INTRODUCTION
This weekend, we gather to honor the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who fought tirelessly for racial justice and led thousands of others in struggle. Their movement won civil rights legislation that forever shifted the balance of power in America.

But over fifty years after the March from Selma to Montgomery and the passage of the Voting Rights Act, voter suppression is still alive and well. Policy brutality still threatens the lives of Black people, as well as other people of color, across the United States. The racial wealth gap remains vast and continues to grow.

How can Jews be allies in the fight for racial equality? What lessons can we learn from Jewish involvement in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement? How can we act today, in 2020?

Throughout MLK Weekend, Repair the World is offering service and learning opportunities to support local organizations across Detroit. This guide serves as a starting point, framing the service we will do and asking us to reflect on the role of Jews in the struggle for racial justice. Before we begin the work of tikkun olam, we must sit down, together, and reckon we these questions.

As we begin this discussion, we invite you to read the following guidelines for respectful conversations:

Brief Guidelines for Respectful Conversations
Please feel free to add to these norms at your table
- Speak up, step back. Create space for everyone to share and make sure to actively listen.
- Assume best intentions; always seek to understand.
- Use "I" statements so as to avoid over-generalizing.

"Martin Luther King is a voice, a vision and a way. I call upon every Jew to harken to his voice, to share his vision, to follow in his way. The whole future of America will depend upon the impact and influence of Dr. King."

– Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

APPETIZER: JEWS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

FRAMING
What do you know about Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement? Spend a moment at your table surfacing any background knowledge or stories people may have. When you have finished, proceed to the next page, which offers snapshots of Jewish participation in the 1960s struggle for civil rights. We encourage you to continue to investigate this fascinating and complicated time in our history, and are more than happy to provide book or article recommendations.
ENTREE: VOICES ON JEWISH ALLYSHIP

FRAMING
What does it mean to be an ally? How should it be practiced between Jews and other communities?

Jews and non-Jews have wrestled with these questions throughout history. In our current moment -- where the Jewish and African American communities face violence from neo-Nazis and white nationalists -- they are especially pertinent. What will be our response to racism and antisemitism in this new year?

The following sources offer a range of perspectives, both historical and contemporary, on the question of allyship. Listen closely to these voices and consider the connections between them.

INSTRUCTIONS
Find a chevruta (study partner) and discuss the texts below. We encourage you to refer to the guiding questions, but do not feel limited to discussing only them. When you are ready, come back together and share any takeaways as a larger group.

WHAT IS A CHEVRUTA?
The word for study partner is chevruta, coming from the root work chaver - friend. When we learn in partnership, we are able to see a perspective we otherwise would not have considered. Additionally, learning about social issues can be fraught with difficult topics that spark emotional responses. Learning with a supportive partner can help us work through these issues together. Allow space for each partner to share a response to the guiding questions.
SOURCE ONE: Telegram to President Kennedy, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Born in Poland in 1907, Rabbi Heschel was a leading Jewish theologian of the 20th century and was known for his prominent activism in the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War Movements. He met King at the 1963 National Conference of Christians and Jews. Note: The term "Negro Problem" was used to refer to the struggle of Black people to be treated equally in America after emancipation from slavery. It is now considered to be outdated. Also note that telegrams often omitted words to save space.


I look forward to privilege of being present at meeting tomorrow at 4 PM. Likelihood exists that Negro problem will be like the weather. Everybody talks about it but nobody does anything about it. Please demand of religious leaders personal involvement not just solemn declaration.

We forfeit the right to worship God as long as we continue to humiliate Negroes. Church, Synagogue have failed. They must repent. Ask of religious leaders to call for national repentance and personal sacrifice. Let religious leaders donate one month's salary toward fund for Negro housing and education. I propose that you Mr. President declare state of moral emergency. A Marshall plan for aid to Negroes is becoming a necessity. The hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity.

Discussion Questions
1. Which parts of Heschel’s telegram stand out to you?
2. What does it look like for a nation, religious community, or other collective to do teshuvah (repentance) for the sins of racism — past and present?
SOURCE TWO: Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a minister and civil rights activist born in Atlanta, Georgia who helped lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Selma to Montgomery marches, and March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

This address was given in 1958. The previous year, Black civil rights leaders invited AJC's president, Israel Goldstein, to the Southern Negro Leaders Conference to show his support after four Black churches were bombed in Montgomery, Alabama.

There are Hitlers loose in America today, both in high and low places. As the tensions and bewilderment of economic problems become more severe, history's scapegoats, the Jews, will be joined by new scapegoats, the Negroes. The Hitlers will seek to divert people's minds and turn their frustrations and anger to the helpless, to the outnumbered. Then whether the Negro and Jew shall live in peace will depend upon how firmly they resist, how effectively they reach the minds of the decent Americans to halt this deadly diversion... Our common fight is against these deadly enemies of democracy...

Specifically to you I ask that you give an example to liberals by speaking out boldly. Today we are finding, too often, a quasi liberalism which is committed to the principle of looking sympathetically at all sides. It is a liberalism so objectively analytical that it fails to become subjectively committed. It is a liberalism which has developed a high blood pressure of words and an anemia of deeds. You can, with your community organization experience, assist in the development of platforms from which white moderates, liberals and others may speak and act toward effective ends... This is no time for apathy nor complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

Discussion Questions
1. How does King connect the struggles of the Jewish and African American communities? What does he believe should be the specific role of Jews in the fight for racial justice?
2. What is King’s critique of “quasi liberalism?” Why is this attitude insufficient, in his view?
3. How would you connect King's assessment of America to today?
Abraham Ibn Ezra was a Jewish philosopher known for his commentary and translation of Judeo–Arabic works into Hebrew in the 12th century. Ibn Ezra's analyses of biblical texts have become foundational to modern Jewish thought.

The Book of Exodus is the second book of the Bible. It details the Israelites' escape from enslavement by an oppressive Egyptian pharaoh.


You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Exodus 22:

This is because whoever sees a person oppressing an orphan or a widow and does not help the orphan and the widow, they too are considered as an oppressor... If a person oppresses and there is no helper, the punishment comes to everyone.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you connect Rabbi Ezra’s commentary to our moment in history? Are there ways in which you -- or communities you call home -- have remained silent despite witnessing oppression? How can we change?
2. What do you make of G-d's commandment? What sticks out to you?


**SOURCE FOUR: One People Means Including Me, and All People of Color, Too, Frances Abebreseh**

Frances Abebreseh is a Black Jew who lives in London and is a part of the city's Orthodox community. In 2012, Haaretz published her account of the challenges she has faced as a Jewish person of color in the UK. When this was written, Abebreseh was the Senior Press Officer at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. She now works for Netflix UK & Ireland.

They say the eyes are the window to the soul; but the eyes that often greet me are filled with fear, discomfort, suspicion and – sometimes – contempt. Those eyes say: Why should you, foreigner, enter this sacred space? They glare with the message: No trespassing, ‘Jews only’. It starts from the minute I step into any shul other than my regular, manifesting itself firstly by the gruff reception I experience at the hands of security, then to the dozens of eyes that mark me, following my every move. [...] 

It is most discomforting to know that your very presence makes people uneasy. You can almost see the cogs turning in their heads, as they try and fail to set their features into something benign; except their eyes betray them and their handshake fails them, and their conscience, conflicted, berates them. [...] 

My hope is... that we all remember to be kind to the stranger – and especially in sacred spaces, remembering that we too were once strangers in a foreign land.

**Discussion Questions**

1. *What is your reaction to hearing about Abebreseh's experience? Have you heard stories like this before?*
2. *What can we do to make our sacred spaces welcoming to Jews of all races? How can making the Jewish community more inclusive contribute to the broader fight against racism and antisemitism?*
[At today's march] we have Jews from the right and the left, with very different ideas on the sources and causes of antisemitism. We have Jews of color, who are often dismayed that the discussion of race around antisemitic attacks too often devolves into racism, traumatizing us repeatedly as we're simply standing with our fellow Jews, regardless of race or ethnicity.

But we are all here are here because antisemitism is an evil that does not differentiate between Reform or Conservative, between left or right, or between black or white. And to have any chance of beating it, we must do it together, in solidarity with both our full, diverse Jewish community with whom we share a faith and a peoplehood AND the non-Jewish communities with whom we share our neighborhoods, our streets, and our subways. That is the solidarity that will truly keep us safe. [...]

At the same time, if we are asking for solidarity from the broader community, we must also be in solidarity with the issues that impact other communities as well. And since we as the Jewish community are black, white, and indigenous; able-bodied and differently abled; rich, poor and middle class; gay, straight and trans, all those other issues affect us too. There is no issue that doesn't somehow impact some community of our Jewish family because our families are nearly as diverse as America itself.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think MaNishtana calls for solidarity outside the Jewish community, as well as within it? How does this resonate with you, given what you know about allyship in the 1960s?

2. MaNishtana mentions the idea of keeping the Jewish community safe. What should this safety look like? How can this be achieved with “No Hate, No Fear?”
Framing
While learning is important, so too is action. In Detroit alone, there are a number of organizations that are dedicated to racial and economic justice issues — from water affordability to voting rights to the ability to live freely without violent policing.

Detroit Jews for Justice
ACLU of Michigan
Michigan Poor People’s Campaign
Black Youth Project 100
Michigan League of Conservation Voters

Email detroitteam@werepair.org if you are interested in getting involved with any of these organizations!

Dessert: From Study to Action

"Is study greater or is action greater?
Rabbi Tarfon answered and said: Action is greater.
Rabbi Akiva answered and said: Study is greater.
Everyone answered and said: Study is greater, but not as an independent value; rather, it is greater as study leads to action." (Talmud Bavli Kiddushin 40b)

Final Reflection
Which questions are still lingering for you? If your Shabbat practice permits, write them on a sticky note and give it to your table lead (or send them to us via email). In the next week, we will be following up with further resources/articles that begin to address these questions and spark further discussion.

Lastly, we encourage you to find at least one person whom you spoke with tonight and exchange contact information. This can be your chavruta from earlier, or someone else with whom you want to stay in touch. Our goal is to keep these conversations going throughout the year!