

# THE **FIFTH** QUESTION

THE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM: PARTED WATERS. WIDE-OPEN WILDERNESS. PROMISED LAND.

*Isaiah's justice leaders reflect on building a more just and compassionate world.*



TEMPLE   
**ISAIAH**

**SOCIAL ACTION  
NEWSLETTER**

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MAH NISHTANA HA-LAYLA HA-ZEH?

# מה נשתנה הלילה הזה

*“How is this night different?”*



The FOUR Questions are a popular stopping point in the seder ritual. The youngest child may be asked (or volunteered) to chant them aloud. The repeated chorus of “ha-layla ha-zeh” invites us to sing along. On this night, we begin to notice the differences on and around our seder table. We take note of how our lives have changed since last we gathered to sing these words.

Passover is our time to tell an ancient story whose themes of slavery and freedom still resonate today. We are all too familiar with modern-day restrictions, limitations, and enslavements. We can identify those who play the role of Pharaoh, slave and taskmaster. We are reminded that “freedom” is sometimes a 40-year journey through the wilderness, a path strewn with threats and uncertainty.

If we are not careful, we neglect to mention that the story also tells us how to recognize individual and communal transformation. We may overlook heroines and heros engaged in the day to day work of redemption. We forget that an uncertain future can also lead us to extraordinary outcomes.

Rebecca Solnit, in her book *Hope in the Dark*, writes: *Amnesia leads to despair in many ways. The status quo would like you to believe it is immutable, inevitable, and invulnerable, and lack of memory of a dynamically changing world reinforces this view. In other words, when you don't know how much things have changed, you don't see that they are changing or that they can change.*

The community of Temple Isaiah has long been committed to building a world overflowing with justice, kindness, equality and peace. Along the way, we have celebrated victories. We have mourned our losses. And, yes, we have wondered when we might reach the Promised Land. We have questioned why the road is so long.

Let this celebration of Passover reignite our commitment to the ongoing pursuit of justice. Let this retelling remind us that activism is a lifestyle not a weekend activity. Let this ancient story guide us in our daily practice of redeeming the captive and returning dignity to the oppressed. On this Passover, let us remember how far we have come, even as we acknowledge the wilderness that lies before us.

**On behalf of Isaiah's social justice leaders, we offer this newsletter as an update on our many pathways of justice. We hope you consider joining us in the months to come. Take note of "The FIFTH Question" offered at the end of each section. Choose a few questions to bring to your seder table and see how they might enliven, agitate and inspire those around you.**

May this Passover bring us new wisdom and insight, strength to endure, and determination to continue our journey together.

To learn more, please contact our Social Action Coordinator, Cantor Lilah Sugarman at [Lilah@templeisayah.com](mailto:Lilah@templeisayah.com).

# AM TZEDEK

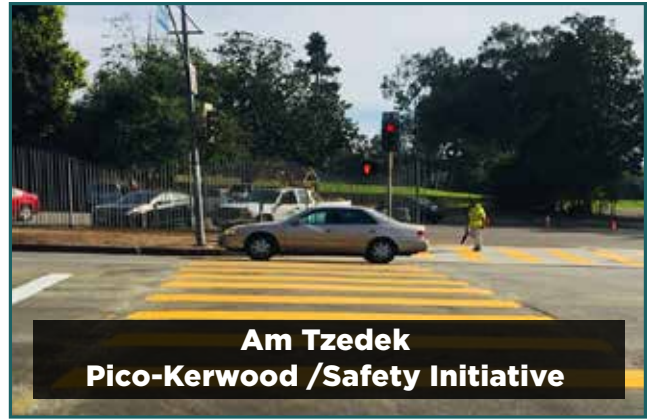
by Janet Hirsch

**Am Tzedek: Isaians Pursuing Justice** is committed to making our Temple community feel connected to one another and to our fellow Los Angelenos.

We have been working to improve safety at the Temple adjacent intersection of **Pico-Kerwood**, in partnership with our elected officials and public servants.

Through our membership with **OneLA (IAF)**, we are working with other member institutions throughout Los Angeles County to address the crisis of homelessness and housing in our city.

We are also committed to making our city a place in which every person feels safe and welcome. To that end, we are engaged in strategies that address the needs of local immigrant and refugee communities.



## The FIFTH Question:

The Torah teaches that we are to show empathy for the stranger since we were once strangers in the land of Egypt. *What are the modern-day obstacles that prevent us from showing empathy to the stranger?*



HA LACHMA ANYA

# הא לחמא עניא

*"This is the bread of affliction"*

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## WORKING GROUP ON HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS

by Debra Silverman

You don't have to work too hard in our neighborhoods to find the visibly homeless: tents pitched beneath overpasses, families camped out in doorways, and folks pushing makeshift carts along our streets. The 58,000 homeless in LA county are a daily reminder of our obligation to do more to repair the world. Through our partnerships with **People Assisting the Homeless (PATH)**, **Upward Bound House**, and **LA Family Housing** we're moving families into permanent homes. In connection with **Am Tzedek** and **OneLA (IAF)**, we're in conversation with the Mayor's office and our councilmembers about affordable housing -- and how to bring more of it to West LA. We're packing lunches, snack packs and hygiene kits for our most vulnerable citizens. We're mobilizing our community with printed guides to facilitate meaningful conversations with our families about homelessness and hunger during the Jewish holidays throughout the year. Want to join us? Let us know which PATH you'd like to take.



## The FIFTH Question:

On Passover we hold up a piece of matzah and say, "This is the bread of affliction that my ancestors ate...Let all who are hungry come and eat." *How are you meeting the immediate needs of individuals seeking food and shelter? How are you working to address the root causes of hunger and homelessness?*

## ISAIAH WOMEN

by Ann Weinman and Helene Korn

Isaiah Women is proud to have social action as part of its mission. At our holiday celebrations for Passover and Sukkot, the “price” of admission is a donation of clothing, books or toiletries for **PATH** or **SOVA**. At Chanukah, we collect hundreds of toys for **First AME Church**. In 2016, we redecorated the Women’s Lounge at PATH’s shelter in West Hollywood. This past year, we visited the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank early one Saturday morning, with some husbands and children in tow, and assisted in packaging meals for people in need. One Sunday, we took the train downtown to join the march for **NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)**. We are proud to be able to do this work and to join with other Temple Isaiah groups as members of Am Tzedek.



## The FIFTH Question:

Moses, Miriam and Aaron worked together to free the slaves and shepherd them through the wilderness. *In what ways has partnership strengthened your efforts to fight for justice? What keeps us from working collaboratively or seeking help from allies?*

## GUN LEGISLATION ADVOCACY COMMITTEE by Karen Sloane

Given the current political climate, **Temple Isaiah’s Gun Legislation Advocacy Committee (“GLAC”)** has taken a less active role working on legislative issues and instead turned its attention towards educational programming. Our programs range from promoting sensible legislation for the purchase, sale and storage of firearms, to understanding the effects of gun violence on our community. In the fall of 2017, GLAC collaborated with **Women Against Gun Violence** and the **Brady Campaign** at a very successful summit on firearms and domestic violence attended by over 80 guests. GLAC continues to educate our Temple youth through its program, **Art as Activism**. GLAC, together with several local pastors is organizing a community gathering on Monday, April 2, 2018 to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and to meet with elected officials to address gun violence in Los Angeles.



## The FIFTH Question:

The seder invites us to consider our role as teachers for the next generation. It is our obligation to tell the story so that our children understand, and so that they might someday teach. *What is the most valuable teaching you have received on how to create a more just and compassionate world? What do you hope to teach to the next generation?*



## TEMPLE ISAIAH COALITION AGAINST TRAFFICKING (TI-CAT) by Gail Solo

With keen awareness that we were once slaves, our hearts are broken by the evil by which men, women, and children are enslaved in our own community. There are no innocent bystanders in the fight to end human trafficking. Slavery must end with us. At Temple Isaiah, we seek to do so, and to bring awareness to this national tragedy, in three principal ways. In collaboration with **CAST (Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking)** we build relationships with survivors by offering opportunities for them to experience joy, attend workshops and to receive mentorship. As partners with the **National Council of Jewish Women**, we advocate for legislative change, deliver community organization and outreach to implement legislation. We teach our religious school students to fight against modern slavery and help its survivors. We cannot take our freedom for granted: we need to step up and be the heroes to give voice to the voiceless and stop human trafficking.



## The FIFTH Question:

Moses did not see himself as a hero. Nevertheless, God chose him (along with his brother and sister) to liberate the Israelites from slavery. *What prevents us from stepping forward and taking action? What voice might convince us we are stronger than we think?*

## FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION



### THE GREEN TEAM

by Steve Fox

At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptian Pharaoh. We are still in bondage today. But now we have become our own Pharaohs: slaves to our own creations. We delight in our discoveries and inventions and invest mightily in them so that they ultimately become our taskmasters. And, ultimately, we are seeing the plagues arrive: smoking, obesity, climate change, diabetes, asthma, bee colony decline, drought... It's painfully clear to most scientists, that a new Exodus is mandatory—an exodus from the world of fossil fuels so we can leave 80% of our known reserves in the ground to avoid raising the earth's temperature by 2 degrees Celsius. We hope you will join us in hastening this Exodus.

## The FIFTH Question:

The ten plagues illustrate a perversion and upheaval of nature: blood in the water, excessive frogs, hail and pervasive darkness. Consider the ways in which nature is still vulnerable to perversion and upheaval today. *Like Pharaoh, what must we learn to let go of in order to survive?*

### WATCH FOR NEWS OF ACTIVITIES AROUND:

The March for Science – Saturday, April 14

Earth Day – Saturday, April 22

A screening of *Merchants of Doubt* – Saturday, April 28

BCHOL DOR VADOR

בכל דור ודור

*“In every generation”*

## ROOTS AND WINGS

by Suzanne Solig

**Roots and Wings**, Temple Isaiah’s mentoring program at Santee Educational Complex and University High School, continues to support students as they make their way through high school. At both schools, we are matched with an AVID class, a four-year college preparatory program for students who will be the first in their family to attend college.

We begin most sessions with a group activity that has educational focus. This month at Santee, where our mentees are juniors, we played the G.P.A. game to show students



that factors other than a good grade point average can boost their chances of getting into the college of their choice. As our students will graduate in June, our conversations center around selecting the college they will attend, searching for scholarships and grants, and anticipating how college life will be different from high school.

## The FIFTH Question:

Moses is instructed by God to select and train Joshua to be his successor. Joshua is hesitant, but Moses reassures him, “Be strong and courageous; don’t be terrified or afraid of them.”

*What gives you strength and courage to continue your work? Have you considered who will do this work after you?*



# CHAI VILLAGELA

by Terry Pullan  
and Barbara Joyner



During the past quarter, ChaiVillageLA has focused on three programs. We partnered with **PATH**, for the second time, to help a previously homeless family of five turn an empty apartment into a home.

We hosted a forum for Neema Namadamu, founder of the **Synergy of Congolese Women's Association**, to learn about their work to foster collaboration among women led NGOs and their Peace, Rights and Development agenda.

On April 5, we will host our second annual seder with the theme, "**Sharing our Journey**". Integral to our plans for this event will be to join forces with local synagogues and collect baby clothing, formula and other supplies for donation to **Save the Syrian Children**.

## The FIFTH Question:

At the seder, we recite the words, Avadim Hayinu, we were once slaves, but now we are free."  
*In what ways do we use our freedom, power and privilege to liberate others?*



## MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY IN (SOCIAL) ACTION !



Eric Shabsis

Community engagement has always been an important part of my life. My grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, taught me through words and deeds about the importance of social justice and action. He taught me quintessential Jewish values: that I have a responsibility to speak up for those whose voices are not usually heard, to support those who need help, and to speak out when I see a “wrong.” As a result of his influence, I dreamed of a life in public service, which I achieved for over a decade of my career, working at all levels of government. Today, while my profession allows me to be proximate to public service, I no longer hold a government job. Instead, one of the ways I honor my grandfather’s teachings about social justice is to volunteer for my former boss, Senator Dianne Feinstein’s, political campaign.



Jennifer Forman

Working with underserved children has always been part of my professional life. My first job out of college was to be a Camp Director for UCLA’s official charity, **UniCamp**. This experience inspired me to become an elementary teacher and reading specialist for twenty-five years. After raising my own children who are now high school students, I’ve returned to work, I’m now a college counselor at L.A.C.E.S and University High School and support First Generation and DACA students as they navigate the college admissions process. Many Isaiah members have domestic workers who are part of our families. I encourage you to talk with them about their childrens’ plans to attend college, and, to reach out to a college counselor to provide the confidential 1-1 support they may need.



Allison Bloom

I started my journey with **Planned Parenthood Los Angeles (PPLA)** twenty years ago teaching comprehensive sex education to LAUSD teens. I really enjoyed this work, and soon transitioned to fundraising for PPLA’s political arm, **Planned Parenthood Action Fund**, when I realized that grassroots political work was essential to keeping Planned Parenthood’s doors open. The funds we raise help put people on the ground to register voters and staff phone banks. We also push for legislation, both in California and across the country, to protect health care access for all men, women and teens. I love Temple Isaiah’s focus on Tikkun Olam (healing the world), and when my kids come home from religious school and ask me how they can help, I know we are all connecting with something bigger than ourselves.

# OUR TIKKUN OLAM OPPORTUNITIES



**Am Tzedek - Isaiahs Pursuing justice:** Am Tzedek is the umbrella under which Temple Isaiah does all types of justice work, partnering with OneLA and Reform California. It is a group made up of a core team of Temple Isaiah members and lay leaders.

**Working Group On Hunger and Homelessness:** In partnership with local non-profit organizations (including **PATH, Upward Bound House and Mazon**), this group works to address ongoing challenges around hunger and homelessness in Los Angeles through education, outreach, advocacy, community engagement and legislation.

**Reform California: Reform California**, a project of the **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**, organizes across lines of race, class, and faith for a more just and compassionate California. Past campaigns have included legislative wins on immigration, transportation and affordable housing.

**Temple Isaiah Coalition Against Trafficking (TI-CAT):** Temple Isaiah's anti-human trafficking initiative was established to help promote awareness in of human trafficking and slavery. TI-CAT partners with **CAST** and **NCJW**.

**GLAC -The Gun Legislation Advocacy Committee:** GLAC advocates for sensible gun legislation and educates to prevent future gun violence.

**The Green Team:** The Green Team focuses on education and advocating for environmental issues, green activism, and creating green initiatives at Temple Isaiah and in the larger community.

**FPC -Family Philanthropy Club:** The FPC was born out of the desire to help Temple Isaiah families engage in deep, meaningful and sustainable partnerships with non-profit organizations concerned with a variety of issues facing Los Angeles, including, but not limited to, hunger, homelessness, child and teen welfare and sustainability.

**Roots & Wings:** Roots & Wings is a program that has connected students at Santee and University High School with mentors from Temple Isaiah since 2008.

**SOVA:** SOVA, a part of Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles, provides free groceries and an array of supportive services to over 12,000 individuals of all ages, ethnicities, and religions each month.



**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED AND WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH ANY OF OUR SOCIAL ACTION PROGRAMS CONTACT:**

**Cantor Lilah Sugarman, Social Action Coordinator**  
lilah@templeisaiah.com or 310.277.2772





10345 West Pico Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90064

310.277.2772  
[WWW.TEMPLEISAIAH.COM](http://WWW.TEMPLEISAIAH.COM)

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