REFLECTION ON SHEHECHEYANU

Each Rosh Hashanah, Jews around the world — at home and in synagogues, in large communities and in small outposts of Jewish life — recite the “Shehecheyanu” prayer, which centers our gratitude to God at the privilege of arriving at this particular moment.

At JDC, we take our commitment to global Jewish life seriously, journeying with the Jewish people from day to day, year to year, decade to decade, from moments of great need to moments of joy, blessed to make a profound impact by saving Jewish lives and building Jewish life.

As we recite this blessing, we think of Jews around the world today — those living through a time of great crisis and those strengthening our people and tradition for coming generations — and salute their resilience and resolve. We pray for their welfare and share with pride their accomplishments. Through our collective resources as a global community, we have come together, as one Jewish family, to this moment and can bless it with profound gratitude.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

On Rosh Hashanah, the liturgy instructs us that repentance, prayer, and charity — teshuvah, t’filah, and tzedakah — can “lessen the severity of the decree,” helping to ameliorate whatever difficult fate may await us in the new year. At JDC, we transform tzedakah into action that lifts lives, helps the world’s most vulnerable communities, and builds the Jewish future.

This High Holiday season, we invite you to bring often-overlooked issues and voices to your table, sparking conversations and taking action this New Year. We’ve given you JDC’s responses below, but we encourage you to think about these questions for your own families and communities.

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE POOREST AMONG US?
We must care for those with nowhere else to turn. Tens of thousands of Jews around the world, from at-risk families to isolated seniors, live in dire poverty. From Latin America to the former Soviet Union, from North Africa to Europe, we ensure that they never have to choose between essentials like food and medicine, and make certain they know they are not forgotten and are part of a global community that will always have their back. JDC provides a comprehensive continuum of care that reaches more than 71,000 people worldwide on any given day.

HOW CAN WE SAFEGUARD JEWISH IDENTITY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION?
We must cultivate the Jewish future. Across the world, Jewish communities — with ancient roots and newly emerged — are “doing Jewish” on their own terms, writing the next chapters of Jewish history. Working hand-in-hand with them from Montevideo to Mumbai, empowering them to realize their own dreams, we strengthen ourselves in the process. JDC — through its Entwine young leaders initiative and Szarvas, the JDC-Lauder international Jewish summer camp — is building new generations of Jewish leaders around the world poised to take on the challenges of tomorrow and act on the value of global Jewish responsibility.
How can we bolster Israel?
We must support Israel’s most vulnerable. Behind today’s headlines, hundreds of thousands of Israelis in need — the poor and elderly, at-risk youth, people with disabilities, and Haredi and Israeli Arab communities — are struggling to advance and take advantage of the Startup Nation’s promise. Since its founding in 1914 to respond to the needs of starving Jews in Jerusalem, JDC has aided Israel’s most vulnerable and today achieves this through innovative initiatives that move the needle on the nation’s most complex social challenges. Bringing Israelis of many walks of life together, it creates scalable solutions that draw on the entrepreneurial, can-do spirit that made the desert bloom.

JDC receives significant funding support from Jewish Federations across North America through cooperation with JFNA and UIA Canada. Major funding partners also include the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, the Maurice and Vivienne Wohl Charitable Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, World Jewish Relief (UK), the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and tens of thousands of generous individual donors and foundations.

Spotlight on Ukraine
More than 18 months since the Ukraine crisis began, the devastating conflict rages on. The majority of the Jewish community remains in the country despite harrowing conditions, committed to Jewish life and to their neediest neighbors. We must continue to be a bulwark of support for this community — and Jews across the former Soviet Union — who have turned challenge after challenge into opportunity and bravely face the future full of hope and determination. Tens of thousands of Jews — the elderly, poor, and displaced — face a New Year counting on us to be a lifeline. Aiding more than 50,000 of Ukraine’s most vulnerable Jews since the conflict began, JDC is a partner in fulfilling this responsibility to our fellow Jews.

Larissa’s Story
“As a child, I didn’t have the chance to celebrate Jewish holidays. I wasn’t even 4 years old when the war started and we had to quickly flee.

The old war, it was difficult ... but children’s memories are one thing — they’re different from the perception of a babushka whose soul is suffering, and for me, this new conflict feels like a personal tragedy. I’d like a new life for all of Ukraine, and of course, for its Jews. I would like people to understand that there is nothing more precious than peace, so that mothers, grandmothers, and children have no more reasons to cry.

I’ll confess. I’ve begun to pray. It seems to me like it’s too much for one person to bear, but I hope that I’ll survive. Even in peacetime, I couldn’t live without the help of JDC and without my homecare worker, Olechka, who has now become my nearest and dearest — my friend and helper who I can turn to in joy and sorrow. It’s not just gratitude that I feel, but reverence.

For me, the sweetness of life is peace, my family, my friends, and our big helper JDC, and I think many generations will feel the same gratitude I do. JDC in my life became, to be honest, my discovery of Jewishness. I realized that the Jews, who have always been persecuted, unfortunately, have nevertheless managed to survive and find their place in the world, and I hope that never stops, so that each new year, each new Rosh Hashanah, brings us more happiness, joy, smiles, goodness, helping one another — everything JDC has taught us.”

A Holocaust survivor, Larissa S., 86, lives alone in Odesa, Ukraine, and depends on JDC and the Claims Conference for food, medicine, homecare, and a connection to her global Jewish family.

What is our role in repairing the world?
We must put Jewish values into action to lift lives and empower communities in the wider world. From natural disasters to slow-moving crises like lack of access to healthcare and endemic poverty in developing countries, the Jewish people and Israel have a key role to play in repairing a broken world. Today, we bring our expertise and compassion to our neighbors in dire need. Whether responding to an earthquake in Turkey, utilizing Israeli AgTech to support poor farmers, or deploying the Ubuntu Beekeeping Project empowering women in rural South Africa to foster sustainable livelihoods through successful honey production businesses, JDC builds a brighter future for countless people across the world in an expression of Jewish values.