Opening Remarks on our 20th Anniversary

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr/ R. Abraham Joshua Heschel Interfaith Service[[1]](#endnote-1)

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Fellow clergy, elected officials, dignitaries, friends, and neighbors, good evening, a Salaam Aleichem, Shabbat Shalom, and welcome to our 20th Interfaith Service honoring the memories and partnership of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Tonight begins the first weekend of Black History Month, so it is appropriate that we honor the memory of Rev. King and his dream of seeing individuals for the content of their character rather than their race, ethnicity, or creed. Today we know less about Rabbi Heschel, though he was one of the foremost theologians of his time. He not only marched with Rev. King and fought for civil rights. Many of Rev King’s followers carried Heschel’s book, *The Prophets*, in their pockets. They were inspired by his understanding of the prophetic message: that God is here in our immediate struggle to help those who are voiceless have a voice; that, even in the face of fear and destruction, we can make a positive difference; and that God’s infinite empathy demands that we try to make that difference. Rev. King was inspired by Rabbi Heschel’s words and partnered with him to free persecuted Jews from the Former Soviet Union and protest the war in Vietnam.

These two men and their partnership were significant because they were concerned for all people’s rights. Rev. King was not only concerned about civil rights for African Americans. Rabbi Heschel was not only concerned for his fellow Jews. That is their legacy to us: to see others with God’s empathy and thus be moved to action on their behalf, whether for a young man judged by the color of his skin when he walks down the street, a student bullied in school for her faith, an immigrant seeking to build a better life on our shores, or a refugee half a world away.

The dreams of these two great men have become part of our dream. I like to think that if Rev. King and Rabbi Heschel were looking down upon us tonight, they would be encouraged to see that women and men of all different colors, faiths, ethnicities, gender identities, and even political parties have gathered to reaffirm their dreams of equality, justice, and acts compassion on behalf of the other.

My friends, we gather tonight, recognizing our world is broken. Our diverse and idealistic County is broken. We gather tonight, seeking the strength and comfort that comes from affirming the humanity of our neighbors, whether they live next door or half a world away. We gather tonight seeking a renewed hope that we can make a difference, buoyed by faith and the fact that when we stand together, when we stand with and for each other, as Rev. King, Rabbi Heschel, and countless others did, we can help bend the curve of history a little bit more towards justice, as Rev. King put it. “No religion is an island,” Rabbi Heschel wrote, “We are all connected… God is hiding in the world. Our task is to let the divine emerge from our deeds.” May we help make it so.

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