

“INESCAPABLE MUTUALITY”: A Review by Ruth Segaloff

Dateline, January 17, 2010, @ Kahal Braira: A stranger off the street today might have mistaken this production of “Inescapable Mutuality” for a play off Broadway rather than a staged reading at K.B., such was the quality of the play and the performances. (The playwright, Merrill Meadow, is a member of our congregation.)

This second only performance in honor of Martin Luther King Day takes as its title, a phrase from Dr. King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, written in April 1963: “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” It is what has happened to change this storied alliance between Jews and African Americans that is the focus of this drama.

In 1954, I was a fourth grader in New Orleans, at the infancy of the civil rights movement. I remember the segregated buses that made African Americans give up their seats and move to the back of the bus when a white person wanted their seat; the segregated bathrooms and water fountains unavailable to Elizabeth, truly our second mother; and the segregated lunch counters in department stores and dime stores.

As the child of liberal Northern Jewish parents, our values and views on human rights put us in conflict with the deep South. It was a very traumatic and lonely time for me. This changed when, as a teenager, I became a member of SOFTY, the Southern Foundation of Temple Youth, where we openly debated social values and civil rights as well as the very issue of God’s existence.

Not since 1962, when I graduated from high school, have I ever again felt at home with Judaism. That is, until I discovered Kahal Braira; and this performance of “Inescapable Mutuality” epitomizes why I joined. It certainly deserves a wider audience and I have just the place in mind: The Underground Railroad Theater in Central Square.