

Our Torah offers many intriguing calls to action that challenge the participants in its narratives. Consider the many examples of our Torah calling out.

When Adam and Eve try to hide in the Garden, God asks them, *Ayeka?* “Where *are* you?” Of course, that question was not merely seeking their GPS coordinates; it was also asking them, “where is your *soul* at this moment?”

Abraham was called to set off on a spiritual and nation-building journey. He famously responded, “*Hineni* – I am *here*, and will *answer* Your call.”

And on this Shabbat of Parshat Shoftim, both the Torah and the *Haftarah* issue a call, as well.

This *parshah* offers this most famous of exhortations (16:20): *Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*. “Justice, justice, you shall pursue”. Here the Torah makes clear that for Israelites then, and Jews now, the pursuit of justice *must* be our calling.

And in today’s haftarah Isaiah called out, (17): “*Hitorerie, hitorerie, koomie, Yerushalayim*”; “Wake up, wake up, rise up, Jerusalem...”

The Torah is perhaps teaching us, “*When God calls, pick up the phone!*”

In more serious terms, we can conclude that our tradition is calling *us* from across the ages. God, the Torah, our Prophets all called out to our Biblical forerunners and they are calling *us*, right *here*, right *now*. The question we should ask ourselves is: What does this prophetic call mean for *us*, in *our* time and place?

A group of Netivot Shalom members recently coalesced around this question; ‘What would it look like for Netivot Shalom to be rooted in social justice work with a majority of our members engaged in social action?’

While the conversation is ongoing, we have agreed on one thing: If our congregation was rooted in social justice work, with a majority of us engaged in it, our world – our immediate community – would be a far better place. We would be positively improving the lives of many more of our neighbors in need. And we would each be firmly answering God’s call, “*Ayeka* – where *are* you?”

Netivot Shalom is *already* engaged in powerful social justice work. Let me share the work our congregation *already* embraces and then paint a vision of how much more we could accomplish, with your participation.

Our **Community Action Working Group, known as ‘CAWG’** builds relationships with other community organizations to develop and support equity actions in Berkeley. The projects CAWG supports include:

The **Step Up Transitional Housing** program right across the street. CAWG members provide welcome baskets to new residents and offer creative support, such as cooking lessons for the residents.

CAWG supports the **McGee Avenue Baptist Church food pantry** by providing weekly volunteers, and food donations, for its hot lunch program.

And CAWG members volunteer for the **Berkeley Public School Fund**, which supports Berkeley Unified school students who are food insecure.

Our Netivot community supports immigrants. Each week Netivot volunteers shop, and deliver food, to two immigrant families who are fearful of leaving their homes due to our government's aggressive and dehumanizing pursuit of immigrants.

Our new **Pe'ah Forward** project encourages you to purchase one shelf-stable food item each time you go to the market. These items are collected in the container in the social hall and brought to The Community Table, a neighborhood food program run by Pastor Barry Cammer.

Our **Interfaith Group** plans activities with the **Pacifica Institute**, a Turkish Muslim group, promoting interfaith relationships and understanding.

Netivot Shalom also co-sponsors an **Annual Interfaith Blood Drive** with five other local faith-based groups.

Our **Adult Education committee** arranges programs relating to many aspects of social justice.

And **Climate Tzedek** is a group of Netivot members who are committed to educating and inspiring our community to take climate change, and protection of our planet, seriously.

We can all feel proud of this work that members of our synagogue are already doing, making so many significant contributions to the well-being of our community, at a time when there are so many unmet needs.

Netivot Shalom's founding Rabbi, Stuart Kelman z/l once said "The purpose of a synagogue *is* to do mitzvot".

And our Netivot Shalom *Mission Statement* declares that "our participatory, egalitarian community" is defined by two primary values: "*Belonging* – we nurture connectedness with each other, *and* with the broader community." *and* "Justice – we embrace Judaism's call to repair the world through deeds of loving-kindness *and* social action."

Our new Social Justice group wants to inspire a sense of belonging from all quarters of our synagogue. We want to elevate and support the wonderful acts of *chesed* so many

of our members are already engaged in. And we want to make it easier for our members to engage in this work together. In other words, we aspire to amplify our synagogue's mission of being rooted in justice, and through this work increase our collective sense of belonging.

There is a constructive power in our communal commitment to answer our Torah's call for action. It can not only repair and heal our world; it can also lift *us* up and strengthen *us*, by bringing us together as we pursue our sacred calling.

"Tzedek, Tzedek, tirdof"; "Justice, justice, you shall pursue" – it's *still* calling us.

So, let me leave you with this question; what would it look like for you – and for everyone in our congregation who is able – to take part in our social justice work?

What action is calling *you*? And how would *you* like to support our synagogue's mission to be a community rooted in justice?

God is *still* calling to each of us with the question, "*Ayeka? Where are you?*"

Let's join together and through our collective actions we can answer God by saying, *Hineni – Here I am.*