

FAITH AND ACTIVISM BEHIND BARS: A RABBI AND REVEREND ON THE LEGACY OF MLK

RESOURCES FOR MLK DAY

Source 1: Excerpt of MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech, August 28, 1963

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, when will you be satisfied? We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: for whites only.

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.



Source 2: Leviticus 19:1-2

(1) And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
 (2) Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, You shall be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.

ויקרא י"ט:א-ב'

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
 (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־עֵדֶת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Source 3: Leviticus 19:9-18

(9) When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not fully reap the corner of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. (10) And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you collect the [fallen] individual grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the Lord, your God. (11) You shall not steal. You shall not deny falsely. You shall not lie, one man to his fellow. (12) You shall not swear falsely by My Name, thereby profaning the Name of your God. I am the Lord. (13) You shall not oppress your fellow. You shall not rob. The hired worker's wage shall not remain with you overnight until morning. (14) You shall not curse a deaf person. You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person, and you shall fear your God. I am the Lord.

ויקרא י"ט:ט'-י"ח

(ט) וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת־קִצְרֵי אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ לִקְצֹר וּלְקַט קִצְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט: (י) וְכִרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵּל וּפְרֹט כְּרַמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וּלְגֵר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: (יא) לֹא תִגְנְבוּ וְלֹא־תִכְחָשׁוּ וְלֹא־תִשְׁקְרוּ אִישׁ בְּעַמִּיתוֹ: (יב) וְלֹא־תִשְׁבְּעוּ בִשְׁמִי לִשְׁקֹר וְחָלַלְתָּ אֶת־שֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: (יג) לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂק אֶת־רֵעֶךָ וְלֹא תִגְזֹל לֹא־תִלְוֶן פְּעֻלַּת שְׂכִיר אֶתְךָ עַד־בֹּקֶר: (יד) לֹא־תִקְלַל חֵרֶשׁ וּלְפָנֶי עוֹר לֹא תִתֵּן מִכְשָׁל וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: (טו) לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂוּ עֹל בְּמִשְׁפָּט לֹא־תִשָּׂא פְּנֵי־דָל וְלֹא תִהְדָּר פְּנֵי גָדוֹל בְּצַדֵּק תִּשְׁפֹּט עַמִּיתְךָ: (טז) לֹא־תִלְךָ רֶכֶל בְּעַמִּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דָּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה: (יז) לֹא־תִשְׁנֵא אֶת־אֲחִיךָ בַלְבָבְךָ הוֹכַח תוֹכִיחַ אֶת־עַמִּיתְךָ וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חֶטָּא: (יח) לֹא־תִקֵּם וְלֹא־תִטַּר אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ וְאֶהְבֵּת לְרֵעֶךָ כַּמִּוֶּךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Source 3: Leviticus 19:9-18 cont.

(15) You shall commit no injustice in judgment; you shall not favor a poor person or respect a great man; you shall judge your fellow with righteousness. (16) You shall not go around as a gossipmonger amidst your people. You shall not stand by [the shedding of] your fellow's blood. I am the Lord. (17) You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, but you shall not bear a sin on his account. (18) You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Source 4: Jeremiah 22:13

(13) Ha! he who builds his house with unfairness
And his upper chambers with injustice,
Who makes his fellow man work without pay
And does not give him his wages,

ויקרא י"ט:ט'-י"ח

ירמיהו כ"ב:י"ג

(יג) הַנִּי בִּנְהָ בַיְתוֹ בְּלֹא-צֶדֶק
וְעַלְיוֹתָיו בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט
בְּרַעְהוּ וְעַבְדָּ חָנָם
וּפְעָלוֹ לֹא יִתְּנֶלֶוּ:

Source 5: Excerpt from a statement issued on April 12, 1963 by six Bishops, a Rabbi and a Baptist minister in Birmingham, Alabama.

"We the undersigned clergymen are among those who in January issued 'An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense' in dealing with racial problems in Alabama. In Birmingham, recent public events have given indication that we all have opportunity for a new constructive and realistic approach to racial problems. However, we are now confronted by a series of demonstrations by some of our Negro citizens, directed and led in part by outsiders. We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely. We further strongly urge our own Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations, and to unite locally in working peacefully for a better Birmingham. When rights are consistently denied, a cause should be pressed in the courts and negotiations among local leaders, and not in the streets."

Source 6: Excerpt from MLK's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", April 16, 1963

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities 'unwise and untimely'... I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well timed" according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation... Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection... So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound... I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom.

Source 7: Photograph by Bill Hudson, 1963



Source 8: New Kids in the Neighborhood by Norman Rockwell, 1967



Guiding Questions for the Texts:

- How does Dr. King draw upon the Bible's vision of a just society in his "I Have a Dream" speech?
- To the clergy who urged King to have patience and practice "Law and Order and Common Sense," what is Dr. King's response in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"?

Guide to Analyzing the Images:

A good way to use images in the classroom is to ask students to look closely and observe the images and then reflect on what they see.

- Ask students to describe what they see in each photo. What details can they notice about the setting?
- Ask students to think about the experiences of the people in the images. What might it feel like to be confronted by the police and their dogs during a protest? How might it feel to be the first Black family in a town?

You may wish to also ask students to make a Venn Diagram that compares and contrasts Bill Hudson's photograph and Norman Rockwell's painting.