

MAZON NEWSTM

SPRING 2022

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

As we approach Passover, we inevitably frame our leadership and action through the lens of three figures: Moses, Miriam, and Aaron. These three leaders, with very different yet synergistic approaches to leadership, worked to unite a people and make a difference.

Each responded to the needs of their people — answering the call to respond with vision and commitment. Moses was called on to lead, and he responded with a familiar refrain: “Here I am.” Here I am, to bear the responsibility of leading a people, despite the obstacles. Miriam saw the needs of her people and with that understanding she stepped up, uniting, amplifying, and inspiring her community. And Aaron, who not only lent his voice to Moses, but also led in his own right, built connections and communal will.

We are all inspired by the leadership of Moses, Miriam, and Aaron — as a community, as an organization, as leaders, and as individual advocates. At MAZON we hear the calls from those who struggle with hunger, and we respond — we are here.

Sometimes, like Moses, we respond by speaking to the powerful — when we are asked to give testimony before Congress, petitioning those in power to act, or to use our voice in the press to amplify the needs of those who struggle. And when we respond, we do so for all people, regardless of background, faith, or circumstance.

At other times, like Miriam, we hear the call and understand that those who struggle feel alone, isolated, despairing. And as leaders, we know it is also our responsibility to listen, to understand and then provide hope and inspiration, because the struggle is hard, and we need to be here for each other.

And, as Aaron built strength in community, we in turn call on our partners and synagogues to join us in action by using their voices to amplify the voices of people who are too often unheard, and their needs ignored.

When we are called, we respond. And we call on others in turn, because together we can change the tide. We call on our partners and our communities to lift the messages needed to effect change, to give a platform to those who struggle. And we call on leaders, whether religious, political, or organizational, to act within their power to end hunger.

The titans of the Passover story remind us that there is not one way to lead. Rather, change requires different strategies, different visions, to repair what is broken in our world. It is our collective response that will change the very circumstances which allow hunger to persist.

In this vein, we listen for the call, we hold the mantle of leadership, and we work to change *how it is*, into *how it should be*.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Joel Pitkowsky

Rabbi Joel Pitkowsky
BOARD CHAIR



Abby J. Leibman

Abby J. Leibman
PRESIDENT & CEO



Expanding Our Footprint: EAF Covers New Ground

MAZON's Emerging Advocacy Fund (EAF) invests in cohorts of on-the-ground organizations in the most food insecure states in the country to make meaningful change. Grantee partners use the multi-year funding to build or expand their capacity to fight hunger. Our grants support policy analysis, community organizing, coalition building, statehouse lobbying, administrative advocacy, and more. The EAF bolsters the work that really matters in these regions.

Since 2017, MAZON has made 38 EAF grants in 15 US states and Puerto Rico. This year, we are excited to expand our partnership grants into 4 new states: Florida, Georgia, Alaska, and Hawai'i. With our strategic investment, a new group of advocates will launch new initiatives for food justice. While each state faces unique issues, we see barriers to food access that are present across our current and new network of grantees.

For the last year and a half, MAZON conducted environmental scans to build our familiarity with the issues in Florida, Georgia, Alaska, and Hawai'i. Through data and policy analysis, we built a deep understanding of the local advocacy landscape by identifying more than 150 organizations in these states and conducting more than 50 interviews with various advocates and experts. These steps allow us to partner with organizations to achieve tangible progress.

By investing in our communities, we have strengthened safety nets, offering a path out of poverty. In Nebraska, our grantee partners passed legislation to raise the income limit on SNAP and address the "cliff effect." Before this change, a family of four earning \$45,000 a year was considered too wealthy to receive help. MAZON's grantee partners in Louisiana achieved an even higher income limit and are working with state agencies to remove barriers to accessing the nutrition safety net.

Both of these organizations credit MAZON's support as being critical to their effort, sharing: "We are drinking from a firehose. MAZON's partnership grant built our safety net team and the administrative advocacy arm of



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our organization. It changed the course of the Louisiana Budget Project." Other partners continue to work for the equitable distribution of federal pandemic relief, to undo barriers to SNAP like drug felony bans, and more.

In Florida and Georgia, SNAP participation is relatively high among eligible individuals. However, too many low-wealth Black, Brown and white households across our country are ineligible for SNAP due to policy decisions that do not reflect the real-life challenges and economic structures facing working and low-wealth families.

Advocates in Alaska and Hawai'i struggle with the remoteness of their states and the challenges this geographic reality presents to child nutrition programming. Hawai'i served zero federally-reimbursed afterschool meals in 2020. Outside of Anchorage Public Schools, the largest school district in Alaska, afterschool and summer meals are almost impossible to manage without deficits, in large part due to the high cost of food and woefully inadequate level of federal funding for meals. At the same time, Native Alaskans and Hawai'ians face unique challenges relative to their non-Native neighbors, including their right to subsist.

We are excited for this new round of EAF partnership grants and to work alongside new advocates to end hunger for our neighbors everywhere.

MAZON's Hunger Seder Haggadah orients the entire Seder experience around hunger. Use this resource at your family Seder table or with your whole community.

KADESH - THE FIRST CUP

Our first cup of wine is our first promise: We will work to ensure that everyone has access to enough nutritious food.



DAYENU

We are grateful to those who use their hands to stock a food bank, their feet to march to Capitol Hill, and their voices to demand justice. Dayenu.

PLAGUES

Apathy, the greatest plague of all — the failure to make ending hunger a national priority.



MIRIAM'S CUP

Just as Miriam's well sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, so too we pray that we be nourished and sustained on our journey toward justice and an end to hunger.



PESACH IN THE TIME OF COVID: HUNGER AT THE FORE

We observe Pesach with the exhortation to “let all who are hungry come and eat” ringing in our ears, but these past years have been different. Collectively, we have seen how the pressures of coronavirus exacerbated needs that already existed. We see so plainly how dearly we need a robust safety net. Folks in our community who never before experienced food insecurity may suddenly have experienced anxieties about feeding themselves and their families — whether because of new financial strain, time deficiencies for those juggling increased responsibilities with less support, or challenges in finding staples at the grocery store. The resources we have gathered hold these new realities in tension and cohesion with our tradition.

“For 11 years, [...] Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus have joined together at a common table — the Seder table. Anti-hunger advocates gather in growing numbers, year after year, to read the unique Hunger Haggadah and share our support and resources to end hunger through the Exodus story.”

– Lois Frank (former MAZON Board Member), reflecting on the upcoming 12th Annual Interfaith Hunger Seder, Atlanta, GA

“As the Seder meal carries such spiritual significance of liberation and freedom, so too do Indigenous people hold sacred the importance of food to our communities. Liberating us from hunger is the freedom we all are hoping to realize in our lives.”

– Janie Hipp, former CEO of the Native American Agriculture Fund and current General Counsel of the USDA

“I want to thank MAZON. Every year I [...] get MAZON's Hunger Seder Haggadah], the book we read at our Seders, and I'm able to incorporate this message of ending hunger, which is so important into the Pesach dinner.”

– Rep Jan Schakowsky (IL-09)

Visit [Mazon.org/passover](https://mazon.org/passover) for our Hunger Seder Haggadah and Fifth Question resources in their entirety, or email outreach@mazon.org with any questions.



MAZON'S FIFTH QUESTION

(Read this after the Seder's Four Questions)

When will the needs of those who are hungry come before the whims of the powerful?

Moses stands before Pharaoh to demand, to reason, to implore: Let my people go. Young and old, a whole community in the balance. Pharaoh considers, only to harden his heart and refuse Moses once again.

It's high drama. It's compelling. And it's tragic. Everyone suffers, and suffers needlessly.

The millions of people experiencing food insecurity in our nation are challenged at every turn. By the circumstances that brought this moment — a cut in hours at work, an elderly parent in need of care, a childcare disruption. By the litany of systemic issues that engender individual hardships and generational

poverty. By a global pandemic and climate emergency, impacting health and safety on an overwhelming scale. But we know these challenges could be softened with thoughtful, compassionate, and sometimes revolutionary interventions.

So together we ask, **when will the needs of those who are hungry come before the whims of the powerful?**

And this question surfaces more — who are the hungry, and who are the powerful? Is it whom we expect? And perhaps most importantly — what piece of this work lies in our hands?

YOU CAN HELP THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY

Shelly from New York said, "Since I've been on disability after leaving the Navy, I've tried many times to apply for food stamps, but I keep getting denied. My daughter and her toddler live with me, and the government says that our combined incomes are too much to qualify for WIC and food stamps. **Somebody show me how this is possible. After paying rent and the utility bills — it's not enough to feed three people. I feed my granddaughter first. If there's not enough food in the house, I'll go without and I won't think twice about it. But it's not good for anyone to be hungry.**"



The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) is our best tool to fight hunger. Now, we must redouble our efforts to not only preserve the program but to strengthen and fortify it to ensure that folks like Shelly can access this vital resource, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. You can get involved by talking about this issue at your Passover Seder tables and throughout the year. Visit mazon.org to join us in our fight to end hunger. **Together, we can transform *how it is*, into *how it should be*.**



Behind the Camera

A core part of MAZON's work is to challenge the dominant and incorrect narratives about people who experience hunger in our nation. Years ago, we sought to tell a new story of hunger in America — to reframe an often untold and frequently misrepresented story. We first invited photojournalist and documentarian Barbara Grover to travel around the country in a series of trips from the southwest to the northeast, in the wake of hurricanes Sandy and Katrina, post-recession — and now, mid-pandemic, to connect with folks interested in sharing their stories with us and resetting the narrative on hunger in America.

We sat down with Barbara to reflect on her experience, the relationships she forged, and the picture of a hungry nation.

(edited for clarity)

I believe everybody has a story. It's just getting that person to tell their story.

I've been telling other people's stories since I was a little girl. [...] I just always felt very comfortable walking up to a stranger and explaining why it's important for them to be able to share their story with others that don't normally hear it.

That's really been my approach to this work because most people who are food insecure don't feel heard. When I go up to someone, one of the first things I say is this is a chance to tell your story to the people that make the decisions that

impact your life. That is very empowering for them.

The people I approach for this project always ask how their portraits and stories will be used and even before I knew exactly how, I told them all the conceivable possibilities I could think of. I'd say, 'Maybe your photo would be on a billboard someday and your story would be told to Congress.' So, when we featured a mother and child's photo on a Times Square billboard, and when those stories were entered into the Congressional record, I felt that I honored the promise I made to them. That was important to me personally and for what they would think about MAZON.

We are grateful for the stories and photographs uncovered through Barbara's journey. As we continue our storytelling project, we look forward to spotlighting more individuals and communities in our priority populations, who are too often ignored or overlooked.

To read more of this interview, visit mazon.org/behindthecamera.



This billboard featuring Barbara's This Is Hunger work appeared in Times Square.

To see more of Barbara's work and to learn more about the true face of hunger in America, visit MAZON's groundbreaking virtual experience *This Is Hunger* at mazon.org/this-is-hunger.

Hunger Bites

SMALL PLATES **BIG CHANGE**



On **Wednesday, June 8, 2022**, MAZON will host *Hunger Bites: Small Plates, Big Change* at Playa Studios in Los Angeles.

Hunger Bites is MAZON's signature fundraising event — a food-focused gathering honoring a community leader's commitment to ending hunger and highlighting the needs of the most vulnerable.

This year, we are proud to present MAZON's inaugural

Justice Award for Advancing the Response to Hunger to Marcie Zelikow, in recognition of her deep commitment to ensuring that all Americans have the resources they need to keep food on their tables.

For sponsorships, ads, and tickets to the event, please visit give.mazon.org/hungerbites or contact Naama Haviv at nhaviv@mazon.org, or by phone at (424) 208-7210.



MAZON is excited to announce its new groundbreaking project to illuminate the history of hunger in America and the opportunities to create a future without it. *The Hunger Museum* is an unprecedented digital experience

We have the solutions; we know what it takes.

Hunger is solvable — the proof is in our history.

grounded in Jewish values, a combination of innovative art, history, and action that has become the hallmark of MAZON's work.

The Hunger Museum is a dynamic, interactive, and entirely digital resource that creatively immerses its visitors in each page and each exhibit. Exhibits will trace the political, economic, and cultural influences of the time, revealing the expansion and dismantling of the American social safety net over the last century and how, with history in mind, we can forge a path forward to end hunger.

Visitors to *The Hunger Museum* can wander through immersive



exhibits, exploring the intricate influence of social, cultural, and political movements on hunger in America — the history that has resulted in today's hunger crisis.

We have the solutions; we know what it takes. Hunger is solvable — the proof is in our history.

If you would like to support *The Hunger Museum*, please contact Rebecca Ward at rward@mazon.org, or by phone at (424) 208-7203.

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BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR!

Invest in the fight to end hunger. Please call us at
(800) 813-0557 or visit mazon.org to join our
monthly giving program today!

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Find out about giving through your will, life-income
gifts, or other creative ways to support MAZON.
Please contact Sarah Pratter at spratter@mazon.org
or by phone at (424) 208-7228.

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WHO IS MAZON?

Inspired by Jewish values and ideals, MAZON is
a national advocacy organization working to end
hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds
in the United States and Israel.

REACH US

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