

# **SPEECH**

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My close friendship with the Jewish people and with Israel began some 30 years ago when I was a freshman at Morehouse College in Atlanta. I went there to pattern my life after the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who attended Morehouse a generation earlier.

While at school I met the late Coretta Scott King who took me under her wing and adopted me as her own. Meeting her changed my life and it set me out on a path of support for Israel that continues to this very moment. Whenever she organized an event at the King Center, whether to honor Dr. King or to promote civil rights, she insisted -- always insisted that there be Jewish representation at any program. She shared with me that the Jews were a friend to Martin and the civil rights movement, and that she would never ever forget that. Relationships matter.

And so my journey of friendship began. I met rabbis and Jewish activists at the King Center in Atlanta. The journey continued when I moved to Los Angeles, California. There I worked with Black Jewish Clergy Alliance and with Temple Israel of Hollywood and my dear friend and brother, Rabbi John Rosove. Our Jewish friends stood with us during the 1992 Los Angeles riots -- or as I like to say, the L.A. Uprising -- assisting my congregation and the people of south central Los Angeles. Relationships matter.

They were there for me and my congregation again after the 1994 earthquake in Los Angeles, providing us a place of worship to worship on a Sunday morning after my church, Messiah Baptist, was red-tagged and we were unable to occupy it. Relationships

matter. And Jews have been there for me and my current congregation since I moved to my hometown Detroit, Michigan and established a relationship with Temple Beth El and Rabbi Daniel Syme. Yes, relationships matter.

Had there been no relationship between Jews and Dr. King and then through Mrs. King to me, I could not have called upon them in my time of need. But God is our refuge and our strength; a very present help in times of trouble. Oh, yes, relationships matter. Moreover, when I look back over my life and look back at my spiritual journey, I cannot help but love Israel and my Jewish brothers and sisters.

Blacks and Jews are connected together by an eternal garment of destiny. We have both been oppressed, ridiculed, and ostracized by society. But God continues to lift us up. The Hebrew Exodus story is the point of departure for black theology. For just as God Almighty delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, so too he delivered African Americans from the chains of slavery. And just as God saved a remnant after the Holocaust to establish the state of Israel, so too God spared some African Americans during the Middle Passage to build America to become the great nation that she is today. Relationships matter.

And through God's divine providence God has now rekindled this most important bond and so because of that historic relationship between blacks and Jews and my own bond of faith with the land of Israel as a Christian minister, I set out to visit Israel; I set out to visit my spiritual homeland. I have been to Israel on five different occasions and

each time I go -- each time I go I become more and more connected to the land and to the people. I have established a strong brotherly bond with an Ethiopian Jew named Mola who I met at Yemin Orde Youth Village in 2002. He and I kept in touch and reconnected last year in January when I went back to Israel with AIPAC.

God has ordained me as one of his ambassadors to Israel and to the Jews, and for that I am eternally grateful. I cannot help but speak out on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people because it is in my DNA. And I will continue to be a friend of Israel and the Jewish people even when I receive hate mail and even when it seemed that the world does not understand. Even when I am called a Jew lover in a negative sense. I will continue to stand with Israel and the Jewish people.

Israel needs friends who are not Jewish and who can lobby Congress in her behalf. Relationships matter. And so as long as I have breath in my body, I will always be a friend to Israel and never ever turn my back on the land of Israel, nor the people of Israel. And so I thank God today for AIPAC. You do a great work in political empowerment and since I've been involved with AIPAC I have gotten to know our president, David Victor. Yes, I say our president because I am a part of you. I am a part of I and he's my president also.

I've made up in my mind -- I've made up in my mind that I will continue to lobby Congress for the good of Israel. Israel must be safe, secure, and unthreatened by all of her neighbors. I've made up in my mind that I will continue to do all within my power to

advance the cause of peace in the Middle East. I will do all I can to make sure that the lion shall lie down with the lamb and every man and woman shall be able to sit together under his or her own fig tree.

Yes, I will talk with my senators, Carl Levin and Debbie Stabenow, both with whom I have an excellent relationship. I will reach out to my longtime friend, U.S. Representative John Conyers, whose wife Monica is here today; Maxine Waters, Jesse L. Jackson Jr., Diane Watson, and Caroline Cheeks Kilpatrick; they are all my close friends because relationships matter.

And I pledge to you today, to AIPAC, to use my relationships with congress and, yes, even with President Barack Obama to fight for Israel to be safe, secure, and protected. And so if we stand together and lift our voices together as one, then our leaders, America's leaders will understand that Israel is here to stay. They will understand that we as a people stand together with Israel today and even forever more. AIPAC matters. Relationship matters. Standing up for right matters.

I leave you with the words penned by James Weldon Johnson in the Negro national anthem, "Stony the road we trod, / Bitter the chastening rod, / Felt in the days when hope unborn had died; / Yet with a steady beat, / Have not our weary feet / Come to the places for which our fathers sighed? / We have come, over a way that which tears has been watered, / We have come, treading out path through the blood of the slaughtered/ out from the gloomy past, / 'Til now we stand at last / Where the white gleam of our

bright star is cast. / God of our weary years, / God of our silent tears, / Thou hast brought  
us thus far along the way. / Thou hast by Thy might / Led us into the light, / Keep us  
forever in the path we pray / Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met  
thee, / Lest, our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world we forget Thee; / Shadowed  
beneath Thy hand / May we forever stand / True to our God, / True to our native land."

Glory halleluiah. Glory halleluiah. Glory halleluiah. His truth is marching on. We  
shall overcome. God bless you.