



March 10, 2022/ 7 Adar II 5782

Dear Judea Reform Friends,

There are no words to speak sufficiently to the pain in our hearts, as we witness the evil, murderous invasion of the Ukraine by Vladimir Putin and his forces. The brutality of this war affects us each in different ways. Some of us have family and friends hiding in shelters or bunkers; for many of us, the war may trigger past or intergenerational trauma; others may be further removed but still so deeply pained. Our hearts are breaking, and we know that our broken hearts are “not enough.” We are outraged, and our outrage is “not enough.” We pray and pray, and our prayers are “not enough.” To believe that our broken hearts, our outrage, and our prayers are enough, would be to diminish our own human dignity. The Talmud teaches, “in a place where no one is human, one must strive to be a human being” (*Pirkei Avot 2:6*). In this hour, our tradition demands we affirm our humanity in the holiest of ways, as *tzelem Elohim*, symbols of God—relating to one another with utmost reverence and love.

For the last two weeks we have been crying out, “what can we do?”—a question both rhetorical and literal. We feel our powerlessness overwhelming our agency, yet we know that *doing nothing* is the most inhumane response, a grievous infraction of the mitzvah, *lo taamod al dam rei’echa*, “never stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (*Lev. 19:16*) We feel the collision between the solace of our sanctuary and the screams of our fellow human beings, as we relearn what our Prophets discovered ages ago: no, prayer is *not enough*.

The reality is, prayer is not meant to be enough, at least not Jewish prayer. The Rabbis debated at length what ought to come first—prayer or action—and even the advocates for prayer conceded that prayer comes first only “because prayer leads to action.” In our tradition this is not “automatic,” it’s upon us to make it so. There is no mitzvah greater than *pikuach nefesh*, saving lives. In yesterday’s JRC eNotices we shared several important pathways to action, which I wish to share again in this message to you, in addition to a few other steps. These are among the many ways we can work together with our partners, pooling our power as best we can to make an impact:

- [Make an emergency donation](#) to the efforts of **HIAS**, our national partner in Refugee Resettlement work. HIAS is on the frontlines of responding to this humanitarian crisis. [Read about their emergency response](#), and you can make a donation [here](#) .
- Give to the [Ukraine Crisis Relief Fund](#) of the **World Union for Progressive Judaism** (WUPJ). WUPJ is the Reform Movement’s global arm, supporting our congregations worldwide. Money will be spent on individuals and communities to ensure their safety and well-being. You can make a donation [here](#) .
- Engage in **JRC’s Refugee Resettlement & Immigrant Justice work**. Now this conflict is adding millions more. The world is facing the worst refugee crisis in human history, with more than 82 million human souls fleeing persecution. [Visit our website to learn more.](#)



- Through the **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**'s online tool, tell your members of Congress to pass the GRACE ACT, so that the U.S. commits itself to refugee resettlement. Our partners at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism have an online tool to help make your voice heard. [Click here](#) .
- [Join us for Shabbat worship](#)—let's be together, whether onsite or online. Our spirits matter, and this is our space where we give voice to share our pains, yearnings, and dreams. We've been doing this for thousands of years, and especially now, coming out of this pandemic (God willing), drawing near to one another, through the loving language of our ancestors, is a part of the Jewish way. *We belong together.*

The synagogue is the one and only home to the Torah, our “Tree of Life.” We cling to our Torah with all our might by binding prayer to action. Within and beyond the walls of our sanctuary, may our *mitzvot* sanctify our *t'filot*, our deeds honor our prayers, and may we realize peace, speedily and in our days.

Be'ahavah Rabah, with Abundant Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rabbi Matthew V. Soffer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rabbi Matthew V. Soffer