

## Martin Luther King Jr 2026

Source Sheet compiled by Jewish Service Alliance

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### ***Rabbi Joachim Prinz, 1963 March on Washington***

When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence.

A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder.

America must not become a nation of onlookers. America must not remain silent. Not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the Negro, not for the sake of the black community but for the sake of the image, the idea and the aspiration of America itself.

### ***Rabbi Sandra Lawson, King and the Power of Community***

As Ecclesiastes teaches: “Two are better than one, for they have greater benefit from their earnings. For should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe to someone who is alone and falls with no companion to assist!” (4:9-10). This wisdom reminds us that movements are built on collective strength. By standing together, honoring the diversity within our communities, and continuing the work of justice, we embody the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the enduring call of Jewish values to pursue a better world.

- Rabbi Prinz warns of the dangers of silence, while Rabbi Lawson highlights the power of community. How do these two teachings complement each other in guiding racial justice work today?
- When injustice happens, what difference does it make to speak out alone versus to speak out as part of a collective?
- What responsibilities do communities (Jewish or otherwise) have to ensure their members are not silent on issues of racial injustice?
- How might diverse voices help communities avoid the trap of silence?

### ***Reflection: Responsibility to Ourselves and Others***

Jewish tradition speaks to the ongoing tension between caring for ourselves and caring for others. “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?” asks *Pirkei Avot*. Leviticus reminds us to “love your neighbor as yourself,” and the concept of *arevut*—mutual responsibility—underscores our obligation to one another. Responsibility to ourselves means seeking to live freely, without the weight of heavy burdens that diminish our well-being or agency. This is not selfishness; it is the recognition that sustaining our own freedom, balance, and integrity allows us to contribute more fully to the flourishing of others. Responsibility to others, in turn, asks us to extend that same care—to help lift burdens, protect dignity, and share in one another’s struggles. These responsibilities are not opposites but partners, inviting us to discern how to integrate them. How do we protect our own wholeness while showing up for others with humility, generosity, and commitment?

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- Pirkei Avot asks: “*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?*” How does this tension between caring for ourselves and caring for others show up in racial justice work?
- Leviticus teaches, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” How does this teaching expand the call not to remain silent, but to act in ways that uphold the dignity of others while protecting our own?
- What commitments do you want to make to speak up in moments of injustice? How do you plan to engage in racial justice work in your community?

<b>FREDERICK DOUGLASS</b> <i>19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist, activist, politician, and author</i>	<b>RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL</b> <i>20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish theologian and Civil Rights activist</i>
I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I <b>prayed with my legs.</b>	For many of us the march from Selma to Montgomery was about protest and prayer. Legs are not lips and walking is not kneeling. And yet our legs uttered songs. Even without words, our march was worship. <b>I felt my legs were praying.</b>

<b>ERIKA DAVIS</b> <i>a Jew of Color, educator, and writer who writes about the intersections of race, sexual orientation, and religion</i>
<p>“[Approaching] Martin Luther King Day we have an obligation to live up to the words of Frederick Douglass. Each year we congratulate our forefathers for the work they did during the Civil Rights Movement. We sift out the grittiness of King’s fight for Black freedom for his more palatable motifs of non-violence. We listen to rabbis give sermons, we attend dinners intended to inspire us into action and instead of getting things done, we tuck away the black and white photos of King and Heschel and go on with our lives... When Heschel marched with King almost 60 years ago he said he prayed with his feet. Did Heschel know that he was paraphrasing Douglass? Was he using the words of a freed slave turned abolitionist to drive home his point about his time with King? I’m not sure. But in these 60 years while much has changed in regards to racial equality, we still do not live in a world that is racially equal. The institutionalized and systematic racism in our country exists because we allow it to with our complacency and our willingness to look the other way...”</p>

- Which of the two opening quotes, from Douglass and Heschel, speaks more to you? Why?
- In what ways can you pray with your feet?
- How might you bring these texts to life with your actions?