

In addition to letter below, The Finest Community Coalition (<https://www.finestcommunitysd.org>), of which we are part, activated decisively on this issue, and released a public letter calling out this exclusion and affirming a fundamental truth: **our connection to Israel cannot and must not become a litmus test for Jewish participation in public life.**

We invite you to [read the full Coalition letter here.](#)

An Open Letter to Our San Diego Community From The San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors

As we enter Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend - a sacred moment in our civic calendar dedicated to justice, courage, and moral imagination - we do so carrying deep sadness, disappointment, and anger.

We have recently learned that Rabbi Hanan Leberman of Tifereth Israel Synagogue was disinvited from offering a benediction at the All Peoples Celebration, a major MLK commemoration event hosted by Alliance San Diego. The reason given was his “Zionist views.” When Rabbi Leberman asked whether another rabbi might step in to offer the benediction in his place, that request too was denied. With the exclusion of Rabbi Leberman, so too came the elimination of any Jewish clergy from the All People’s Celebration.

Over the years, there have been rabbis honored with the opportunity to connect the legacy of MLK to the Jewish commitment to and involvement in civil rights and racial and social justice, by offering a benediction. There was *never* a litmus test for Jewish clergy to speak at this event. To the contrary, inviting rabbis and cantors to be part of the sacred convening felt inclusive and important.

The decision this year to disinvite Rabbi Leberman not only isolates Jewish clergy, it sends a message to the entire San Diego Jewish community, including Jews of Color, that there are conditions placed on our participation in public life, that our identities must be edited or disavowed to be deemed acceptable. To do so at an event entitled *All People's Celebration*, is to say "all" means everyone except Jews - which is a far cry from the moral courage and collective belonging that are at the core of King's vision of the Beloved Community. It is shocking, and it is wrong.

In the aftermath of the devastating antisemitic firebombing last week of Congregation Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi, this decision is particularly painful. In 1967, that same congregation was firebombed by the KKK because its rabbi at the time, was outspoken against racism. The message then, as now, was meant to silence moral voices and push Jews out of the struggle for justice.

And yet history tells a different story.

Jews in San Diego and all over the country have stood side by side with the Black Community over the last 40 years against racism and xenophobia. Dr. King himself walked with Rabbis Heschel, Eisendrath, and Kelman, who were giants of social justice in the fight for civil rights.

There have been important alliances between the Black and Jewish communities for decades. The common enemy of white supremacy has sought to pit our communities against one another, but allyship has meant that we must understand our histories and shared values and experiences, while recognizing discrimination in both communities. The work is ongoing, and Dr. King's legacy includes a warning against the dangers of division and moral litmus tests that fracture coalitions for justice. He understood that liberation movements falter when they begin deciding who is "pure" enough to belong.

To exclude rabbis from an MLK celebration because of their connection to Israel is not only a distortion of Jewish identity - it is a betrayal of Dr. King's vision.

As President of the San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors, I speak on behalf of a diverse, pluralistic rabbinic community that spans denominations, politics, and perspectives. What unites us is not uniformity of thought, but a shared commitment to justice, dignity, and the sacred worth of every human life. Removing Jewish clergy from a public commemoration of Dr. King fractures that commitment and undermines the very values this weekend is meant to honor.

We cannot and must not allow our inherent connection to Israel - or any single aspect of Jewish identity - to become a litmus test for inclusion in civic and interfaith spaces. When Jews are told they must check part of themselves at the door to participate, the door is no longer truly open.

We remain committed to partnership, dialogue, and shared struggle for justice. But partnership requires mutual recognition and respect. Silence in moments like this would be a betrayal of our history and our moral responsibility.

This weekend, as speeches are given and songs are sung, we ask our broader community to remember who walked together before - and to ask who is being left outside today.

Justice demands better.

Dr. King's legacy demands better.

And our shared future depends on it.

Rabbi Jason Nevarez

President, San Diego Board of Rabbis and Cantors

Senior Rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel of San Diego