

At Rosh Hashanah, Black and Jewish Americans must choose each other again | Opinion

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Aerial view of the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach. Photo by Matias J. Ocner mocner@miamiherald.com

On Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, the *shofar* is blasted in Jewish houses of worship to interrupt our complacency and remind us of our higher purposes. This year, its call should reach beyond the walls of the synagogue. Antisemitism and racism are surging, while Black and Jewish Americans, two communities whose partnership helped transform this country, have too often drifted apart. In this new year, we must come together once again.

That is why I recently joined with dozens of other faith leaders from across the country, including clergy from South Florida, for the Atlanta Summit of Black Pastors and Rabbis. We gathered at The Temple, Ebenezer Baptist Church and the King Center, sites central to the history of the Black-Jewish partnership.

The summit was not about nostalgia, though. We came together to consider what that partnership demands of us now. In Atlanta, where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached and where his close friend Rabbi Jacob Rothschild fought against segregation and for integration, we sought to rebuild on the neglected legacy of their alliance.

What that legacy teaches us is that before communities can understand one another, they must know each other. During the summit, pastors and rabbis prayed, studied, shared meals and spoke candidly about the pain in both communities, including racism, antisemitism, issues around Israel and Zionism, and the misunderstandings amplified by our social-media feeds.

The goal was to build the relationships that lead to trust. The participants did not seek to silence disagreement, but rather to make honest disagreement possible without turning other communities into enemies. We did not agree on every issue, but we saw the real-life impact that our communities have on one another.

Throughout history, when Black and Jewish Americans have joined moral courage with organized action, we have helped move this nation closer to its ideals. We fought against discriminatory college admission and housing practices. We pushed for equal access to government resources and protections. And throughout, we refused to be divided by those who would rather see both communities weaker, more fractured and less effective.

We must rebuild that partnership to meet this moment. Jewish leaders must stand publicly against racism and listen seriously to the needs and aspirations of Black communities. Leaders in the Black community should stand publicly against antisemitism and help make room for the complexity of Jewish life. In both cases we must forcefully reject the notion that solidarity requires either self-negation or unanimity.

At the end of the summit, a rabbi and pastor from each city were asked to return home, widen the circle of relationships, and translate their experience into education, advocacy and service. South Florida, with its large and vibrant Black and Jewish communities, can help lead that work.

Here in Miami, that means learning what our neighbors actually believe instead of simply accepting the loudest online caricatures. It means bringing congregants, students and civic leaders together, building meaningful relationships and showing up for each other in calm times as well as in times of crisis.

Rosh Hashanah teaches that starting over is possible but that it requires us to do the work. Moses stood on Mount Nebo and looked across the Jordan River toward the Promised Land. The Rev. King reached his own mountaintop and told America that he, too, had seen it. Neither vision excused the people from making the journey.

As this new year begins, let us take the first steps together. Let us choose fellowship over fear, courage over caricature and love over hate. Let us get our feet wet.

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