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Prayer and Support Offered for Ukraine

By Debra Rubin | March 10, 2022

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As the Russian onslaught of Ukraine raged, the Jewish community along the Jersey Shore gathered to offer prayer and support and hear harrowing stories of desperation and heroism.

“We have to feel the pain even though we thankfully are not there,” said Rabbi Nasanayl Braun of Congregation Brothers of Israel in Long Branch, which hosted the March 3 gathering. “We have to feel

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a sense that people are in danger; Jews are in danger.”

The program, which was also livestreamed, was additionally sponsored by Congregation Agudath Achim in Bradley Beach, Congregation Torat El in Oakhurst, Chabad of the Shore in Long Branch and the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey.

Rabbi Braun said that in addition to a compassionate response, the community should be donating tzedaka and davening, which “has been the Jewish response to danger throughout history.” He used the miracles behind the holidays of Purim and Passover to demonstrate “that Hashem who saved us then with crazy miracles” is the same God today.

“We’re davening for the people of Ukraine. We’re davening for the Jews of Ukraine that they should have divine salvation, that Hashem should work his magic as it were and

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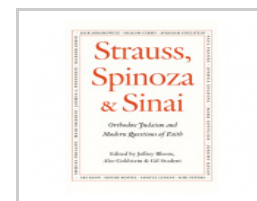


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should directly and indirectly come to the aid of Jews who are in real danger.”

Rabbi Maury Kelman of Agudath Achim, who initiated the program, said he felt the Jewish community needed to be connected, recognizing “it is impossible for us to continue with regular everyday life” knowing that both Jews and non-Jews are in the crosshairs.

“We care about all people in the world,” he said. “As Jews we feel the pain of our family members, but also the pain of any creature, any human being that is in distress and especially when we talk about tens of millions of innocent people and seeing the images, the terrible images.”

Stating “no man is an island” Rabbi Kelman added: “We have to be connected to the entire world and with our Jewish family. We have to send a message to the people of Ukraine, the Jews and non-Jews that we are with them. We care about anybody in distress, anybody in trouble.”

The ways in which others were providing assistance were laid out by Federation Chief Communications Officer Lisa Karasic and Chabad of the Shore Executive Director Rabbi Laibel Schapiro.

Karasic spoke of how Federation and its worldwide partners, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Jewish Agency for Israel and World ORT, were helping supply food, medicine, healthcare, shelter, satellite phones, transporting for fleeing Jews and helping to expedite visas for those wanting to make aliyah. She also announced that the Woodbridge-based Marion and Norman Tanzman Charitable Foundation would match the first \$25,000 donated to the federation’s Ukrainian Emergency Fund.

Rabbi Schapiro has been in frequent contact with Chabad emissaries there and said earlier in the day he had spoken to the rabbi from Kharkiv, who left the embattled city the day before, but has remained in Ukraine to assist its community. He has also spoken to the rabbi in Kherson, the first city captured by the Russians, who can’t leave.

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“He said there was death and destruction all over,” said Rabbi Schapiro, who noted there were almost 200 Chabad shloshim in Ukraine, who stayed despite the life-threatening conditions.

Leading up to the massive invasion he said many of the rabbis he spoke to were skeptical of a full-scale Russian invasion.

“I guess we outside of Ukraine believed or realized more than them,” he said, although most rabbis would have still stayed. Every rabbi he spoke to said leaving would have generated additional panic and fear.

“You have to realize for Ukrainians (and I spent a lot of time there when I was a young yeshiva boy), the shul, the Chabad houses, they’re not just a shul,” he explained. “It’s a community center. It’s a soup kitchen, It’s a school. It’s everything for them.”

Rabbi Schapiro told the story of a friend who grew up in Southern California but has been a rabbi for about 20 years in a Ukrainian town near the Russian border. Forced to apply every five months for a new visa, he spoke to a lawyer acquaintance who suggested he just apply for Ukrainian citizenship since he owned property.

However, the rabbi’s application was turned down, and when he went to the office to inquire why he was told that anybody from Southern California who wanted to live and become a citizen of Ukraine had to be a spy or insane—and they weren’t interested in either one of those. His friend couldn’t argue with the insanity reference.

“We all need to be a little insane,” said Rabbi Schapiro. “We need to do things other people think are meshuga, but we believe in it. We need to do things that are a little wild and a little impossible, but in order to affect a Jewish future, to fight for a Jewish future here at the Jersey Shore or in Ukraine or anywhere in the world you need a little bit of superrational, that craziness to do something about it.”

By Debra Rubin

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