

Prayers

The Helpers and the Hope, a prayer in the wake of the Boston bombings

Holy One,

We are on our knees

In awe and supplication

For we have remembered the incomprehensible value

Of every human life.

We have heard the thrum of helicopter blades

And wailing sirens.

We have smelled the ash and smoke.

We have seen the blood-spattered sidewalks

And the ravaged bodies of your children.

We cannot un-see.

Help us, dear God.

Bathe our ears

Soothe our senses

Flush our eyes

Wrap your mother's arms around us,

For we need to be reminded of you,

to remember what is holy

and good.

We ask for the strength to remember that

We are the helpers.

We are the hope.

We are the face behind the bomb suit
We are the children rushing to answer their fathers' feverish texts
We are running the 27th mile to donate blood
We are kindness to strangers
We are the searching dog
We are hearts glued to the television
We are compassion for whoever did this, and
For the suffering life out of which this violence came
We are on our knees cleaning blood off hospital floors
We are the impulse to run toward chaos.

We are the helpers, and the hope.
Inside our breaking hearts is all the evidence we need
That an unshakable conspiracy of goodness thrives in rubble and ash.

- Rev. Sue Phillips, Boston, MA April 16, 2013

**Courage, Compassion, and Commitment:
A Prayer in the Aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon**

Name Beyond All Names,
Spirit of Love and Life,
Eternal Presence,
Great Mystery,
Dear God...

In prayer, our hearts open to all who suffer
in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon:
a beautiful celebration of the human spirit,
a gathering of people and nations from around the globe,
turned to tragedy, explosions, and loss.

Continually these past days—
on television and computer screens and in newspapers—

we have seen the billowing smoke, the fallen runners, the confusion of the crowd,
bystanders leaping over barriers to respond.

On the radio we have heard confused shouts of runners and first responders,
shaken voices of shocked announcers,
heartfelt words from government officials struggling to lead
even as they try to understand what has happened.

We have spoken to friends and family—
in disbelief, in anger, in grief—
holding one another close by telephone and text.
On social media we have glimpsed
the thousands and millions indirectly impacted,
whose suffering is smaller but no less real.
We are confused, hurt. We cannot make sense of it.
We stand awestruck before the profane and the mysterious.

Spirit of Life and Love,
Weaver of the Sacred Web of Life, Death, and Renewal:
Even as we have witnessed death and injury,
to people,
to our sense of self-assurance,
and to any belief in our own safety as a individuals and a nation,
we have also seen the crisis strip away all that divides us.

That first day,
we watched ordinary people carry strangers to ambulances,
saw Bostonians open their homes to people from around the world,
saw waves of spontaneously organized relief pour in,
reminding us of the common humanity we all share,
of all that unites us amidst the illusion of separation.
We have seen, we have remembered, that life ever renews itself.
Life renewed itself on that day and it renews itself even now,
as people reach out to one another across neighborhoods, across oceans,
searching for ways to respond in love and care.

Eternal Love,
Sacred Web of Life, Death, and Renewal:
We pray for the people most directly affected,
the families of those who have died, those who linger in critical condition,

those who worry for or who have lost loved ones.
We pray for those heroes of the day who now huddle alone,
experiencing their own secondary trauma as they try to go back ordinary life.
We pray for politicians and social leaders,
that their sense of violation
and their desire to stand strong for the victims not interfere with their better angels;
we pray that our political leaders act with wisdom,
with compassion, and with focus on the longer view.
We pray for already marginalized communities,
that they not become victims of retaliation for the acts of unwell individuals.
And we pray for those perpetrators,
that they might know some respite from their inner turmoil,
and come to know the ways of peace and compassion.

We pray for ourselves,
that our hearts might awaken in solidarity
with others who face a tragedy we cannot comprehend,
but that they must live through.

May we open ourselves to people and to beings nearby us and far away
who are in pain.
May we notice the suffering in our own community,
the interdependent web that links us to all suffering,
and turn not away from but toward suffering, so that we too,
like the heroes of that day,
leap over barriers that could have divided us...
meeting the brokenness in our world with
courage, and compassion, and commitment to do our part.

Spirit of Love,
Interdependent Web of Life, Death, and Renewal:
We pray, too, for our own, more personal struggles,
which still matter, even though others always face greater challenges than ours.
We pray for any among us who have not yet discovered
our own power to bless the world.
We pray to find the courage and grace
to move one step closer to healing, and to the sacred potential of our lives.
We pray for strength, grateful for all that is not lost,
for the ever-renewing powers of life,
for our chance to play our part in this life

we have been given to share with one another.
And we join in this time of quiet, this moment of silence,
in which we lift up the silent meditations of our hearts.

-Revs. John and Sarah Gibb Millspaugh, Boston MA 4/16/2013

Peace Prayer

God, make me a channel of thy peace, that
where there is hatred, I may sow love;
where there is wrong, the spirit of forgiveness;
where there is discord, harmony;
where there is error, truth;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there are shadows, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

God, grant that I may not so much seek to be comforted, as to comfort;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

-Twelfth century Christian mystic Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone,
now known as St. Francis of Assisi

Tibetan Buddhist Prayer

May you be at peace,
May your heart remain open.
May you awaken to the light of your own true nature.
May you be healed,
May you be a source of healing for all beings.

-Ancient

Be the blessing you already are

Service Leader: In our religious tradition, it is not just ministers and religious professionals who have power to bless. Each of us has to bless another, and to bless the world. Therefore I invite everyone here to participate in this blessing. The words are ordinary words, but we make the blessing real through our shared intention.

[Invite congregants form physical connections, hand-to-hand or hand-to-shoulder, throughout the congregation.]

All: As we have been blessed, so we bless one another to be a blessing. Breathe in, breathe out, this breath we share with all that breathes. Feel the love of the universe flowing through this community, into you, and out into the universe again. Let the love of all the universe—your love—flow outward, to its height, its depth, its broad extent. You are more than you know, and more beloved than you know. Take up what power is yours to create safe haven, to make of earth a heaven. Give hope to those you encounter, that they may know safety from inner and outer harm, be happy and at peace, healthy and strong, caring and joyful. Be the blessing you already are. That is enough. Blessed Be; Amen.

-adapted from the Karaniya Metta Sutta (*Sunna Nipata* 1.8) of the Pali Canon by Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh

Prayer for World Peace

Great God, who has told us
“Vengeance is mine,”
save us from ourselves,
save us from the vengeance in our hearts
and the acid in our souls.
Save us from our desire to hurt as we have been hurt,
to punish as we have been punished,
to terrorize as we have been terrorized.

Give us the strength it takes
to listen rather than to judge,
to trust rather than to fear,
to try again and again
to make peace even when peace eludes us.

We ask, O God, for the grace
to be our best selves.
We ask for the vision
to be builders of the human community
rather than its destroyers.
We ask for the humility as a people
to understand the fears and hopes of other peoples.

We ask for the love it takes
to bequeath to the children of the world to come
more than the failures of our own making.
We ask for the heart it takes
to care for all [people]...
as well as for ourselves.

Give us the depth of soul, O God,
to constrain our might,
to resist the temptations of power
to refuse to attack the attackable,
to understand
that vengeance begets violence,
and to bring peace--not war--wherever we go...
And so may we be merciful
and patient
and gracious
and trusting

with these others whom you also love.

This we ask through Jesus,
the one without vengeance in his heart.
This we ask forever and ever. Amen
-Sister Joan Chittister

A Muslim Prayer for Peace

In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful.

Praise be to the Lord of the Universe who has created us and made us into tribes and nations, that we may know each other, not that we may despise each other.

If the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace, and trust in God, for the Lord is the one that heareth and knoweth all things.

And the servants of God, Most Gracious are those who walk on the Earth in humility, and when we address them, we say "PEACE."

-Based on the Koran, 49:13, 8:61

Meditations

The Growing Edge

Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit. Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor. This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child—life's most dramatic answer to death—this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!

-Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

-Taoist philosopher Lao-tse, sixth century BCE

May I Become

May I become at all times, both now and forever

A protector of those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need
For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I, too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.

-Eighth century Indian Buddhist scholar Shantideva, The
Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life).

Readings

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

-“Kindness” from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* by Naomi
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Corner Books, Portland, Oregon.

Wage Peace

Wage peace with your breath.
Breathe in firemen and rubble,
breathe out whole buildings and flocks of red wing blackbirds.
Breathe in terrorists
and breathe out sleeping children and freshly mown fields.
Breathe in confusion and breathe out maple trees.
Breathe in the fallen and breathe out lifelong friendships intact.
Wage peace with your listening: hearing sirens, pray loud.
Remember your tools: flower seeds, clothes pins, clean rivers.
Make soup.
Play music, memorize the words for thank you in three languages.
Learn to knit, and make a hat.
Think of chaos as dancing raspberries,
imagine grief
as the outbreath of beauty
or the gesture of fish.
Swim for the other side.
Wage peace.
Never has the world seemed so fresh and precious:

Have a cup of tea and rejoice.
Act as if armistice has already arrived.
Celebrate today.
- Judyth Hill