

JUSTICE DAY!

Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. would often end his speeches in a thundering voice: "We will not rest," he would say and then go on to quote the Hebrew prophet Amos, "until justice falls down like water and righteousness as a mighty stream!" For Rev. King, this and other references he often made to the biblical prophets were more than mere rhetoric. He studied the prophets carefully. Their insistence on spreading God's message of justice, love and compassion; their disgust for the chasm between the haves and the have-nots, their desire to comfort the vulnerable and indigent; their courage to stand for righteousness when it was unpopular and dangerous; their willingness to condemn injustice, idolatry and abuse of power to the faces of kings-all helped MLK understand that his was a pathway with a clear religio-historical context.

In addition, Rev. King was steeped in the tradition that taught that Israel was a 'kingdom of priests' and described Moses as yearning for the time that all of the people he would be as prophets. MLK saw in the civil rights movement the potential to create a 'beloved community' where everybody involved would exemplify the shining side of religion and transform society through hope, inspiration, awe, forgiveness, reconciliation and unity.

No less an authority than Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who wrote the definitive book on the Hebrew prophets, claimed that Rev. King was a modern day heir to the Israelite prophetic calling. "Martin Luther King Jr. is a sign," Rabbi Heschel once said, "that God has not forsaken the United States of America."

Knowing all of this, I believe that we Jews have a special obligation to observe the day set aside to honor Rev. King in a way that helps prevent it from becoming like other American holidays, seemingly revered mainly as opportunities to have a day off from school and work and as advertising fodder for special sales at department stores and used car lots. We 'do justice' to Martin Luther King Jr. Day when we treat it as *yontiff*, a holy *yom tzedek* (justice day) during which the *mitzvot* include recommitting to the dream of bridging the gap between black and white; rich and poor, serving others, sharing resources with those who need our help, and joining together arm in arm with a rainbow of faces renewing our faith that 'we shall overcome.'

There are always plenty of ways to make this '*yom tzedek*' a 'day on instead of a day off' including attending the official St. Louis observance on Monday at the Old Courthouse Rotunda and Powell Symphony Hall. And we hope that you will join us as we once again come together with our longtime partners at Cote Brillante the preceding Wednesday night (more info, including directions are inside this MEMO). The program, including messages from Rabbi Talve and Reverend Gilesie as well as popular singer-songwriter Rick Recht performing with youth from both congregations, will be inspiring as usual. But I cannot overstate the importance of your merely showing up; helping increase the

number of Jews who will make the trip to an African-American church in North St. Louis. It will point to our commitment to dismantling our own racism, fear, apathy and privilege and demonstrate our determination that the voices of our prophets-including the voice of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.-will help bring about that day when justice will well up like water and righteousness like an unfailing stream.

B' Ahavah, (With Love),

Rabbi Randy