

A Spiritual Leader's Prayer

Charles H. Harper is a poet, pastor and workshop leader. He resides with his wife, Patricia, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. On the back cover of his book, 'Gratitude' he wrote: Some may question phrases here and there in this collection, or even want to argue with what seems an irreverence or heterodoxy. Go for it. In the author's opinion, God loves a good argument, even asks for it. "My ways are not your ways," the Holy One announces to the Prophet, Isaiah.

'Independence Day'

Lover of all
Nations and people,
You
Who over millennia
Have watched empires
Rise and fall,
Come and go-
On this anniversary
Of our country's birth
In 1776,
We give thanks
For your many mercies.
We repent of our sin.
We seek wisdom,
Courage and strength
To be blessing,
Not a curse,
Among your people
Of many races tongues
And homelands.
Amen.

'What Leaders Have To Say About . . . Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness'

An American Leader's Reflection

John Adams (1735-1826), one of the founding fathers of our country, was a key player in our fight for freedom and a powerful voice in the formation of our democratic form of government. He was a man who valued the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. He was also a man of faith who contemplated God and his relationship with his Creator. In a May 1756 entry (Quotable Founding Fathers, p. 246), into his diary he reflected on the specific question: 'What is the proper Business of Mankind in this Life?' He wrote: We came into the world naked and destitute of all the conveniences and necessaries of life. And if we were not provided for, and nourished by our parents or others should inevitably perish as soon as born. We increase in strength of body and mind by slow and insensible degree. 1/3 of our time is consumed in sleep, and 3/4 of the remainder is spent in procuring a mere animal sustenance. And if we live to the age of three score and ten and then set down to make an estimate in our minds of the happiness we have enjoyed and the misery we have suffered, we shall find I am apt to think that the overbalance of happiness is quite inconsiderable. We shall find that we have been through the greatest part of our lives pursuing shadows, and empty but glittering phantoms rather than substances. We shall find that we have applied our whole vigour, all our faculties, in the pursuit of honour, or wealth, or learning, or some other such delusive trifle, instead of the real and everlasting excellences of piety and virtue. Habits of contemplating the Deity and his transcendent Excellences, and correspondent habits of complacency in and dependence upon him, habits of reverence and gratitude to God and habits of love and compassion to our fellow men and habits of temperance, recollection and self government will afford us a real and substantial pleasure. We may then exult in a consciousness of the favour of God and the prospect of everlasting felicity.

A Military Leader's Story

Our Old Testament story today is about Naaman, a military commander who suffered from leprosy. He was not Jewish. He was a citizen of the foreign nation, Aram. His nation was an enemy of Israel and he had won battles over Israel. Now the only thing that the military commander Naaman was powerless to accomplish was to cure his leprosy. In everything else, he had great authority and power. He had the power of command over his men. When he spoke, they obeyed. As a victorious military leader, he had the power to gain wealth. He was paid handsomely by the king and had acquired slaves on his raids. As a strong fighter for the nation, he had status among men. But when he took his armor off at night, he knew that he did not have the power to cure his ill health. Leprosy had taken over his body. If he had summoned local physicians and faith healers in town, they had not been able to help.

Now fortunately for him, his leprosy was also a concern for the God of Israel. So when the Lord saw Naaman's plight, his Maker sent in the troops to help out him out. First there was his unnamed slave who told her mistress that the God of Israel could cure him. Next there was the king of Israel, who, in his fear of God, denied having God's power. Then there was God's prophet, Elisha, who told him that all he had to do was to wash in the Jordan River seven times. And, finally there was Namaan's servant who knocked him off his high horse of arrogance with a good dose of common sense. "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more when all he said to you was, "Wash and be clean?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. That day Namaan experienced a healing that comes within the created order rather than by way of supernatural or magical means. He experienced being restored to health through people in the community who were

helping out with the healing work of the Lord. And, he experienced wholeness as he humbled himself before the power of God.

An International Leader's Hymn

Fred Kaan's widely published text was first sung at Pilgrim Church in Plymouth, England, at a service of worship marking Human Rights Day in 1965. It has been used for many subsequent occasions, including the twenty fifth anniversary of the United Nations.

'For the Healing of the Nations'

For the healing of the nations, God, we pray with one accord;
For a just and equal sharing of the things earth affords;
To a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom from despair your world release;
That, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in
peace;
Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope
increase.

All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned:
Pride of status, race, or schooling, dogmas that obscure your
plan
In our common quest for justice may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator God, have written your great name on human kind;
For our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind,
That by our response and service earth its destiny may find.