Rabbi Greene's Closing Statement

Before we close, I want to bring us back to where we started 126 years ago. JFSWM was founded by a community that itself knew displacement, that understood in its bones what it meant to arrive somewhere new and uncertain, hoping to be met with more than suspicion. That founding impulse — hachnasat orchim, welcoming the stranger — has outlasted every legal regime, every presidential administration, every court that has ever sat in Washington. Laws change. That foundational obligation hasn't.

There's a teaching from the Talmud that I keep returning to these days: *lo bashamayim hi* — it is not in the heavens. When the sages debated a point of law and a voice from heaven itself intervened to settle it, the rabbis refused to accept it. The law, they insisted, was given to human beings to interpret, argue over, and — crucially — to act on, here on earth, in community and with one another. I don't think that teaching is about defying courts. I think it's about something more basic: that no single ruling, however final, relieves us of our own obligation to respond with justice and compassion in the world right in front of us.

So, whatever any of us takes from tonight's conversation — concern, clarity, resolve, even exhaustion — I'd ask you to take one more thing with it: this community has been doing this work for over a century, through wars, through waves of migration, through legal landscapes that shifted for better and for worse. And through presidential administrations who have acted out of a sense of racism and bigotry. We are still here. The people we serve are still here. And the stranger among us is still, as the Torah insists, someone whose heart we are commanded to know as our own.

Thank you for being here tonight, thank you to our staff, our board and committee members, for our countless volunteers who have already given so much of themselves to this work, and for the work I know so many of you will continue individually in the days and months ahead.