A Haftara for Martin Luther King Shabbat

Quotes from Dr. King’s speeches
edited by Rabbi Marcia Prager and set to Haftara Trop by Hazzan Yakov Kessler

Honoring the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr
-- a man in whom Dr Abraham Joshua Heschel said "we hear a voice like
the voice of the prophets of Israel ... his presence is the hope of
America." -- numbers in parentheses are source quotes (end of document).

We are on the move now
We are on the move now
We are on the move now
The bombing of our homes will not deter us
The beating and killing of our clergymen and young people
will not divert us.
We are on the move now. Like an idea whose time has come,
not even the marching of mighty armies can halt us.
We are moving to the land of freedom.(1)
Now the fact that this new age is emerging reveals something basic about the universe. It tells us something about the core and heartbeat of the cosmos. It reminds us that the universe is on the side of justice. It says to those who struggle for justice:

"You do not struggle alone, but God struggles with you."

This belief that God is on the side of truth and justice comes down to us from the long tradition of our faith. I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness man has cosmic companionship.

Behind the harsh appearances of the world there is a benign power.
I refuse to accept the view
that mankind is so tragically bound
to the starless midnight of racism and war
that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood
can never become a reality.

I refuse to accept the cynical notion
that nation after nation
must spiral down a militaristic stairway
into the hell of thermonuclear destruction.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love
will have the final word in reality.

This is why right temporarily defeated
is stronger than evil triumphant.
I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.

I still believe that one day mankind will bow down before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive goodwill will proclaim the rule of the land.

I still believe that we shall overcome. (4)

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop.
And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to have a long life.

Longevity has its place.

But I'm not concerned about that now.

I just want to do God's will.

And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain.

And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land.

And I'm happy, tonight.

I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. (5)


(3) "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," in "Strength to Love" (collection of sermons by Dr King) (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1963), 153.


(5) Address at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee, April 3, 1968 (Dr King's last sermon); in "A Testament of Hope," 286.