



At home with the family.

King provided inspiration for Jews

by Rabbi Benjamin A. Kamin
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Martin Luther King, Jr. would have been 54 years old on January 15. Since his death at the age of 39, Dr. King's dreams have evaporated and most Americans have turned inward.

It is getting harder and harder to remember how King ignited us, changed us, and returned American Jews to their prophetic tradition. But he did.

The Jews, a people with generally decentralized patterns, responded to King as to no other American in the country's history. In effect, he became the living moral flagship for the liberal Jewish community in the 1960s. The Jews had applauded Harry Truman's courageous endorsement of Israel in 1948 and gathered around Bobby Kennedy in the 1960s, but had never involved themselves emotionally and physi-

cally as was the case with Dr. King. With uncharacteristic exuberance, and real bravery, Jews trusted and worked for Martin Luther King.

Albert Vorspan, vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and director of its Commission on Social Action, was an associate of King in the civil rights movement. He recalls that the Black-Jewish alliance was at the heart of the movement. "He had an extraordinary impact on us," Vorspan recalls. "Like no other non-Jewish partner, American Jews gave to Dr. King a blank check of commitment."

A remarkable Black-Jewish partnership was galvanized by Dr. King. In the great struggle to de-segregate the South, rabbis were hosed and beaten and jailed alongside King and the many other freedom fighters of all backgrounds who joined the battle against the tyranny of racism.

Jewish representation was disproportionately high in the dangerous Mississippi summer of 1964 and in every anti-discrimination effort of

those times. The notorious and cold-blooded executions in Philadelphia, Miss., of three young civil rights workers in 1964 took the lives of two Jews and one Black. At the great March on Washington in 1963 and in St. Augustine and Birmingham and Selma and Montgomery and Memphis, Jewish involvement in the lifeline of Martin Luther King's campaign for human dignity was signal. Through it all, it was the vision and awesome dynamism of Dr. King himself that moved Jews and others beyond themselves.

The admiration Jews felt for Dr. King, and the strong historical affinity of the Jews to the Black experience, was by no means one-sided. When he spoke at the convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Chicago in 1963, King related his dream to the proven ability of Jews to transcend discouragement and despair. In his later writings, the Black preacher wrote: "The lesson of Jewish mass involvement in social and political action and education is worthy of emulation." King encouraged his own

brothers and sisters to become active politically, as Jews had done, in order to assure a more equal role in society.

In 1983, however, it can be fairly asked what has become of Dr. King's historic struggle. Does the dream he articulated and shared with so many of so many differing backgrounds speak to us still? Certainly, the times are different, the issues blurred by overriding economic obsessions. But one is saddened by those whose recollections of those urgent and heady days have diminished into nostalgia. Not enough youngsters, black or white, know much about Martin Luther King today, and America in general has fallen into a resigned non-concern.

That Martin Luther King's dream of full equality in a free society for all Americans remains a vision too far from realization is our failure, not his. But because we Jews shared so much of what was his, we remember him now, on his birthday, with special warmth and identification and love.

A role model for public service

by Lanita Duke

Grassroot News, N.W.—Among Portland Afro-American political leaders Charles Jordan stands alone as a man who stood up for his convictions and paid a price, much like King who stood up and was shot down. "When I think about King I

am reminded of what he stood for. This was the courage, sacrifice and the suffering of struggling people. He spoke not only for black people but disenfranchised people everywhere. He left the world with principles and if these principles were followed today it would be a much better world. He did make a difference and is making a difference today."

Considering Dr. King meant so much to so many people, why did the system target King for destruction? "Because Dr. King was making a difference and anytime you stand up for a belief you set yourself apart from the crowd," Jordan said. If King had lived through the 1980s there is no telling what this world would be like. Dr. King stepped outside of the boundaries the system established for minorities. When that happens the system knows how to put you in your place. With his death the system is saying you can only go so far. You still will not achieve full freedom.

"It is unfortunate but sometimes the system works through sick minds. Dr. King taught that you do not use violence and oppression to deal with violence and oppression. This tactic was working on the consciousness of the world. He would not have been as powerful as he was if there were not television. He brought the plight of the black man in the South to every home in America. The system worked through sick minds to quiet the man, Dr. King. They could not afford to allow a man like that to move at the rate he was moving. Dr. King was making a difference."

Today, we have the most complex communication system in the world. Where is the consciousness of the world? "The consciousness of the world is wrapped up in economic problems. Now, the almighty dollar is number one. People are in a survival mode. People do not mind giving when things are going well; but now life is tougher and they are not so charitable. It's every man for himself and the moral consciousness of the world has fallen asleep."

Will we ever have another like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?

"There are moral leaders out there.

Throughout history, anytime God's people are facing a crisis, he sends them a Moses. His name may not be Moses but Martin Luther King or one of your readers. I do not think we have reached that point where it is timely for the Lord to send one. But, I know one will arise and stir the moral consciousness of the world."

What does Martin Luther King mean to Charles Jordan? "A role model. This man was arrested and brutalized but he still kept on making a difference. He was one of the finest role models I've ever had."



King children see picture of their father who took to hospital bed for needed rest.

THE POOR

"The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and Negro—live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to take means which have been called for, and which are at hand, to lift the load of poverty."

—1968

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