



REMEMBERING SELMA

Racial Justice Then and Now

A RESOURCE GUIDE



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On March 7, 1965, civil rights leaders led 600 marchers towards Montgomery, AL in pursuit of voting rights, but were stopped after just six blocks. The marchers were brutally attacked by police as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Images of the attack were televised across the country and the world, horrifying citizens and rousing support for voting rights throughout the nation. The day became known as “Bloody Sunday” and this year, 2015, marks the 50th Anniversary.

Included in this packet are two prayers, each written by a rabbi in the St. Louis area who has been active in the aftermath of Michael Brown’s death. We encourage you to choose whichever is right for your congregation and incorporate it into your Shabbat service. With these prayers, we honor our Jewish teachings and tradition, the still-strong memories of those who marched in Selma and the voices of today’s ongoing struggles for civil rights.

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A PRAYER FOR OUR COMMUNITY

WRITTEN BY RABBI ANDREA GOLDSTEIN, CONGREGATION SHAARE EMETH, ST. LOUIS, MO

Source of All Being, Creator of All Life, may Your goodness find its way into the hearts of all Your children.

May those who wield power do so with a balance of wisdom, justice and compassion. May those who feel powerless remember their intrinsic worth, and also act with a balance of wisdom, integrity and compassion.

May we all feel called to action based on the injustices of racism, and see ourselves not as enemies of one another, not in struggle with one another, but as human beings, created in the image of God, connected to one another's well-being.

May all of us come to acknowledge the racism that is pervasive in our region and our nation.

May we commit to sitting down with one another in honest dialogue, opening our hearts in compassion to one another, bearing witness to the pain and fear of one another, even if ... and especially if ... "the other" looks and seems so different from ourselves.

May we commit to joining together in acts of justice that will bring about equality in education, economic opportunities, law enforcement and judicial proceedings.

May each of us come to understand that, ultimately, "my" experience of freedom, justice and peace is inextricably linked to the freedom, justice and peace of every other person in our county and city, our country and our world. May we open our eyes to the invisible lines of connection that unite us, and with clarity of vision, continue to work for a world where every person's life is valued, cherished and loved.

Amen.

A JEWISH LITANY FROM THE VOICES OF FERGUSON

WRITTEN BY RABBI SUSAN TALVE, CENTRAL REFORM CONGREGATION, ST. LOUIS, MO

"To act in the spirit of religion is to unite what lies apart, to remember that humanity as a whole is God's beloved child. Racism is worse than idolatry. Few of us seem to realize how insidious, how radical, how universal and evil, racism is. Few of us realize that racism is the gravest threat to humankind." - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Rasheen calls out. "No justice, no peace"

We are called to come out of our homes and hidden places and cross the artificial divides of age and gender and class and race and grow communities of plenty and radical hospitality that will shelter and feed and nourish and satisfy and welcome the citizen and the stranger and all who are gathered to march for justice.

"I am a human being." Brittany calls from the street into the line of police with helmets and clubs.

We hear the mothers who have the "talk" with their black and brown sons, "keep your head down, don't run, lose the attitude." We witness the rage of the activists who are tired of the profiling and the violent targeting and typing of black and brown youth.

"We must love and support each other." Alexis leads with her chant.

We become family and this becomes personal and we lift up their voices because they are us, they are our future. And we pray that the present can redeem the sins of the past. Like the Israelites thunderous marching through the sea shook the knife out of Abrahams hand, the marches and protests to demand justice and accountability for the death of Michael Brown and countless other young black men will change the relationships of our youth to the legal system.

"Black and Brown lives matter, too." Netta tweets again and again.

Without the *Erev Rav*, (the beautiful mixed multitude,) all of us together making sure that every voice is heard, marching and working for justice, this moment will never become the movement for change we are longing for. We join the multitudes of the young black, brown and white, standing firm in their protests deep into the night. We support their voices as they teach us all pointing to themselves,

"Tell me what democracy looks like, this is what democracy looks like." K.B., with kippah and tzitzit, leads us with his drum song that has become the heartbeat of the movement keeping us

focused on non-violent civil disobedience.

The bandage has been torn from the wound uncovering the deep festering sore but we will not cover it up again until it is healed with love and mercy and forgiveness and truth.

Truth about the modern day slavery of jobs that do not pay a living wage in industries making huge profits.

Truth about the internal and external prejudices that lead to the inequitable distribution of resources for people who are black and brown.

Truth about an in-justice system that targets the poor to pad local budgets and thrives on the school to prison pipeline that feeds a prison system built on mass incarceration.

Truth about the suffering of every family when another loved one whose crime was being black is provoked and profiled and often killed. Every 28 hours a person of color is shot by police.

"Thank you for coming, If I was Michael Brown, you would be here for me." Devon said on a night when the clergy showed up and the police stood down.

"Yes, but I am here because I don't want you to die. No more blood in our streets."

On the 50th Anniversary of Bloody Sunday on the *Shabbat of Ki Tisa* we are called to resist the idolatry of the golden calf, when we are more upset about the destruction of property than the loss of life. We are challenged to embrace the *mishkan*, a sanctuary where all are valued and all are welcome. A *mishkan* that does not allow for the divisions that demonize the other side.

A *mishkan* that says no to a world of haves and have nots, no to a world where the privilege of some caused pain for others, and no to the profiling and prejudice that leads to all forms of violence.

A *mishkan* that says yes to a world where each and everyone one of is valued and knows that we have infinite worth.

A *mishkan* that says yes to a world where young and old listen to each other and yes to a world where justice finally does lead to peace.

In every generation we must leave that narrow place of slavery and protest for the common good and march through the sea toward freedom remembering that the tradition tells us that what shook the knife out of Abrahams hand, what saved his son, was the tremendous tumult we caused, all of us marching together, singing, praying, even shouting and making sure that with every step we were closer to the promised land.