

October 12, 2010

Dear Board Member,

One of the most fascinating—and demanding—challenges that JDC faces as an international Jewish organization is how to interact appropriately with hundreds if not thousands of Jewish communities around the world, each with its own particular history, culture, and character. Our ability to operate “with nuance” on such a vast scale is being highlighted through a unique event known as the Global Day of Jewish Learning, in which JDC is the main overseas partner.

Set for Sunday, November 7, the Global Day is turning out to be an extraordinary cooperative venture with the Aleph Society, the organization of one of our long-time partners in Jewish renewal efforts in the former Soviet Union, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. The Aleph Society was established in 1988 to support Rabbi Steinsaltz’ audacious mission to make the Talmud, a cornerstone of Jewish tradition, as well as other sources of Jewish knowledge accessible to Jews of all backgrounds around the world.

The Aleph Society initiated the Global Day to celebrate the completion of Rabbi Steinsaltz’ monumental, decades-long effort to annotate and translate the original text of the Talmud into modern Hebrew, with parts translated also into English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The Rabbi will complete his 45-volume Hebrew translation and commentary on November 7 before an audience of more than 4,000 people in Jerusalem.

JDC is proud to lend our global reach to an initiative that is engaging—and exciting—individuals and entire communities from Cuba to Kyrgyzstan, Moscow to Mumbai.

We have, in fact, been a vital partner in the Rabbi’s historic undertaking. Early on, when the Talmud project did not yet enjoy the financial support it needed to proceed, Ralph I. Goldman, then JDC’s Executive Vice President, convinced the Board of the significance of this endeavor. The Board subsequently approved a major one-time commitment that enabled the project to take off.

And for more than two decades, JDC has supported university-level educational facilities and academic conferences in the former Soviet Union through which Rabbi Steinsaltz has helped rekindle the rich light of Jewish learning in a part of the world where it was nearly extinguished. As a result, tens of thousands of Jews have been able to reconnect with their heritage and identify more fully with our people.

The Global Day is marking the fulfillment of Rabbi Steinsaltz' quest by organizing a form of simultaneous Talmud study—broadly defined—in Jewish communities worldwide. Everywhere, regardless of location or language, participants have been asked to choose one topic from Tractate Ta'anit (a section of the Talmud full of Jewish legends) as the focus of their events and presentations. What is being planned is eclectic and varied, ranging from classic lectures and study sessions to film screenings, theatrical performances, art exhibits, and even a Kabbalah-inspired jazz concert.

The Global Day is especially suited to JDC because of the near universality of its approach. In the lead-up to the Sunday event in Prague, for example, Rabbi Menachem HaCohen, whom JDC is bringing to the Czech Republic for the occasion, is scheduled to address the Reform congregation on Thursday, speak at Conservative services on Friday night, and join an Orthodox “educational *minyan*” on Shabbat morning. Sparked by JDC, the Sunday event is now part of a special Family Outreach Weekend at the Lauder Jewish School, with families from all over Bohemia coming together to celebrate Shabbat and take part in the global celebrations.

On the Tunisian island of Djerba, classes at the JDC-supported Jewish Girls' School will focus on the nearly magical story of Honi Ha'ma'agel, who in time of severe drought drew a circle around himself and told the Almighty he would not leave it until exactly the right amount of rain fell.

With the guidance of Yechiel Bar-Chaim, our Country Director for Tunisia, Djerba is already being featured in the Global Day's promotional video, where footage of Djerban Jews studying Talmud in Arabic adds a very special dimension among people featured in various languages and locations. According to Yechiel, when the filmmakers arrived in Djerba in August, they were astounded to be confronted by eight different classes— boys and girls, children and adults—all learning from the same page of the Talmud with enthusiasm—and all looking forward to taking part in the November 7 event.

For 96 years, JDC has coupled its abiding concern for Jewish lives with an equally firm commitment to strengthening Jewish life, and our support for the Global Day of Jewish Learning fits right in. It is the most recent link in a chain of endeavors whose highlights include funding Jewish schools and yeshivot in Europe and Palestine in the aftermath of World War I; meeting the educational and religious needs of Holocaust survivors in the DP camps (an effort that included support for the publication of the DP Talmud); providing broad-ranging Jewish renewal activities throughout the former Soviet bloc; and ensuring that Jewish youth in the small and isolated communities of North Africa and Asia have access today to quality Jewish educational programs.

Irv and I urge you to find some way to join in the Global Day of Jewish Learning on November 7. Coming just prior to the commemoration of Kristallnacht (November 9), this milestone event holds special poignancy, reaffirming as it does the strength of the tradition that binds our people together throughout the world. For more information, visit www.TheGlobalDay.com.

Until next time,



Just a reminder, you can click on the image below to enlarge.

DID YOU KNOW



Studying the Passover haggadah in a JDC-supported school. Teheran, Iran, c. 1966.

In the decades following World War II, in Iran as in other Muslim countries, JDC support for local schools and educational programs helped strengthen and improve both Jewish learning and secular education, giving the younger generation a chance for a better life. Today, JDC helps ensure that children in Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey have access to quality Jewish as well as secular education through Jewish day schools; and continues to promote and sponsor Jewish learning experiences for people of all ages, skill levels, and religious streams.

Read other Executive Reports:

[Carrying Forward the Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship Legacy](#)
[JDC Sends Torah Scrolls to Sofia and Sarajevo](#)
[The Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues](#)

For more information about the world of JDC, please go to www.JDC.org.
