REMARKS BY RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ
DEDICATION OF THE JFS HUB
APRIL 11, 2021

Good afternoon and Bruchim Habaim, welcome to this sacred space.

Indulge me for a moment with a brief story, trust me that it has a point and I will not take too long to make it relevant to why we are gathered here today.

In October of 1846, a Boston dentist by the name of William Morton approached a friend and local surgeon, Henry Jacob Bigelow, with a gas that could render patients unaware of the pain of medical procedures. A few days later, Bigelow agreed to let Morton demonstrate the gas in a Massachusetts hospital on a young man undergoing jaw surgery. Four weeks later, Dr. Bigelow published his report describing the use of the gas. While he did not divulge the recipe (Morton was seeking a patent) he did describe "smelling ether" in the air. That's all it took for letters and messages passed among colleagues to spread the idea. Within three months, doctors were administering anesthesia world-over.

Twenty years after Bigelow penned a perfunctory report about anesthesia, an Edinburgh surgeon, Joseph Lister, perfected Louis Pasteur's work of using carbonic acid to purify wounds as well as the doctor's own hands. In 1867, Dr. Lister published a series of seminal essays in a prominent medical journal. Unlike the immediate adoption of ether, it took a generation before the use of antiseptics was adopted as standard practice in hospitals. In 2013, the eminent physician and author Atul Gawande profiled the rapid spread of anesthesia and contrasted it to the glacier-paced adoption of an equally important medical discovery – antiseptics.

Fast and Slow

These stories led Dr. Gawande to ask a deeply spiritual question, "Why do some important ideas spread so quickly, while others seem to take forever?"

What Dr. Gawande found was that solutions to great problems spread more slowly if the problem is invisible. The visible problem and immediate problem of pain during surgery spurred doctors to share notes and encourage each other to adopt anesthesia as a way to make surgery more pleasant for both patients and doctors. Sepsis, on the other hand, can take days to manifest when presumably the surgeon is already working with other patients. What we learn from this is that ideas addressing big, immediate problems that make life easier for everyone are more readily spread than even the most wondrous solutions to perhaps even bigger, but less visible, quandaries of the human spirit.

Hunger in the Jewish community is an invisible problem that we have ignored for too long. For decades JFS and the Jewish Food Bank have been working tirelessly to address this ever-growing crisis, but they have laboured largely out of sight and therefore as Dr Gawande discovered with the slow adoption of antiseptics - out of sight has meant out of mind as well.

This building, these people, this sign on the door, this address, these community programs - that changes everything as of this moment. Hunger in the Jewish community is no longer invisible; its not someone else's problem; that only occurs on a few days a month when folding tables and volunteers generously and heroically gather to assemble a pop-up Food Bank.

No, with this building and our community's public and intentional dedication to supporting it, staffing it and promoting its many services hunger in our community can no longer be overlooked or ignored. The very real pain of an empty stomach too many in our community experience on a regular basis

cries out for our immediate attention and action. This building and what takes place here is the shofar blast that must wake us up to the most solvable problem in our community.

We can end hunger in our community; we can fix this.

We are Jews, we get the importance of food, build entire holidays and calendars around food - that someone in our community should be hungry, should be without food, when there is so much that we have to give and to share - its a Shanda. Its disgraceful - and right here from this holy place we will solve that problem; we will echo the words that we called out last month at our Passover Seders - "Let all who are hungry come and eat!"

The Torah and Jewish tradition are explicit in commanding that we feed the hungry. "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I the Eternal am your God. (Leviticus (23:22)" In Isaiah 58:7, God commands us to "share [our] bread with the hungry and bring the homeless into [our] house." Deuteronomy 15:7-10 elaborates on our commitment to helping the hunger person amongst us. The text states, "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be."

The modern application of these biblical mitzvoth is clear:

- When we go shopping, our modern equivalent of harvesting our fields; we must buy extra for the food bank, every time. And we can bring it here to the JFS Hub.
- “Bring the hungry into your home”, share your bread with them. This JFS Hub that we dedicate today; this too is our home – may its doors always be open to those in need,
- “Open your hand those in need” – it’s through our tzedakah, and that of the Jewish community, through food drives and Bar/Bat Mitzvah projects, donations made in honour and memory; all the ways we give as Jews of our time and our resources that we will sustain this place and fulfill the commandment to open our hands to those in need.

Today we hang a mezuzah and we are reminded of the words inscribed on the scroll within, the same that adorn our doorposts at home; “remember these words when we lie-down at night and when we get up in the morning, when we walk on the streets – that we must love God and therefore every human being who is created in God’s image with our whole heart, soul and might.

We know as well that food is love.

With the heart we feel, with the soul we think and consider and with our might we act on those feelings. Feeling, thinking, doing.

As we dedicate this building let us dedicate ourselves to that principle and let us act fast, not slow – for the problem is apparent, it is right before our very eyes; and may this building remind us of that every day and in every way.

MEZZUZAH HANGING