

Dear Chavraya,

As we approach this Shabbos, as with every Shabbos, it is with the hope that through this day of peace, we shall bring the world a little bit closer to the day that is all Shabbos / *yom she'kulo Shabbos*. We are the shapers of that day, and, along with Eliyahu, its harbingers if we would help to bring it. On this Shabbos, the hope in the coming of that time of "swords turned to plowshares and spears to pruning hooks" is given added focus and urgency. This Shabbos, the Shabbos before Pesach, is Shabbos HaGadol / the Great Shabbos. The name is drawn from the hope and vision of the prophet Malachi, whose words are chanted as the Haftarah, *Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of God, that he may turn the heart of the parents back to the children, and the heart of the children back to their parents*. It was that vision of wholeness, of world peace beginning at home, that I had in mind and heart this week as I offered the opening prayer at a meeting of the Boston City Council. Of elders turning first to touch the hearts of the young, so we may keep faith with Malachi's Pesach promise of a future without violence. I share that prayer with you now as a prayer for Shabbos HaGadol

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

Opening Prayer for Boston City Council Meeting, April 13, 2011

Holy One of Being, Compassionate One Who dwells in the city upon the highest hill, as You look down upon the teeming metropolis of humanity seeing so much strife and sorrow, see also the good and the beautiful, hearing the laughter amid the tears.

At a time when our souls seem worn down, when meanness of spirit threatens to divide us one from another, clouding the vision and the way, plant in our hearts the seeds of courage and compassion, opening our eyes to see what is wrong that we might act to make it right.

Of homes foreclosed upon, dreams turned to dust, hearts needing to be opened to feel the pain of others, there must be a better way than turning people out upon the streets. And on these streets we walk along, how to look into their eyes and Yours, people sleeping on heating ducts before grand buildings of commerce and state, sleeping in parks and under bridges, in shelters if they're lucky, even children and families without a place to call their own?

Of agencies valiantly striving beneath the staggering load of so many needs of so many people who are hurting in body and soul, the orphan, the widow, the stranger whom You have taught us to help and to love, we are all one, the old and the young, the able and infirm, may we together insure the funds to sustain, even higher taxes if a single life to save. Guide us to the wherewithal to insure summer jobs for young people at risk, and things so basic as cell phones and walkie-talkies and training for youth workers on the streets and in the schools.

A few decibels beneath the sound of the bombs and bullets that tear Your world apart, do you hear the sound of urban gunfire, God, and cry along with us; and do You see the bodies of all the young people strewn upon side walks, fallen in the alleyways and playgrounds, upon the basketball courts, in neighborhood stores, and even on their own front porches and stoops, their parents' shrieks of horror unable to prevent the carnage, do You see what we see and wonder why, oh why, dear God?

Give us the courage and the will to stem the lethal tide, to change the culture of violence that fills the land, to say no to those who think that guns represent what freedom means and the right to own them the measure of what it is to be an American, the "know-nothings" who hide behind the second amendment untouched by the blood that flows in our streets.

Holy One of Being, Source of courage and compassion, open our eyes to see what is wrong and give us the vision, the will and the way to look beyond and see and pursue the beauty of what might be. Of those who sit on this good council, magnify the vision and the purpose they each bring to this place and to their work, for which we honor them, each one to share the wisdom gleaned from her or his own unique experience of life. Bless them in their deliberations, civil and decent, argument only for the sake of Heaven. Give them the courage and compassion to put human needs before all else in matters of budget and finance, and remind them and us that it is not theirs alone to do, that the task is all of ours.

As rain and sunshine dance in the springtime, a day for one and then the other, each one needed to make the flowers bloom, hand in hand each one of us is also needed to reveal the beauty and the promise of our city's diversity. At this season of renewal, of Passover and Easter and all the ways of celebration among us, help us God to renew the vision of people in harmony with each other and the earth, that beyond strife and sorrow, the good and the beautiful shall blossom in our city, our country and our world.