

Dear Chavraya,

I had the opportunity this week to give the opening prayer at a session of the Boston City Council. I share the prayer below, offering this week's Torah portion as backdrop. Being at city hall, I had the opportunity to see the panoply of people coming and going, and to reflect on the inter-relationship of people as the ultimate measure of quality and wellbeing in the life of a city, as in any polity.

The Torah portion this week is *Parashat B'chukotai; Im b'chukotai tayleychu/If you will walk in My statutes....* Addressed to all of us in the plural, to each of us as part of something larger than ourselves, the nature of our walking with each other and with God determines whether the society shall find blessing or curse. Either one comes as a consequence of the way of our living in relationship to each other. On this Shabbos we complete the reading of *Sefer Vayikra*, third book of the Torah. As upon the completion of each of the five books, we sing out as the Torah is dramatically raised, *chazak chazak v'nitchazek/be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen each other*. That is my prayer for us, and in that spirit I offered the following prayer, and so I share it now.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor

Prayer before the Boston City Council  
May 21, 2008

Holy One of Being, in Whose image every human being is created, we reach out to You, as You reach out to us, partners toward fulfilling the promise of Creation. Help us to see the vision of wholeness that you planted in the beginning, a seed of hope for us to water with our deeds that we shall bring to flourish the tree that is humanity.

Bless the work of our hands and hearts and minds; and the dedication of those who serve the common good, as those of this council who give of time and self as stewards of our city, helping us all to become the human face of possibility. As they transcend differences in order to work together, may we celebrate the diversity that makes us who we are, home-born and stranger as one community.

In our city that pulsates with life, plant in our hearts concern for one another, helping us to see beyond the limits of our own neighborhoods. When we lay down at night and with our rising to the new day, may we think of others' needs, of parks and schools and neighborhoods of equal quality, not letting us be content with what we have until every person has at least a place to call home, and the right to dreams that cannot be foreclosed upon. Help us to see all that might be, even as we cry for so much that is.

As Your tears fall for us, help us to go beyond tears and beyond words as our children die upon the streets. Guide us all to support the future now by supporting youth in danger in this city we call home. Teach us to bravely stand

up for good, opening our hearts and our pockets, giving of ourselves and from the budget of our city, that we might always do what is right, setting priorities that include jobs, good counsel and support to affirm and protect young lives that are so vulnerable in their becoming.

That hope shall replace despair, help us to see the interconnectedness of all violence, from the cynical availability of guns, the poison and the greed; the benighted notion that yet regards war and might as a way of conflict resolution; the culture of violence that spawns games of murder, rape and mayhem and calls it entertainment. May our city be a wellspring from which shall flow out into the world, a river of peace.

Instead of violence and its sorry web, help us to recognize the interconnectedness of all, and make us weavers of the thread that is love and compassion and peace. From this room, this time and place, may the strand be spun and go out to become a tapestry of hope that joins us all together as one.

Rabbi Victor H. Reinstein