

## D' var Torah

December 17, 2008

Next week, December 23, marks the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of AJH. His Yahrzeit will occur on January 14, five days before MLK's birthday. And on January 20<sup>th</sup> Barack Obama will be sworn in... I think we all know that Heschel and King were close (show picture)

These were two individuals who came from very different places but shared similar values and who saw religion as a vehicle for social change.

When the Seminary honored Dr. King with an Honorary Degree in 1964, Heschel was his sponsor. When King died four years later Heschel attended the funeral and visited the King Family at their home.

Heschel's work deals with, among other themes, the wonderment of life, the value of the individual and the meaning that religion and faith give to life. When MLK died then Seminary Chancellor Louis Finkelstein eulogized him saying "Our youth needs hope – hope which derives from effective action, guided by wise insights and courage. It is the loss of hope which has brought dismay to so many..."

Ironically, 40 years later we have elected a black man as our nation's next president – A black man in whom we all have much hope for our personal and for our nations near term future.

This weeks' PARASHA, Va-yeishev, speaks of Jacob's having settled in the land of Canaan and the note in Humash Etz Hayim suggests that Jacob thought he was going to settle down after all he had been through.

Indeed, we all know people who have reached a certain point in life, not necessarily age related, where they feel that they are at a place where they can now settle down; that is, do less, care less, be less.

The modern biblical commentator, Aviva Zornber, comments. "The full tension of composure and discomposure of order and disorder in the world is felt most acutely by the righteous, by those whose sense of beauty and desire for order exposes them to the shock of reality."

Heschel and King, notwithstanding their stations in life, never felt settled; rather, they constantly felt the shock of life and so lived with the tension of composure and discomposure.

May the hope that we have for our new president not allow us to feel "settled", that is to feel that President Obama will take care of it all; that we can now "settle" back.

Rather, let us be guided by the lives and values modeled by AJH and MLK and like them also constantly feel the shock of reality and live with the tension of composure and discomposure.