



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Sermon at Temple Israel of Hollywood*

"Keep Moving From This Mountain"



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Rabbi Max Nussbaum: ...that he is the unchallenged voice of the Negro people, and the disquieting voice of the white -- I would rather introduce him to you as the man who has changed the moral climate of America to a point by which our country and our nation will never be the same again. I'd rather introduce him to you as the man who has given the history our generation a forward thrust, a sense of direction, an encounter with destiny. It gives me great pleasure and I consider it a distinct privilege to give you at this point Dr. King, Dr. Martin Luther King.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Rabbi Nussbaum, officers and members of this great congregation, ladies and gentlemen: I need not pause to say how very delighted and honored I am to have the privilege of being here this evening and of being a part of this very meaningful and significant worship service. I want to express my profound and sincere gratitude to your distinguished rabbi for extending the invitation and giving me the opportunity to share these moments of fellowship with you. It is always a rich and rewarding experience when I can take a brief break from the day-to-day demands of our struggle for freedom and human dignity in the South and discuss the issues involved in that struggle with concerned people of goodwill all over this nation. And so I can assure you that I'm happy to be with you and I consider you real friends of our struggle. And I want to thank you for your support; our struggle is often difficult and frustrating. It has its dark and desolate moments. But we are often given new courage and vigor to carry on when we know that there are friends of goodwill in the background who are supporting us and we feel this day in and day out. And so I want to thank you in advance for your prayers, for your concern, for your moral support, and also for your financial support. I can assure you that this financial support will go a long, long way in helping us to continue in our humble efforts to make the American dream a reality.



Tonight I would like to have you think with me from the subject, *Keep Moving from this Mountain*. I would like to take your minds back many, many centuries into a familiar experience so significantly recorded in the sacred Scriptures. The Children of Israel had been reduced into the bondage of physical slavery. Throughout slavery they were things to be used, not persons to be respected. Throughout slavery, they were trampled over by the iron feet of oppression; they were exploited economically, dominated politically, and humiliated on every hand. But then God sent Moses to lead the Children of Israel from the dark and difficult period of Egypt's slavery into a bright and better day. Moses stood up over and over again in Pharaoh's court and cried out, "Let my people go!" Pharaoh with a hardened heart refused over and over again. But then came that glad day when the Red Sea opened and God's children were able to leave the darkness of Egypt and move on to the other side. But as soon as they got out of Egypt they discovered that before they could get to the Promised Land there was a difficult, trying wilderness ahead. They had to realize that before they could get to the Promised Land, they had to face gigantic mountains and prodigious hilltops. And so, as a result of this realization, three groups of people emerged. One group said in substance that "We would rather go back to Egypt." They preferred the flush parts of Egypt to the challenges of the Promised Land. A second group that abhorred the idea of going back to Egypt, and yet they abhorred the idea of facing the difficulties of moving ahead to the Promised Land and they somehow wanted to remain stationary and choose the line of least resistance. There was a third group, probably influenced by Caleb and Joshua who had gone over to spy a bit and who admitted that there were giants in the land but who said, "We can possess the land." This group said in substance that "We will go on in spite of..." that "We will not allow anything to stop us," that "We will move on amid the difficulties, amid the trials, amid the tribulations."

Now certainly, one could almost preach a sermon from either of these groups. This evening I want to deal mainly with the second group: those individuals that chose the line of least resistance, those individuals who didn't want to go back to Egypt but who did not quite have the strength to move on to the Promised Land. These are probably the people who wanted to remain stationary. These are the people who probably wanted to stop at a particular point and remain right there in the wilderness. God speaks through Moses to these people. The first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy said, "Ye have been in this mountain long enough. Turn you and take your journey and go to the mount of the Amorites." In other words, God was saying through Moses that you must not allow yourself to get bogged down with unattained goals. You must not allow yourself to get caught up in impeding mountains. Whenever God speaks, he says, "Go forward." Whenever God speaks, he says, "Move on from mountains of stagnant complacency and deadening pacificity." So this is the great challenge that always stands before men. In some real sense, we are all moving toward some "promised land" of personal and collective fulfillment. In every age and every generation, men have envisioned a promised land. Some may have envisioned it with the wrong ideology, with the wrong philosophical presupposition. But men in every generation thought in terms of some promised land. Plato and his *Republic* thought of it of a day -- as a day when philosophers would become kings and kings philosophers, and justice would reign throughout society. Emanuel Kant thought of it as a day when men would recognize the moral laws of the universe and the categorical imperative would reign supreme. Karl Marx dreamed of it as a day when the proletariat would conquer the reign of the bourgeoisie and so society would live by the motto "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."



Judaism and Christianity dreamed of it as a day when the Kingdom of God would emerge; a day when justice, brotherhood, peace, and the reign and will of God would dwell throughout society. Whenever men have thought seriously of life, they have dreamed of a promised land, and so in a sense we are all moving toward some promised land.

Tonight I would like to suggest some of the symbolic mountains that we have occupied long enough and that we must leave if we are to move on to the promised land of justice, peace, and brotherhood. Yea, the promised land of the kingdom of God. First, we've been in the mountain of practical materialism long enough. And when I speak of materialism at this point, I'm not talking about metaphysical materialism -- that strange doctrine that speaks of all of reality is little more than matter in motion, that strange doctrine that says in substance that all life is merely a physiological process with a physiological meaning. I'm not talking about that kind of materialism because I think ultimately it is blown away by the wind of essential thinking. I'm talking about practical materialism -- the notion that causes individuals to live as if material values are the only values and concerns in life. Each of us lives in two realms, the "within" and the "without." The within of our lives is somehow found in the realm of ends, the without in the realm of means. The within of our [lives], the bottom -- that realm of spiritual ends expressed in art, literature, morals, and religion for which at best we live. The without of our lives is that realm of instrumentalities, techniques, mechanisms by which we live. Now the great temptation of life and the great tragedy of life is that so often we allow the without of our lives to absorb the within of our lives. The great tragedy of life is that too often we allow the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live. And how much of our modern life can be summarized in that arresting dictum of the poet Thoreau, "Improved means to an unimproved end?" We have allowed our civilization to outrun our culture; we have allowed our technology to outdistance our theology and for this reason we find ourselves caught up with many problems. Through our scientific genius we made of the world a neighborhood, but we failed through moral commitment to make of it a brotherhood, and so we've ended up with guided missiles and misguided men. And the great challenge is to move out of the mountain of practical materialism and move on to another and higher mountain which recognizes somehow that we must live by and toward the basic ends of life. We must move on to that mountain which says in substance, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world of means -- airplanes, televisions, electric lights -- and lose the end: the soul?"

Now the other mountain that we've occupied long enough, and certainly it is quite relevant to discuss this at this time when we think of brotherhood -- we've been in the mountain of racial injustice long enough. And now it is time for us to move on to that great and noble realm of justice and brotherhood. That is the great struggle taking place in our nation today. It isn't a struggle just based on a lot of noise; it is a struggle to save the soul of our nation for no nation can rise to its full moral maturity so long as it subjects a segment of its citizenry on the basis of race or color. And somehow we must come to see more than ever before that racial injustice is a cancer in the body politic which must be removed before our moral health can be realized. Racial segregation must be seen for what it is -- and that is an evil system, a new form of slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity. Segregation is wrong, whether it is in public schools, whether it is in housing, whether it is in recreational facilities, whether it is in any area of life. It is an evil which we must work to get rid of with all of the determination and all of the zeal that we can muster. Segregation is evil because it relegates persons to the status of things.



Somewhere the theologian Paul Tillich had said that "sin is separation." What is segregation but an existential expression of man's tragic estrangement, his awful separation, his terrible sinfulness? Somehow we must work, labor, and struggle until every vestige of segregation is removed from our society.

I remember some time ago Mrs. King and I journeyed to that great country known as India and we had some marvelous experiences. They will remain dear to me as long as the cords of memory shall lengthen. I remember one afternoon that we journeyed down to the southern most point of India in the state of Kerala. And I was to address that afternoon some high school students who were the children mainly of parents who had been "untouchables." And I remember that afternoon that the principal went through his introduction and when he came to the end he said, "I'm happy to present to you, students, a fellow untouchable from the United States of America," and for the moment I was peeved and shocked that he would introduce me as an untouchable, but pretty soon my mind leaped the Atlantic and I started thinking about conditions back home. And I started thinking about the fact that I could not go in to most places of public accommodation all across the South. I started thinking about the fact that 20 million of my black brothers and sisters were still at the bottom of the economic ladder. I started thinking about the fact that Negroes all over America, even if they have the money can not buy homes and rent homes of their choices because so many of their white brothers don't want to live near them. I started thinking about the fact that my little children were still judged in terms of the color of their skin rather than the content of their character. And I said to myself, "I am an untouchable and every Negro in the United States is an untouchable." And segregation is evil because it stigmatizes the segregated as an untouchable in a caste system. We've been in the mountain of segregation long enough and it is time for all men of goodwill to say now, "We are through with segregation now, henceforth, and forever more."

We've been in the mountain of indifference concerning poverty long enough. Whether we realize it or not, most of the peoples of the world still go to bed hungry at night. Millions of them are in Asia, millions in Africa, millions in South America. On that same trip to India I will never forget the depressing moments that came to me. How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes evidences of millions of people going to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks at night? In Bombay more than a million people sleep on the sidewalks every night. In Calcutta more than 600,000 sleep on the sidewalks every night. They have no beds to go in; they have no houses to go in. How can one avoid being depressed when he discovers that out of India's population of more than 400 million people, some 380 million make an annual income of less than 70 dollars a year? Most of these people have never seen a doctor or a dentist.

The world must do something about this. The affluent nations, the "have" nations must join in the grand alliance to do something about this. And not only must we look abroad, we can look in our own nation. We will discover that there are some 10 million families that are considered poverty stricken families. These families have an average of four or five members, which means there are some 40 -- between 40 and 50 million of our brothers and sisters in this country who are poverty stricken.



There they find themselves perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. And certainly if we are to be a great nation, we must solve this problem. Now there is nothing new about poverty. What is new that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of it.

Some years ago a thoughtful Englishman by the name of Malthus frightened the world by discussing the problem -- the joint problem of production and population. He reached the conclusion in a book that the world was moving toward universal famine because man's population -- the population rather, was outrunning man's capacity to produce. But it didn't take many years after that for many other people to reveal that Malthus was wrong, that he grossly underestimated the resources of the world and the resourcefulness of man. It was Dr. Kirtley Mather, a Harvard geologist a few years ago who wrote a book entitled *Enough and to Spare*. He said in substance throughout that book that there is enough and to spare in this world for all men to have the basic necessities of life. It boils down to the question of whether men and women in this nation are willing to be concerned about the least of these. A great nation is a compassionate nation. Who are the least of these? The least of these are those who still find themselves smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in an affluent society. Who are the least of these? They are the thousands of individuals who see life as a long and desolate corridor with no exit sign. Who are the least of these? They are the little boys and little girls who grow up with clouds of inferiority floating in their little mental skies because they know that they are caught in conditions of economic deprivation. Who are the least of these? They are the individuals who are caught in the fatigue of despair. And somehow if we are to be a great nation, we must be concerned about the least of these, our brothers. And we've been in the mountain of indifference too long and ultimately we must be concerned about the least of these; we must be concerned about the poverty-stricken because our destinies are tied together. And somehow in the final analysis, as long as there is poverty in the world, nobody can be totally rich. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. And what affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. John Donne caught it years ago and placed it in graphic terms, "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." And he goes on toward the end to say, "Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never sin to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." And when we see this, we will move out of the mountain of indifference concerning poverty.

There is another mountain that we've been in long enough. It is a mountain of violence and hatred. I'm more convinced than ever before that violence can not solve the problems of the world. Violence is both impractical and immoral. This is why I've tried in my little way to teach it in our struggle for racial justice that I've come to see and I believe with all my heart that we can not make the great moral contribution to our nation that we should make, and we can not win the battle for justice if we stoop to the point of using violence in our struggle. And it is my basic feeling that if the Negro succumbs to the temptation of using violence in his struggle for justice, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos. Violence is not the way. There is still a voice crying through the vista of time, saying, "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword." And history is cluttered with the wreckage of nations.



History is filled with the bleached bones of communities that failed to follow this command. And the same thing applies to love. This is no longer an idea that we can afford to ignore over the world. Love is basic for the very survival of mankind. I'm convinced that love is the only absolute ultimately; love is the highest good. He who loves has somehow discovered the meaning of ultimate reality. He who hates does not know God; he who hates has no knowledge of God. Love is the supreme unifying principle of life. Psychiatrists are telling us now that many of the strange things that happen in the subconscious [subconscious], many of the inner conflicts are rooted in hate, and they are now saying "Love or perish." Oh, how basic this is. It rings down across the centuries: Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself. We've been in the mountain of violence and hatred too long. And this not only applies in the struggle to achieve racial justice. We've got to move on to the point of seeing that on the international scale, war is obsolete -- that it must somehow be cast into unending limbo. But in a day when Sputniks and Explorers are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence; it is either nonviolence or nonexistence. And the alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a greater suspension of nuclear tests, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation. And so we must rise up and beat our swords into plowshares, and our spears into pruning hooks and nations must not rise up against nations, neither must they study war anymore. We've been in the mountain of war. We've been in the mountain of violence. We've been in the mountain of hatred long enough. It is necessary to move on now, but only by moving out of this mountain can we move to the promised land of justice and brotherhood and the Kingdom of God. It all boils down to the fact that we must never allow ourselves to become satisfied with unattained goals. We must always maintain a kind of divine discontent.

There are certain technical words within every academic discipline which soon become stereotypes and clichés. Every academic discipline has its technical nomenclature. Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word in psychology. It is the word "maladjusted." Certainly we all want to live the well adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But I must honestly say to you tonight my friends that there are some things in our world, there are some things in our nation to which I'm proud to be maladjusted, to which I call upon all men of goodwill to be maladjusted until the good society is realized. I must honestly say to you that I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self defeating effects of physical violence. And I say to you that I am absolutely convinced that maybe the world is in need for the formation of a new organization: "The International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment" -- men and women who will be as maladjusted as the prophet Amos who in the midst of the injustices of his day would cry out in words that echo across the centuries: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream;" as maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free;



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as maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery would etch across the pages of history words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness;" as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth that said to the men and women of his day: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." And through such maladjustment we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man into the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

And may I say in conclusion that I believe firmly that we will get to the promised land of collective fulfillment. I still believe that right here in America we will reach the promised land of brotherhood. Oh, I know that there are still dark and difficult days ahead. Before we get there some more of us will have to get scarred up a bit. Before we reach that majestic land some more will be called bad names. Some will be called reds and communists simply because they believe in the brotherhood of man. Before we get there some more will have to be thrown into crowded, frustrating, and depressing jail cells. Before we get there maybe somebody else like a Medgar Evers and the three civil rights workers in Mississippi this summer will have to face physical death. If physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children and their white brothers from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive. Yes, we were singing about it just a few minutes ago: "We shall overcome; we shall overcome, deep in my heart I do believe we shall overcome." And I believe it because somehow the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. We shall overcome because Carlyle is right: "No lie can live forever." We shall overcome because William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell is right: "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne. Yet, that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own." With this faith we will be able to hue out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day. And in the words of prophecy,

"Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain and the crooked places straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."

This will be a great day. This will be a marvelous hour. And at that moment, figuratively speaking in biblical words: "the morning stars will sing together and the sons of God will shout for joy."

Rabbi Max Nussbaum: We were privileged to hear a great oration, a wonderful sermon, deep and challenging, and I hope that together we may move away from the mountain of hatred and prejudice toward the large and glorious valley of human brotherhood.

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