so even before Russia's invasion last year. As you might imagine, the difficulties faced by Ukraine's Jews have increased exponentially as a result.

For a full year now, Russian depravity has been on full display. The deliberate targeting of vital infrastructure: power plants, water treatment facilities, apartment buildings, hospitals and even nuclear facilities has had a terrible as well as terrifying effect on Ukraine's population. Millions of Ukrainians have sought refuge outside its borders, and millions more are internally displaced. The war has caused a 40 percent drop in Ukraine's economy. All this, and so much more that is beyond the scope of this message has led to staggering losses and suffering. JDC is now providing social and economic services to over 40,000 Jews every day. In a normal year, 9000 Jews would receive extra help to assist them through the bitter winter for which Ukraine is famous. This year, 22,000 have turned to JDC to survive the cold. All types of social and economic help are being extended to help those in need. JDC has raised \$85 million that it has distributed on its own or to 36 organizations conducting relief efforts in Ukraine.

Our news sources rightly report the heroic efforts of Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky, world leaders who visit to demonstrate support and solidarity, the bravery of Ukrainian soldiers as well as

Russia's unconscionable military attacks and tactics. But what is not always visible is the effect of the war on the civilian population. I was particularly moved by the words of Inna Vdovychenko, a JDC volunteer in Odessa, who spoke about what life is like for civilians. She spoke of the constant fear, the empty shelves in supermarkets, and the lack of medicine. She spoke about what it was like to live through a blackout -- not the kind that we are familiar with here in Bergen County which generally lasts less than several hours, but the type that lasts for several days at a time. Think back to Hurricane Sandy when many of us in Bergen County lost power for several days. The synagogue was without power for six days. My home at the time, only about 1000 feet from the synagogue, was without power for 8 days. But even during that time, we had access to water, food and medicine. In Ukraine, when the power goes out, it also knocks out water and plumbing, public transportation, and especially important at this season of the year, heat. Without electricity, there are no phones, no internet, no way to get money from the bank to pay for groceries. All this amidst the constant sounds of air raid sirens and the threat of Russian bombardment of civilian targets, straining every aspect of Ukrainian civilian life.

The money that Jewish communities have raised is helping 40,000 Jewish refugees in places like Poland, and Moldova, and 46,000 elderly and poor Jews within Ukraine. It has provided 13,000 medical evacuations, 1.6 million pounds of food, as well as assisting other organizations to further the reach of these humanitarian efforts.

All this is in addition to the 43,000 Jews in Russia and 10,000 Jews in Belarus that JDC supported before the war and continues to support during the war.

Despite the horror that has been inflicted on Ukraine's people, funds also are allocated to build and strengthen Jewish communal and religious life and institutions which continue to give hope, solace and dignity to those who are suffering.

My weekly Shabbat message is a forum for ideas that I like to share with the congregation. I truly believe that on the first anniversary of this war, the most important message I can share with you is that we must remember the Jews of Ukraine. So many American Jews can trace their Eastern European origins back to Ukraine. That's where my grandparents came from. It's where my daughter-in-law was born. The Jews of Ukraine need our continued support as well as charitable donations. It's time to once again dig deep and contribute.

Some of you know that for the past 27 years, I devote our winter adult education semester to the study of Jewish history. This year, I devoted our winter session to the study of the history of the Jews of Ukraine. Jews have lived in Ukraine for 1000 years. There were periods of cooperation with their neighbors, and other times relations were characterized by hatred, enmity, and violence. At times

they thrived, and at other times they suffered. But there has been a 1000 year commitment to building Jewish life and community there, even under the most difficult of circumstances. No matter how this war ends, there will be Jews who remain in Ukraine. They will continue to need our help and support.

Ukrainian Jewish history cannot be understood without a general understanding of Ukrainian history. What I want our congregation to understand today is that for 1000 years, in various ways and forms, Ukrainians have fought for independence, freedom and the ability to chart their own destiny free of foreign dominion. I'm not a general, diplomat, or a prophet, but I am a student of history. This war will not end soon.

The Biden Administration understands this, which is why President Biden visited Kiev and declared again our abiding commitment to Ukraine's victory and freedom. His message was clear to all, friend and foe alike: America is in for the long haul.

That same conviction must be shared by American Jews. We must not waver in our support for Ukraine's Jews. So remember the Jews of Ukraine. They need us now. History will judge us by how we respond.

To learn more about the important work of JDC in Ukraine and how you can help, please click on the following [link](#).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner