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My first 2 years at MAZON have flown by, and what an amazing ride it’s been so far. Current statistics about the prevalence of food insecurity in the United States and Israel prove our mission continues to be necessary. And yet I marvel at all that we’ve accomplished – because of you – and look forward to what the future holds.

MAZON’s influence in the anti-hunger community is considerable. Our programs lead the way on many fronts – from helping the emergency food network focus more energy on the nutritional quality of the foods they provide to educating and empowering the next generation of Jewish anti-hunger advocates and working to change the varied circumstances that leave our veterans struggling to put food on the table. As we proceed, we are constantly trying to anticipate ways to leverage our 27 years of experience to further propel the anti-hunger community forward.

Our recently launched Rural & Remote Initiative is a prime example – the first of its kind. Rural communities in our country face the immense task of providing more, without necessarily having the equipment or resources to do so effectively. Through this initiative we are supporting 9 committed partners and helping them increase their capacity to address hunger in their small and struggling communities. (Read more about this initiative on page 10.)

And as we launch this new initiative, the first phase of our Healthy Options, Healthy Meals™ initiative is drawing to a close. Because of HOHM™, 12 food bank partners are setting the standard and paving the way for their peers to be more proactive in the fight against obesity in the low-income communities they serve. Moving forward, we are determined to share all of the tools and resources we’ve created to a wider network of partners.

Since joining MAZON, one of my top priorities has been to enhance our relationships with our grantees in Israel. We are now working with a consultant with extensive background in anti-hunger advocacy to assess the work our grantees are doing and help us determine how we can improve our impact on food insecurity in Israel. (Read more about this work on page 4.)

We’ve been hard at work, but none of that work would be possible without you. Your energy invigorates and strengthens us daily, and your generosity allows us to continue our fight. We can’t thank you enough.

Wishing you a warm and meaningful Passover holiday.

Lech l’shalom,

Abby J. Leibman
PRESIDENT & CEO
FROM MAZON’S BOARD CHAIR

Many MAZON supporters and partner synagogues wonder how they can become more involved in our fight against hunger. Some work towards this goal by raising awareness; others rally their synagogues for generous donations; others have the capacity for doing highly effective advocacy. Each contribution looks a little different, yet our collective hopes are the same - to eliminate hunger in the United States and Israel.

Our congregation, Adath Jeshurun in Minnesota, has been a MAZON partner since 1988. Over the course of many years, we’ve built our commitments, one step at a time. Here are examples of ways in which our congregation has been involved:

- Our synagogue's initial commitment, which we have maintained for 25 years, has been to encourage congregants to donate 3% of what they spend on life-cycle celebrations. In doing so, we are reminded of our responsibility to those in need when we are feeling especially blessed.

- We have also found it very meaningful to raise awareness about hunger at Passover by encouraging people to ask MAZON’s Fifth Question at their Seders. Some congregants include a reading at the Seder provided by MAZON. Others make a contribution to MAZON of the amount it would cost to provide for one additional guest, a symbolic way of acting on the mandate in the Haggadah to “Let all who are hungry come and eat.”

- Our Synagogue’s Hesed (Social Action) Committee enthusiastically supports the local emergency hunger response, but have also helped our congregation understand that no amount of canned goods can fully address the scope of the hunger problem, and that we must include advocacy as part of our anti-hunger effort.

- And for the past year, Adath congregants have directed considerable energy and talent to help launch the MAZON Advocacy Project - Minnesota (MAP-MN), engaging other MAZON synagogues and advocacy partners to address an issue we believe can be solved through civic engagement. (Read more on page 6.)

Our congregation did not rise to this level of commitment overnight; we built it with MAZON over a span of 25 years. We invite you to do the same. All you need to do is find a strategy that fits for you and take that proverbial first step.

Rabbi Tarfon teaches in his oft-quoted statement in Pirkei Avot 2:21 “You may not be able to complete the job, nor may you shirk your responsibility by neglecting it.” This aphorism is especially meaningful when applied to meeting the most basic human need of providing for those who are hungry. We welcome your partnership in figuring out the roles that you and your community can play. While Deuteronomy 15:11 observes that “there will never cease to be needy ones” it goes on to provide concrete steps to alleviate those needs. Let MAZON help you in taking those steps.

Lech, l’shalom,

Rabbi Harold Kravitz
BOARD CHAIR
OUR WORK IN ISRAEL

Improving our advocacy efforts with our grantee partners in Israel.

For over 20 years, MAZON has awarded financial grants to organizations in Israel to support their efforts to end hunger. But the depth and strength of our relationships with those partners were limited by the physical distance (7,000+ miles from our headquarters in Los Angeles) and the time difference (9+ hours). Recently, we initiated a new effort to assess the feasibility of strengthening MAZON’s impact on food insecurity among Israelis. For the last five months, C & K Hecht Consulting* has been our eyes and ears on the ground, gathering invaluable information about the activities of our partners, the prevalence of food insecurity in Israel, and how we might promote solutions through advocacy. Below is a short synopsis of their findings so far.

In our first month in Israel we visited all 11 MAZON grantees. They are compassionate and committed people who work diligently to help impoverished members of Israeli society.

In addition to those meetings, we have also had in-depth conversations with dozens of experts: from academics to government ministry officers, from members of the needy population to a Talmudic scholar. The information we’ve gathered from this wide range of perspectives has given us a preliminary yet robust understanding of the complexities of Israeli society and the outcome of varied efforts to alleviate hunger and improve nutrition within Israel’s borders.

A 2011 survey conducted by the Israeli National Insurance Institute indicated that nearly 1 in 5 Israelis (19%) lacks access to an adequately nutritious diet. (By comparison, about 14.5% of the U.S. population - nearly 1 in 6 - is food insecure).

In addition, government statistics show that over 62% of Israeli adults are obese or overweight (the comparable US figure is 69%). The Israeli data also show a significantly higher rate of overweight and obese low-income children as compared to their higher income peers.

In the early decades of the State of Israel, the government operated a school lunch program that included nutrition and food preparation studies. By the mid-seventies most families could afford to provide lunches from home, and in 1977 the school lunch program ended. Starting in the nineties, however, food insecurity has been steadily growing, yet the government and many Israeli citizens have been disinclined to recognize the magnitude of the problem. Instead, a huge number of charitable food assistance agencies, guided by the Jewish imperative of tzedakah, have been formed to respond to the growing need for food.

Unfortunately, the scope of the food insecurity problem is now larger than charity alone can solve. In recent years, and thanks to the work of committed advocates, there is growing acceptance that State-sponsored solutions are required. The government has authorized and is now rapidly expanding a program that revives subsidized school lunch for children in low-income communities. And last year the Ministries of Health and Education began a “healthy living” campaign aimed at preventing obesity. Still, much remains to be done.

We see tremendous opportunity and untapped potential for MAZON to enhance and enrich the work that’s already being done in Israel. And the recent elections show that Israelis, too, are looking for change. In the coming months we will be working to build the advocacy capacity of MAZON’s grantees, to identify key issues on which to focus such advocacy, and to create stronger relationships between and among the many partners who are concerned about food insecurity in Israel.

Please visit mazon.org for more information about food insecurity in Israel and the work of MAZON’s grantees.

* C & K Hecht Consulting’s principals are Christina Hecht, PhD, public health demographer, and Ken Hecht, former Executive Director of California Food Policy Advocates for 20 years.
Military families and veterans face unique circumstances and struggles in putting regular, nutritious meals on the table.

While it is heartbreaking to consider that millions of Americans are suffering from hunger, it feels particularly upsetting to hear stories of active duty military personnel and veterans struggling to put food on the table. These brave men and women tirelessly defend our country and uphold our interests. It is beyond comprehension that so many of them must also battle with food insecurity. And so we launched our Help Our Heroes initiative and began to investigate the causes of this injustice.

Like all Americans, military families and veterans are adversely affected by the weak economy and high cost of food. But we’ve also learned that they face unique circumstances and additional challenges. Despite its recent drop from 12.1% to 9.9%, the rate of unemployment and underemployment among veterans is still 25% higher than the national average. (Veterans ages 18-24 have a staggering unemployment rate of 30%!) Chronic homelessness and mental health issues afflict veterans in high numbers - vets make up 14% of the homeless population, but are less than 1% of the general population. Low starting salaries of entry-level service members make it hard for families to make ends meet, especially while a partner has been deployed overseas. Moving every few years, as military families often do, adds another substantial burden of cost and stress from having to endlessly start over again. Then there are inconsistent and draconian rules about whether a housing allowance counts as income, which prevents families otherwise eligible from obtaining SNAP benefits. And we find it especially alarming that some veterans applying for disability benefits currently wait almost a year for their disability and SNAP benefit claims to be processed and approved. Last July, the Veterans Administration had almost 1 million pending disability claims.

While MAZON cannot address every component of this complex problem, it’s clear to us that there’s much we can do to streamline access and improve benefits for federal programs (like SNAP) for our esteemed heroes.

Our path forward will, of necessity, be nuanced and sometimes sensitive, involving a number of potential solutions including working to change outdated administrative policies of federal agencies and engaging Members of Congress to draft and introduce new federal legislation. We will continue to meet with Congressional offices, staff at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, policy experts, veterans advocacy groups, and our grantee partners to explore and advance solutions to provide our military families and veterans the support they need and deserve.

The work will not be easy, but they didn’t give up on their country and we will not give up on them.

HELP OUR HEROES
by Josh Protas
Last year, we launched a new initiative – the MAZON Advocacy Project (MAP) – to reinvigorate our relationships with our synagogue partners around the country. The goal of this new initiative is simple: provide a meaningful way for the American Jewish community to actualize its sacred Jewish duty to care for the vulnerable people in our midst.

MAP reflects our firm belief that synagogues and their congregations can play a leading role in ensuring that our nation’s cities and states uphold our collective responsibility for the men, women and children who struggle to put nutritious food on the table every day.

We launched MAP-MN in February of 2012 at Adath Jeshurun Congregation in Minnetonka, Minnesota. As their first step, the team organized a series of in-depth research meetings with advocates, community members, and lawmakers to better understand the complexities of food insecurity in Minnesota so they could identify which specific issue they could address as part of this work. They were appalled to learn that many children who qualify for reduced-price lunch are actually going without this mid-day meal. Why? Because their families cannot consistently pay the requisite 40 cents per day, and some school districts in Minnesota impose a “turn away” policy that requires cafeteria employees to deny that child the regular school lunch. Some schools provide a sandwich to the child (separately, in the kitchen), but others dump the lunch tray into the garbage right in front of the child.

And so the MAP-MN team began to craft a solution to ensure that every low-income student in Minnesota can eat a healthy lunch.

In January, Senator Jeff Hayden and Representative Ryan Winkler introduced new MAZON-sponsored bills in the state legislature: S.F. No. 146 and H.F. No.336. This legislation will close the lunch gap for up to 61,500 students across the state, by allocating state funds to cover the 40 cents that these families must currently pay.

We are optimistic that our proposed legislation will pass and we are heartened to see the tremendous impact MAP-MN has already made. Since the initiative’s launch, the MAP-MN team has grown to include 150 leaders from 5 synagogues and 20 organizational partners from across the state. MAP-MN participants have successfully established new relationships and forged new alliances that will endure long after this specific project is finished. MAP-MN is a shining example of the power and possibility of direct democracy and the potential that lies within this initiative – to ignite a community of informed leaders ready and able to live our vision of the Jewish response to hunger.
A True Mensch

To Joel Jacob, recognizing the responsibility to help those who are less fortunate has always been important - both as a business owner and as a Jew. Becoming personally invested in the fight against hunger meant he could educate and influence others to make ending hunger a priority.

Joel has served on the MAZON board for almost 10 years, including as the immediate past Board Chair. Joel has always supported MAZON in a very generous way, most recently launching our new Birkat Ha’MAZON Giving Society with a leadership gift of $50,000. He’s a mensch in the truest sense.

“A True Mensch

Won’t you join me as part of the Birkat Ha’MAZON Giving Society? Together, our gifts will empower MAZON to continue its effort to transform how it is into how it should be.”

GIVE A GIFT TODAY

On Passover, you can symbolically “Let all who are hungry, come and eat” by making a gift to MAZON.

Give a gift today by using the attached envelope, visiting mazon.org or by calling us at (800) 813-0557.

Thank you for your generous support!

Birkat Ha’MAZON Giving Society

A blessing of sustenance, typically recited after meals in thanks, is now also a unique opportunity for impactful philanthropy that will deepen MAZON’s fight to end hunger in the United States and Israel. The Birkat Ha’MAZON Giving Society allows leadership gifts to offer a symbolic “blessing of sustenance” to the most vulnerable among us.

Please join the Birkat Ha’MAZON Giving Society today with a generous gift!

$50,000

A gift at this level could help launch new strategic initiative to help veterans, seniors or rural and remote communities struggling with hunger.

$25,000

A gift at this level helps MAZON provide educational programs at Jewish summer camps, synagogues and Jewish Community Centers.

$10,000

A gift at this level allows MAZON to maintain our support of food banks and food pantries in the United States and Israel.
Passover is a special time when we gather with family and friends to retell the story of our people’s freedom from bondage. We read from our prayer books, perform rituals that are thousands of years old, and eat A LOT of delicious and symbolic foods. Unfortunately, not everyone is lucky enough to have that luxury.

Hunger in America is at an epidemic level. 50 million Americans – nearly 1 in 6 – struggle to put enough nutritious food on the table every day. 1 out of every 5 Israelis can’t be sure when or if they’ll have their next meal. These statistics are tragic, and they inspire our daily work. But at Passover, when it can seem as though the primary purpose of the Seder is to eat (and eat and eat), we feel the discomfort a bit more keenly.

We set the stage early in the Seder by saying, “All who are hungry, let them enter and eat.” We move ceremoniously through the haggadah, reminding ourselves that we once were slaves.

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me...

(Exodus 22:19-22)
in Egypt and explaining the meaning of each bite
we eat. But millions of Americans and Israelis
do not have enough nutritious food, which has a
very different meaning – it is a reminder that they
are still enslaved.

This year, please join us as we again ask
The Fifth Question:

Why on this night are
millions of people still
going hungry?

MAZON has a number of materials
available to help you ask The Fifth
Question at your Seder.

Visit our website or contact us by
phone (800) 813-0557.

HURRICANE SANDY

Thanks to your generous support
of MAZON’s Hurricane Sandy
Relief Fund, we were able to
distribute $50,000 to our partner
grantees in New York, New Jersey
and Haiti.

These additional funds were
immediately put to good use,
enabling grantees to repair
storm-damaged facilities and to
expand their programs and services
to handle the sudden increase in
people needing assistance.

Thank you!

THE
JEWISH
RESPONSE

by Beth Huppin

Beth Huppin teaches children at the Seattle
Jewish Community School and adults at
Congregation Beth Shalom. She is a recipient
of the 2010 Covenant Award for Exceptional
Jewish Educators.

In this text, spoken only three months after
leaving Egypt, God cautions the People of Israel
to use their new freedom wisely. The fact that we
were recently slaves does not free us from being
responsible for the newly vulnerable. Here God
explains the eternal lesson of having been strangers:
Building a truly free society means we must protect
those at risk who live among us.

Today, when asked why I support programs to help
hungry and food-insecure Americans, I respond with,
“Because I was a stranger in Egypt.” The Torah teaches
me that others shouldn’t suffer as I suffered. It is a
religious imperative for me to support those who are
vulnerable, just as God supported and helped free
me when I was a slave. God hears the cry of anyone
who is in pain. Torah teaches that God expects us to
hear those cries as well, and to respond by building a
society that cares for all who suffer.
ost of us think of hunger as an affliction of big cities and urban areas. But hunger has been steadily rising among low-income families in rural communities who face a number of unique struggles. Some communities are so small and so spread out that in order to get a bag of food for your family, you would have to drive 2 hours to the nearest food pantry. This requires a car, gas and half a day’s time - a luxury many can’t afford. Many of the smaller pantries in these communities cannot properly store refrigerated or frozen foods, leaving them unable to accept fresh donations, and many fear they have exhausted their limited donor base and need to find new funding streams.

With generous funding from the Walmart Foundation, we launched our Rural & Remote Initiative to help these rural community-based organizations meet the growing need in their communities.

In January, representatives from 9 partner organizations came to our LA office for the official kickoff meeting. At this initial gathering, partners met with MAZON staff for one-on-one sessions designed to help our partners think strategically about their long-term plans and how this initiative could best support their vision. MAZON staff also provided capacity-building training in management & leadership and fundraising. After a full and intense day, the partners went home to their respective corners of the country to begin drafting their work plans and establishing long-term as well as initiative-specific goals.

Each participating organization has identified its own unique objectives. Some of them will focus their efforts on increasing their revenues; others will work to improve board engagement; others will explore ways to improve the quality of their existing programs. But despite these varying goals and circumstances, our newest partners have one basic thing in common: a commitment to ensuring greater food security within their communities.

MAZON is proud of our Rural & Remote partners. Their organizations may be small, but their reach is great. Stay tuned!
OUR PARTNERS

Our R&R partners were selected based on a specific set of criteria. Each participating agency is a 501 c(3) that is well-established in their community, has a visionary leader, and serves a minimum of 50 clients at least once a month.

Good Samaritan Food Bank
Thibodaux, Louisiana

Jackson County Food Bank
McKee, Kentucky

Livingston Food Pantry of Park County
Livingston, Montana

Migrant Farmworkers Project
Kansas City, Missouri

Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture (MEGA)
Shelby, Mississippi

Mooresburg Community Association
Mooresburg, Tennessee

St. Jude Food Bank
Tuba City, Arizona

Sister Evelyn Mourey Center
El Centro, California

Tangi Food Pantry
Hammond, Louisiana

To learn more about these partners, visit mazon.org.