

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

It is impossible to write a message at the beginning of March and not address the war in Ukraine. Hopefully when you receive this Bulletin, the conflict will have been somehow resolved, but the truth is that I am not so optimistic.

I am sure you have been inundated by emails from every single organization, including Hillcrest Jewish Center, addressing the conflict in Ukraine and what we could do about it. Among the many emails I received, there was one by the Drisha Institute (you should check the Drisha Institute out), that drew my attention to the title: "What can we do when we feel we can do nothing?" The reason this email caught my attention is because this was exactly the way I was feeling.

So let me address the Drisha Institute's question, first with the Drisha Institute's answer.

We see the suffering in Ukraine. We see innocent civilians being displaced, or murdered. As people with faith convictions, as people with consciences, this is and should be intolerable. But what can we do? If we are not among the courageous people helping with their own hands, what can we do?

- 1. We can contribute to groups who are able to provide effective direct support on the ground. We recommend JDC and Razom, in particular. (Hillcrest has recommended JDC as well.)*
- 2. We can uplift and honor the humanity of the people of Ukraine. It is all too easy to justify harm against a political abstract; Ukrainians are real people, made of not just flesh and blood, but of hopes, aspirations, interwoven stories, and gifts for this world. (I like to add that Russians are real people as well, including the Russian soldiers that are being sent to fight by a government that doesn't allow for dissension, and the Russian population that is suffering and will suffer even more from the rightful sanctions imposed by the West.)*
- 3. We can pray. (And I will add, that we can pray not as a last resort, but as the first one.)*

To the three well taken points by the Drisha Institute, I would like to add a 4th one.

I believe that we can, and we must, learn from everything that is happening in Ukraine and around the globe. My main take away in terms of learning from the experience (and I am neither the first one or the only one to focus on this), is that no people and no country – and I am thinking especially of the Jewish people and the State of Israel- should be in a situation in which they depend on the mercy and good will of another country for their survival. We have been there and done that during the Shoah, with the terrible consequences everybody knows. "Never Again" isn't only about the barbaric acts of the Nazis, may their memory be obliterated, but about the defenseless nature of the Jewish people before the creation of the State of Israel. We all can empathize with the loneliness of President Zelensky, who in his own words, is receiving blankets when he needs airplanes, missiles, and military support, which he will probably not get, because the free world doesn't want to antagonize President Putin to a point of no return.

True, Israel should look for partners and alliances as much as it can. Significant improvements have been made with many Muslim countries, including the Emirates, Morocco, and Turkey. However, at the end of the day we should learn from our experience during the Shoah and from President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people

today. In order to have all the options on the table, you first have to have all the options available.

To conclude, let me leave you with a last thought. Make no mistake, Ukraine is far away, but the entire world, including each of us, started feeling and will continue to feel the consequences of the war, so we all have a stake in what's happening in Ukraine.

Let me close by borrowing the prayer that ended the email from the Drisha Institute:

"May the One Who creates peace offer it speedily and abundantly into the corners of the world where it seems most impossible."

Looking forward to brighter days,

Rabbi Manes Kogan