

Let there be light.
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An ancient rabbi once asked his students. "How can you tell when the night has ended and day has begun?"

An eager student spoke up first: "Could it be, that the day has begun when you can see an animal in the distance and tell if it is a sheep or a dog?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

Another student wondered: "Is it when you can look at a distant tree and tell if it is a fig tree or a peach tree?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

After several other students tried to answer the rabbi's question, all without success, the rabbi took a deep breath and said:

"My cherished students, the night has ended and day has begun ... when you can look upon the face of any person, and see that it is your brother, your sister. Because if you cannot see this, there is darkness; it is still night."¹

Dr. King knew the perils of darkness. And we know that the darkness of his time still exists today. But Dr. King also offered us the solution, when he said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that."

The power of a single flame is immeasurable because its light can kindle another, and another, and another. We sit in this room surrounded by light in darkness; the illuminating flame of our youth, of our families, of our neighbors. And yet, we know that there are so many other candles yet to be lit, so many souls who remain in the dark night.

And so I invite you, if you are holding a candle, or if you are at the end of a row near a candle, to lift up that light, and respond to each of the next lines with "let us be the light."

¹ adapted from BT Brachot 9b

Only the light of compassion can drive out the darkness.

Let us be the light.

Only the light of trust can drive out the darkness.

Let us be the light.

Only the light of friendship can drive out the darkness.

Let us be the light.

Only the light of beloved community can drive out the darkness.

LET US BE THE LIGHT.

Out of the night, a new day will come, illuminating the dark corners of our world.

Let there be light, let there be light, let us be the light.

To which we all say: amen.

It is my honor to invite forward my fellow members of the SOMA Interfaith Clergy Association, as well as the trustees and town officials, and our community leaders who helped to plan this remarkable celebration of Dr. King's legacy, to please come forward to join me on stage so that we might, together, lift up our voices in song.