

## Remarks Shared on MLKing Jr Day 2010 At Impacting Your World Christian Center

Good People,

It is an honor to share this day of memorial and inspiration, of what was and what can be, with all of you. On this day we join people all over the world reminding ourselves of what matters most, reconnecting our souls with our most important priorities. And therefore it is only fitting that we, members of Beth El, return to this place to reconnect with our roots, here in the building where, for nearly 40 years, we studied and worshipped and found inspiration through prayer and reflection. The very thought that this process continues here under the guidance of Pastor Bernard and his Ministry brings me great joy and satisfaction. And I believe in my heart that Gd above rejoices knowing that His word is still shared here each and every day. You who pray here each week - you are Gd's eyes and hands and head and heart in the world, and I believe that Gd looks down at you and your ministry and says, "Thank you, I am proud of the work that you do". His light and His love radiate throughout our community because of Impacting Your World and its sacred mission, and we are proud to stand with you tonight.

In 1964, The Reverend Dr. King was given an honorary doctorate by my alma mater, the Jewish Theological Seminary -JTS. He was sponsored on that day by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a professor at JTS; the man who later walked across the Edmund Pettis Bridge arm in arm with Dr. King in Selma, Alabama. Selma is a town I know well, as our children were both born in Montgomery, Alabama, just a "short march" - 54 miles, away. We took our children to that bridge and told them the story of what went on there years ago.



When Rabbi Heschel returned from his march with Dr. King, he spoke with the rabbinical school students in his classes about what he saw, about what he felt needed to be done. Guided by his words, many of them put down their Bibles, laid aside the Talmud books open before them, put away the philosophy tomes and got on busses headed down to Alabama and Mississippi. It is not often recalled, but JTS students risked life and limb, taking off from school to be Freedom Riders, registering African Americans to vote in the mid-1960's to make sure that everyone had equal representation. They suffered at the hands of haters, verbal, and sometimes physical abuse. Dr. King never forgot that support, of Heschel and of the students of JTS, and that is why he accepted an invitation to speak at our Rabbinical Convention. Rabbi Arnowitz and I are both members of the Rabbinical Assembly, the central organization, the union if you will, of Conservative Rabbis worldwide. Dr. King was invited to address the organization and he accepted. In a March 25, 1968 speech to the Rabbinical Assembly, Dr. King, understanding the needs of the Jewish community, knowing what was weighing heavy on their hearts at the time, spoke about something of deep significance to the Rabbis, the Land of Israel. And remember, this was March of '68, less than a year after the Six Day War. He said: "Peace for Israel means security, and we must stand with all our might to protect its right to exist, its territorial integrity. I see Israel as one of the great

outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security and that security must be a reality." Less than two weeks later, on April 4th, Dr. King was murdered while organizing support for striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee.

And I bring this to your attention, not to make a political point but rather to emphasize Dr. King's ability to peer into the hearts of others and to understand them on the deepest level. He was able to cross that divide and get to the heart of the matter, to bond with others on a level far beneath the surface. That was the kind of bond he had with Rabbi Heschel and that is why Coretta Scott King asked Rabbi Heschel to give a eulogy at Dr. King's funeral - they had that kind of understanding, that kind of bond between them.

Dr. King was uniquely able to reach across the false barriers and borders that hatred and bigotry build, and while we may not be able to hurdle them all, with a change in mindset we can begin to plot a new course around them. We can build the kind of bonds that are the legacy of Dr. King. We can get to know each other, to understand one another at a deeper, more meaningful level. We can transcend the superficial, the simple stereo-types that so often pass for dialogue and learn to appreciate the inner workings of each other's hearts; the needs, wants and desires that weigh heavy on our conscience. We too must work to understand the causes and issues that remain foremost in each other's minds.

You know, too often these days we hear people preaching "Tolerance"... "teach tolerance"... "learn to tolerate" one another. Well, I think the time has come to move beyond tolerance to respect, from acceptance to appreciation, from just getting along to working together for the greater good of us all. That is how we build meaningful relationships. That's what it means to live with and grow together in the shadow of Dr. King's towering legacy. It is my hope and prayer that this event is just one more building block in that process, one more stepping stone on the road to a more unified community. We come from diversified backgrounds but we are indeed united in our dream of a better world for our children - A world that I know - that Pastor Barnard knows, that Dr. King knew - that Gd knows - WE can build together. May Gd bless us all in this sacred endeavor and may Dr. King's memory be an enduring inspiration for generations to come.

For a short (9 minute) video about Heschel's Social Activism, click here:  
[www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/january-18-2008/abraham-joshua-heschel/1789/](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/january-18-2008/abraham-joshua-heschel/1789/)