

**"Impact of Globalization on Israel and
Jewish Communities Worldwide"
Presentation at the
World Council of Jewish Communal Service conference by
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Let me start by saying how proud I feel to be a member of this community of professionals.

Like each of you, I see my work as a vocation – not just a job or a regular career. This afternoon, I want to speak about something critical to each of us in this room: why our work matters more than ever before.

Globalization may well mean different things to each of us. But this afternoon as we head back to our home communities, I want to share some thoughts about what globalization might mean for us, the Jewish people -- the group that I call the original globalized people.

To my mind, creating connections between Jews everywhere is not just a nice slogan. It's much more fundamental and fateful than that: strong Jewish bonds that span the globe are critical if the Jewish people are to survive and thrive.

My perspective is shaped by my own place in our Jewish world – a member of my community in New Jersey and the chief professional of an organization linked to Jews everywhere in the world. I have the privilege of traveling often from my home to hundreds of Jewish communities in every corner of the globe –literally, from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe.

These are the thoughts of a Jew who wanders from community to community in the age of globalization.

In our era of new freedom and surprising technology, we are always hearing that our globe is more inter-connected than ever before. With a few clicks on a keyboard or a cellphone, we tune in to people and places across the planet in real time.

So from my desk in New York, I can use a satellite phone to reach colleagues in a Georgia war-zone. Or use a video conference to talk face-to-face with partners in Israel. Or read a blog written by a Jew in some far-flung corner of the globe and learn what's on his mind.

At the same time as virtual bridges are appearing, people and commerce are also flowing across ever-more open borders in a real global village.

Yet even if globalization is re-casting our world, globalization is not new to the Jews. In many ways, we are the original globalized people.

You can look at almost any point in our history over the past two thousands years to find that not only were Jews living all over the globe, but they were connected to each other. Jews moved between communities. Rabbis and leaders corresponded to ask each other questions and share concerns. Jews did commerce with each other on trade routes across land and sea. And, of course, we all faced Jerusalem when we met to pray.

Tzedaka was another global Jewish bond: Take the JDC for example. For almost a century, the Joint has enabled Jews in one part of the world to support Jews across the planet – Jews who they will never meet or visit, but who are genuinely connected to each other.

So even if we were dispersed, we knew what was happening in each other's communities, shared ideas, and helped each other. And more than anything else, we felt connected – by real and powerful bonds.

So how is 21st century globalization really changing our lives as Jews?

Well, even if we Jews have lots of experience thinking and acting globally, I believe globalization has presented us with a troubling paradox that I have witnessed first hand in scores of communities.

The paradox is this: At the same time as globalization makes all of humanity more interconnected, the connections between the Jewish people are breaking down. In an age when we should find it easier to be a global Jewish community, we are actually drifting apart.

Consider these facts:

Over eighty percent of Jews today live in two locations – North America and Israel. Yet only a small minority of American Jews has actually visited Israel, and the majority of Israeli and American Jews has no real connection to each other.

Consider another fact – this time about Jews who survived Communism. Over a million made their homes in Israel, and a similar number immigrated to North America, Germany and elsewhere. Yet though only a few years ago the entire Jewish world mobilized to free them, we now have to ask ourselves a challenging question: as a wave of these Jews choose to reconnect to Jewish life, are we effectively building a community together?

And finally, consider the pattern of philanthropy. If money talks, my friends, then the message couldn't be clearer. Even if many Jews have ridden the wave of globalization to enjoy newfound levels of wealth, it is becoming more and more difficult to raise funds for Israel and for Jewish needs around the world.

Each of these facts illustrates the paradox: in an age when it is easier to be a global community, our traditional bonds are loosening and our people are fragmenting.

But I am not a prophet of gloom. My twenty years at the Joint and my lifelong involvement in Jewish life as a community member have taught me a clear lesson. If we act, we can make a difference.

So the main idea I want to share this afternoon is this: If Jews are to survive and thrive, we must act to re-energize and renew our connections across the globe. They are simply too vital to allow to atrophy any further.

My remarks draw in part from ideas raised at a round-table of JDC staff that discussed globalization this summer. It's a central issue for us at JDC, and I want to share it now because nobody is better positioned to make a difference than our community of Jewish professionals.

Firstly, let's ask ourselves why renewing these bonds is so important.

The upheaval that followed September 11 and this year's global economic crisis taught us that we live in alarming and fast-moving times. What surprises us in one location can harm us far away. These events have changed the situation of Jews everywhere – and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

I can look at each continent and find actual or potential issues that will demand a common response: Hostility against the West in Latin America; xenophobia in Europe; the economic fragility of the Former Soviet Union; and of course the ominous threats to Israel from regimes in the Middle East.

Our history reminds us that such events often call for dramatic responses. Consider the rescue of Ethiopian Jews, and the massive aliya of Soviet Jews. Consider the Jews who remained in the former Communist world where states collapsed and left them poverty. And here in Israel – recall the last Lebanon conflict when Israelis found themselves exposed to life-threatening risks on the home front.

In each case, the Jewish world scrambled in response – and made a difference. A decisive difference.

I know this because I have seen the faces of Jews in dozens of communities whose lives were changed because the Jewish world responded. Ethiopian faces and Israeli. Argentineans, Georgians, Russians, Hungarians, and more.

Who can look into the future and be sure that new moments will not appear?

The real question is if we will be ready to respond, for vigilance is worthless without the capacity to act. The capacity to act depends on a broad and deep sense of global Jewish community.

But it is just this kind of solidarity that is eroding. On my travels, too often I hear Jews deflect another community's problem – and say it is someone else's responsibility. This attitude is breaking with our tradition.

We *must* renew the feeling of a global Jewish community. We *must* have partnerships between distant communities. We *must* teach our children about Jewish life around the globe, and bring our youth together.

These are some ways to renew global Jewish community. There are many others – some excellent examples of which were raised in our conference yesterday and today.

Without the feeling that every Jewish community is "my" Jewish community, there will be no capacity to act when the distress call comes. Jewish solidarity is not just a nice slogan – it's a strategy for our wellbeing and even survival.

So if *turbulence* best describes the economic and security order, the term that comes to mind when we think of Jewish identity and community in the globalized age is *choice*.

For the most part, today's Jews are freer than ever before to choose how and where they live. This includes the choice to opt in – or out – of Jewish life. These freedoms mean that Jewish values and identity have fully entered the free market of global identities and ideas.

I do not need to describe for this room the expanding array of wonderful types of Jewishness that are emerging in Israel and North America where more than 80 percent of us live, but consider this:

Freer immigration is making our communities more diverse than ever before. Cities across the globe are home to "mini-Diasporas" of Israelis, Russian-speaking Jews, and ex-patriots from many other countries.

Secondly, communities are emerging in old or old-new locations – Moscow, Berlin, Budapest and Odessa are once again centers of Jewish life. Other places have surprised us such as communities in Beijing and Shanghai.

Consider one more fact – perhaps the most remarkable: if you add up all the Jews who emerged from the Communist bloc, there are now some 3 million Jews who once didn't have the freedom to opt "in" to Jewish life. Yet today many have difficulty being universally recognized as Jews.

Think for a moment about how different this Jewish world is from the world of only one generation ago – and how quickly it took shape. Our Jewish communities have become more complex.

Many more of us now have the opportunity to opt "in". In market terms, this is great. In this reality, to ensure that as many Jews as possible opt "in", we must offer as many different "entry points" as possible to Jewish life.

What does this mean in practice?

The strengthening and re-emerging communities outside of North America and Israel are generating new energy and creative ideas. Many of the ideas they have launched are unthought-of elsewhere, and they have much to offer.

Ideas can flow from Kiev and Buenos Aires, from St. Petersburg and Istanbul, from Berlin and Vilnius. It could be a Jewish artspace in a Budapest café, or a Moscow dance troupe that reinterprets our Biblical texts, or a freestyle community of learning such as Limmud that originated in England.

These communities offer us in the West inspiration and ideas. We need to turn to them, for we have much to learn from each other.

Again, my point is that global Jewish connectivity is not just a nice idea. It is a platform for exchanging creativity and ideas to help more Jews say "yes" to Jewish life.

Let me conclude with a message to our own professional community.

Everything that I have said this afternoon frames a challenge for no-one more than for us, the global community of Jewish communal professionals. Alongside our lay leaders and philanthropists, we have opportunities to act to renew global Jewish connectivity.

As you travel home, ask yourselves these questions:

- "Am I educating my community about the global diversity of Jewish life?"
- "Are world communities on the radar screen of local philanthropy?"
- And "What have I learnt from my colleagues far away?"

To sum all of these questions up, ask yourself: "Have I encouraged us all to feel that the Jewish community is a global Jewish community?"

To conclude, remember that our Jewish values teach us what is important in life, and guide us to making the right community decisions. One of the values that guides me is "kol Yisrael areivim ze ba ze" -- "every Jew is responsible for each other".

The wisdom of this value is its reminder that there is something greater than each individual. Its wisdom is also in teaching that bonds between Jews are a source of strength to be pursued throughout our lives. Thank you.