

Day Of Freedom: Demanding Freedom In The Footsteps Of MLK

Source Sheet

How might we connect between MLK day and the hostage situation in Gaza?

Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr

“Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (April 16, 1963)

Background:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an American reverend and leader of the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. In April 1963, Dr King organized marches and sit-ins protesting segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr King was arrested for these protests, and composed a letter from jail demanding change. This is an excerpt from that letter:

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Discussion Questions:

- Why does freedom need to be demanded?
- How can we demand freedom for the hostages?



Martin Luther King Jr.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

The Insecurity of Freedom (1966)

Background:

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was a leading rabbi, philosopher, and social rights activist in the United States during the 20th century. The compilation 'The Insecurity of Freedom' is a collection of essays on Human Existence. Here is an excerpt from that compilation:

"The glory of a free society lies not only in the consciousness of my right to be free, and my capacity to be free, but also in the realization of my fellow man's right to be free, and his capacity to be free. The issue we face is how to save man's belief in his capacity to be free."

Discussion Questions:

- Share your impressions of Heschel's words.
- How does Heschel define freedom in this excerpt?
- How can Heschel's words inform our duty toward freeing the hostages?

Rabbi Esther Hugenholtz

Martin Luther King Day Speech (January 23, 2020)

Background:

"Dr. King's great hope and deep knowing as a man of faith steeped in our shared Scriptures, is that he knew hearts of stone could be turned to hearts of flesh. His dream was not for lack of confrontation but because of it; it was a vision built on speaking truth to power. Human beings must all speak truth to our own power... Our words and our works matter. Our love and solidarity matters. Our curiosity about each other and our realization of how little we may know and how much we can grow, matters. As a rabbi, I know that all of us here are being called – uniquely and differently, but by the same Voice. In the words of our Sages: "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it (Pirke Avot 2:21)."

Discussion Questions:

- How do you speak your truth to power?
- There are two Jewish references in Rabbi Hugenholtz's speech - one to Pharaoh and the Exodus from Egypt and one to Pirkei Avot (The Ethics of our Fathers). How does your Jewish life embody these two references as it relates to the value of Freedom?