

On Saturday morning, Jews around the world will chant the weekly reading from the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses, including this verse from the book of Exodus: **You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.** The command not to oppress a stranger, to support and love the stranger, is repeated at least 36 times in our sacred scripture. It is a core part of our commitment as Jews and as human beings to improve our world.

On this first anniversary of the war in Ukraine, my heart – and the hearts of so many of my rabbinic colleagues and members of the Jewish community – is with the people of Ukraine, many of whom have been made into strangers and refugees in their own land. We've watched in horror as this brutal war has dragged on, with solidarity and support for so many Ukrainians living in fear in their own homes, as internally displaced people within Ukraine, or as refugees beyond Ukraine's borders.

Galina Semyonova, an elderly Ukrainian Jew from Kharkiv and a client of the international Jewish humanitarian organization "JDC", writes:

When the rocket fell next to us, it was already dark. Our building shook and everything turned a glowing red: All I could see were fragments flying everywhere. And I was screaming, screaming for my son, Dima. Earlier in the year, when the war began, I simply couldn't believe it. And later on, when the bombings started, it was horrible. It's horror, that's all. Uzhas. We're living in horror... But when you know that someone cares for you, that's everything.

We find light in the darkness from those who are doing the work of caring, in Ukraine and abroad. Stella Britchenko, a JDC volunteer in Odesa, writes:

If I wasn't volunteering, I'd go crazy. When the war began, everything changed. We had to do everything all at once, do whatever was needed: We packed boxes of food. We answered calls from people asking for help, for evacuation assistance, for supplies – even diapers and baby formula. There were hundreds or thousands of those calls during the first part of the conflict. But as difficult as it was, it taught us to work quickly, to communicate fast and efficiently. And we did – we worked fast and non-stop.

Friday night is the beginning of Shabbat, the day of rest and peace for Jews around the world. As you hear this message, I and my colleagues are leading our regular Friday night prayer services in synagogues across the city to welcome Shabbat tonight. We'll pray, as we do every week, that God "spread over us God's own canopy of peace," and we'll imagine that canopy of safe skies spreading from us across the world to Ukraine, supported by everyone in the world working to protect those who are suffering.

Shabbat shalom – may we all have a peaceful Sabbath.

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