



STEPHEN
WISE TEMPLE
WISE STORIES
2018 - 2019
MAKE MEANING **CHANGE THE WORLD**



**"THE POWER OF
COMMUNITY IS
COMPELLING; WE NEED
IT, BUT COMMUNITY
ALSO NEEDS US."**

Let's Connect

OFFICE HOURS:
Monday-Thursday | 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Friday | 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

CONTACT:

- Ⓐ WiseLA.org
- Ⓒ LetsConnect@WiseLA.org
- ☎ 310.476.8561
- 📍 15500 Stephen S. Wise Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90077

SOCIAL MEDIA:

- Ⓕ WiseLA
- Ⓣ StephenWiseTemple
- 🐦 WiseLA

MESSAGE FROM RABBI YOSHI ZWEIBACK

Jews are known as the "People of the Book." On a more granular level, we are the people of stories. From the family narratives of Genesis through the great drama of our exodus from Egypt, the stories we tell teach us about our past and remind us of our destiny — the people we are striving to become. It's a story we share with the entire Jewish People and, at the same time, one which is quite personal. Our communal story is made up of thousands of individual stories.

And so it is with Stephen Wise Temple and Schools as well: the Wise story is made up of the experiences, values, hopes, and passions of the thousands of individuals who have come together over the decades to build our community. We celebrate our diversity, knowing that in bringing these different stories together in an inclusive community, we are stronger.

In these times, especially, the power of community is compelling; we need it, but community also needs us. Thank you for being a part of our story, and we hope you enjoy this reflection on the year that was—a pictorial representation of 5779 here at Wise. In worship, celebration, *tikkun olam*, learning, and more, we made meaning and changed the world.

In the pages that follow, we share three of the many, many stories that make Wise so extraordinary. Each one is unique and yet inextricably bound up with our communal, shared narrative. Reading them, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude for the privilege of being part of such a creative, inclusive, and generous community.

I look forward to continuing to write our story together.

L'Shalom,

The number forty is significant in the Bible. The flood story tells of forty days of rain. The spies scout the land for forty days. Our ancestors wandered in the wilderness for forty years. In honor of this special number, we've decided to share the stories of three member families: one that has been part of the Wise community for forty years; one who joined us forty months ago; and one who joined us forty weeks ago. Their stories are our stories—the stories of our community.

40 MONTH MEMBERS: SEAN, NIKKI, AIDAN AND HAYLEY HASHEM

WHEN NIKKI AND SEAN HASHEM DECIDED TO ENROLL THEIR CHILDREN, Aidan and Hadley, in a Jewish day school, they needed to look no further than Wise School and the Stephen Wise Temple community, which they had known about for years through friends.

"I have loved being at Wise School as the teachers really explain everything so well," says Nikki. "Because the kids are exposed to Judaism on a daily basis, they are living it."

Nikki grew up in Tehran and migrated with her family to the United States when she was 10 years old. Sean's parents moved from Iran to Israel and later to France, Canada, and then New York where Sean was born. Both families ultimately settled in Los Angeles.

Sean and Nikki own Greenbridge Investment Partners in Beverly Hills and operate a variety of commercial properties and businesses in California and Washington. They are owners and developers of unique projects that include Seattle Design Center, Time Square Business Park and various projects around Los Angeles and Seattle. Last year, they opened Platform 35 Market Hall in Koreatown after Sean recognized the opportunity for a culinary food hall in the increasingly hip neighborhood. The hotspot includes eight dynamic restaurants and a craft beer and tapas bar. Sean oversees the vendors and the social media-savvy Nikki handles marketing. Her personal Instagram account, on which she features photography of the family's worldwide travels, has over 66,000 followers.

"We love to show the kids what's outside the bubble we live in," Nikki says of their ambitious travel plans. This year they will travel to Poland and Israel where they will celebrate Aidan becoming Bar Mitzvah with Israeli relatives. Last year they visited Australia, Bali, Japan, and South Korea.



Aidan (pictured above with his parents and sister) celebrated becoming Bar Mitzvah at Stephen Wise Temple in February this year.

**"BECAUSE THE KIDS ARE EXPOSED TO JUDAISM ON A DAILY BASIS,
THEY ARE LIVING IT."**

Like lots of Wise School families, there's never a dull moment for the kids. Hadley, a soon-to-be graduate of 6th grade, is into the arts and everything creative. Following in her entrepreneurial parents' footsteps, she has opened her own Etsy store making and selling slime. Aidan, who will be a freshman next year at Milken Community High School, participated in every sports league while at Wise School. Basketball is now his passion.

"We love being at Wise and feel fortunate to have gone through the school," Nikki says. "We love the community—the people are amazing."

Here are just some of the many ways that we made meaning and changed the world together in 2018-19.

LEARN

Early Childhood students enjoyed learning about Tu B'Shvat.



Monthly Baby Playdates gave families a chance to connect and make new friends.



Camp Wise welcomed over 250 kids for a summer of fun in the sun!



Costumes and fun galore! All ages loved our Purim Carnival.



Wise newlyweds connected over dinner and a Havdalah service at Rabbi Yoshi's home.



WORSHIP

Wise Readers to Leaders brought over 450 students from under-served LAUSD schools to Wise for summer learning.



High Holy Days Family Services were memorable, musical, and meaningful.



Wise Guys hit the slopes for an annual weekend retreat full of bonding, learning, and skiing.



G I V E



Religious School celebrated Simchat Torah and our community's love of learning.



C E L E B R A T E



Wise Years heard from an eclectic variety of fascinating speakers on intriguing topics throughout the year.



Women of all ages and backgrounds connected at Wise Women's Challah Bake



Past Presidents of Wise met for dinner to share stories and reflect on the growth of our community.



C O N N E C T



At a special event, Wise School alumni met up with old friends and learned all about the present and future of Wise.



The Wise Walking Group ventured all over the southland to explore new neighborhoods.

40 WEEK MEMBERS: BRENTON AND DAISY (THANH) TESLER



Brenton Tesler, Ken Gross (standing), Daisy Tesler, Michael Shore, Sussan Shore celebrating Sukkot.

IT WAS JUST A MATTER OF TIME. Brenton and Daisy lived half a world apart but, they kept connecting whenever Daisy traveled from Saigon to Los Angeles. Their international romance led to a wedding: Rabbi Joshua Knobel married the couple in December 2018.

While Brenton grew up in a Jewish household, he explains that Daisy is the one who brought him back to Judaism. She had always been exposed to a diverse world of religions—her parents are Buddhist and her sister-in-law is Catholic—but Daisy never felt comfortable committing to one faith. Until, that is, she learned more about Judaism—its openness, its limitlessness. She was inspired about the history of Jewish perseverance, the strength of the Jewish people to pass along traditions *l'dor v'dor* (from generation to generation). She connected to the Jewish commitment to learning from an early age.

Daisy is the one who brought Brenton to his first Shabbat service in years.

When searching for a community to join together, the young couple felt that Stephen Wise Temple checked off all the boxes. "The Wise clergy are talented, and the congregation is very welcoming," they point out. The two have become regular Friday evening attendees, participating in worship that they find touching, peaceful, joyful—and, most of all, comfortable.

It's a community allowing them to grow together: Daisy's professional background has been in customer service and hospitality for Hyatt Hotels and Resorts in Vietnam and customer service for a private investment company in London. Now she is working on obtaining her real estate license, studying Spanish, learning Korean folk painting. Brenton works in politics, presently developing an election campaign for a San Fernando Valley candidate. When they do get some spare time, Brenton and Daisy love to explore the cultural, culinary, and natural life of Los Angeles.

From the monthly Wise Walking Group urban excursions and Shabbat wilderness hikes with Rabbi Ron Stern to Learning in your Neighborhood classes in members' homes and Center for Jewish Life lectures—Brenton and Daisy have jumped right into the life of Wise and have found a community to call their own.

40 YEAR MEMBERS: FRANK PONDER & HELEN RANDALL

LONG BEFORE Stephen Wise Temple existed, Frank Ponder was learning the values that would become the heart of the Wise philosophy—creativity, inclusivity, generosity, and the importance of making meaning and changing the world.

And the person who taught him these values? None other than the future founder of the community, Rabbi Isaiah Zeldin (Z”L).

“He was one of the best teachers I’ve ever had,” says Ponder, who studied under Rabbi Zeldin at Temple Emanuel more than half a century ago. “He was very influential in my life at that time.”

After Rabbi Zeldin left Temple Emanuel to start his own synagogue, Ponder soon followed—and over 40 years later, he remains an active member of the Wise community. He commends the clergy and his fellow members for making Wise as warm and welcoming today as it was when it first started.

“Wise has a very open, ‘let’s do it’ attitude, which I find exciting,” he says. “I’m always looking for ways to give back.”

And he’s done exactly that. Ponder, who ran Bel Air Camera for forty years, is president of a real estate investment group, and has been involved in a number of roles with Wise, touching almost every aspect of the synagogue’s operations. He was the chair of the Purim and Membership committees; he’s currently serving his second term on the Board of Directors; he’s hosted numerous community events and has attended classes at Wise “since my daughter was in first grade.”

That’s all in addition to other leadership roles he’s held in support of the larger Jewish community, including URJ Camp Newman, Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles Jewish Federation, 6-Points Sports and Sci-Tech Academies, plus Co-Chairing the Diller Youth Engagement Committee, and past Chair of Hillel at UCLA and is currently VP of the Westside Jewish Community Center (JCC).



Our Board of Directors, led by President Janine Kolodny, represent our community and lead our Stephen Wise Temple and Schools community to make meaning and change the world. (Frank is pictured centered in the front row).

Frank Ponder celebrating with Rabbi David Woznica (pictured third from left) as he became the inaugural holder of the Rabbi Isaiah Zeldin Rabbinic Chair (From left: Helen Randall, Frank Ponder, Rabbi David Woznica, Lionell and Robin Greenberg)

While all these responsibilities keep him busy—“especially when they schedule all their Board meetings on the same night!”—he believes it’s his duty “to help and be a positive energy” to the community.

But for Ponder, now 76, his latest effort may be his most important—and he credits Rabbi Zeldin for sparking his inspiration.

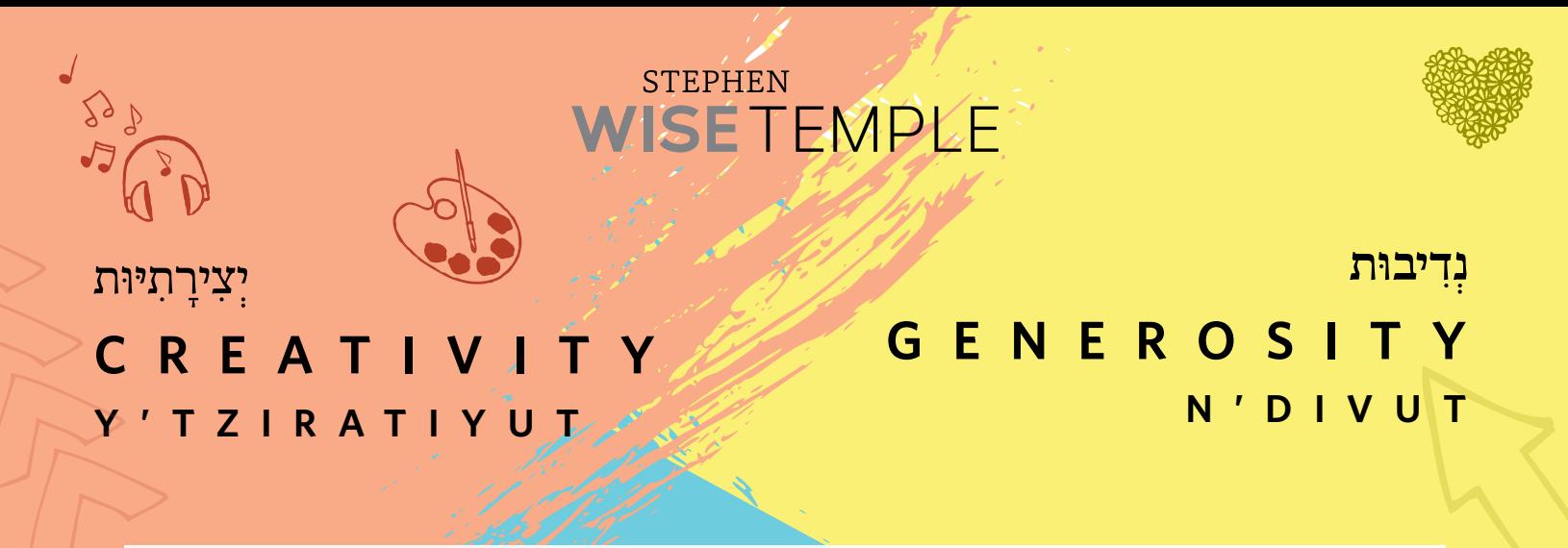
“One thing Rabbi Zeldin said years and years ago that stuck with me is that we have to promote Jewish education after the Bar or Bat Mitzvah,” says Ponder. “I’m a product of the Jewish youth movement. I was a leader of our temple youth group, our region and Northeastern Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY). I also went to Jewish summer camps and those experiences influenced me a lot. I’m at a stage in my life where I can give back and I want to give as much as I can to help youngsters learn more about the values, and culture of our people.”

To that end, Ponder and his wife, Helen, have hosted a number of Learning in Your Neighborhood events and this year (thanks to the suggestion of Rabbi Stern) invited members of Stephen Wise Temple for a Sukkot in Your Neighborhood. They loved it so much they want to make it an annual tradition. They have also supported efforts to send teenagers and young adults, including Wise School and Wise Religious School students, to Jewish summer camps to deepen their shared connection to Judaism and Israel.



STEPHEN WISE TEMPLE CLERGY ARE HERE TO SUPPORT & CELEBRATE WITH YOU

From left: Rabbi David Woznica, Cantor Emma Lutz, Rabbi Josh Knobel, Cantor Nathan Lam, Senior Rabbi Yoshi Zweiback, Rabbi Sari Laufer, and Rabbi Ron Stern



STEPHEN WISE TEMPLE AND SCHOOLS IS AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY that seeks to inspire its diverse constituency to engage ever more deeply and personally in ongoing, significant acts of loving kindness and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world); the mindful study of Torah and the pursuit of wisdom; and worship that inspires, uplifts, and connects us to God. Every aspect of Wise community life and work is informed by our unyielding commitment to *inclusivity*, *creativity*, and *generosity*.

כְּלַליּוֹת
INCLUSIVITY
K'LALIYUT

