



A VIRTUAL MULTI-FAITH PRAYER

5pm, Sunday, 22nd March 2020

**Welcome: Imam Monawar Hussain, MBE DL
Founder, The Oxford Foundation**

Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Rahim – In the name of God, the Infinitely Good, the Most Merciful.

Welcome to Oxfordshire's Multi-Faith Virtual Prayer.

We are joined by:

Mr Tim Stevenson OBE, Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Oxfordshire

Cllr Craig Simmons, Lord Mayor of Oxford

The Rt Revd Bishop Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester

Penny Faust from Jewish Community

Jawaid Malik from Muslim Community

Gian Gopal from Hindu Community

Davinder Singh from Sikh Community

Satyadasa Waterstone from Buddhist Community

Philip Koomen from Baha'i Community

Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Mayor, Faith Leaders and Representatives, Attendees and those viewing this live stream.

Peace be upon you all.

Thank you to all of you for joining us and making this possible.

The United Kingdom and the global community, are going through an unprecedented period in history. The impact of measures to stop the rapid spread of the Coronavirus pandemic, have been profound. All our certainties, whether they be social or economic, have come to a sudden end. This is, for example, the first time in living memory, that many of us have not been able to participate in congregational worship, something that is at the very heart of all our traditions. It builds a sense of community and belonging, it's a means of keeping in touch and brings joy and nourishment, to our hearts.

Today's virtual multi-faith prayer therefore, is a response to our current circumstances. We seek to bring together, virtually, our diverse faiths, to offer prayer for the well-being of the human family, our beautiful country and may I say too, that we do so with integrity. Multi-faith prayer is not about diluting our differences or distinctiveness, but it is instead a recognition, first, of the rich diversity of spiritual paths that the human family choose to follow, and second, that the essence of our great traditions is human flourishing - to bring love, mercy, comfort and joy, to the hearts, of the human family.

I want to hold especially in my prayers and thoughts, all in position of

leadership, all in our health and public services – thank you for all that you are doing to save lives and to bring this terrible pandemic to an end.

Address by: Mr Tim Stevenson OBE

Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Oxfordshire

The next few months will be difficult for every one of us. The current crisis will result in major challenge and change in how we view the world and our individual parts in it. I would like to begin this special multi faith occasion with what Her Majesty the Queen said earlier this week: “Our nation’s history has been forged by people and communities coming together to work as one, concentrating our combined efforts with a focus on the common goal. In particular, we must be enormously thankful for the expertise and commitment of our scientists, medical practitioners and emergency and public services; but now more than at any time in our recent past, we all have a vitally important part to play as individuals - today and in the coming days, weeks and months”.

The instinctive response to this need around the country – with thousands of people voluntarily offering their time, expertise and support to those who will most need it in the days ahead – has already been remarkable.

But it is wider yet than our challenge in these islands. As Leo Varadkar, Taoiseach of Ireland said earlier this week: “We are in this together and to the people of China, Spain and Italy we must say “we are with you”. To all those living in the shadow of what is to come. “We are with you.” And we must say the same to all those whose belief, whose political stand is different from our own. This is a time for solidarity, for mutual support, for putting behind us conflict, violent disagreement and struggle both at home and looking outwards. For a wonderful and positive outcome of this difficult period would be a world more aware of our common humanity, our similarities and common interests, than we are of our differences.

And so we pray especially for the safety of all those involved in the front line of protecting us, and that all of us may have the understanding, the patience and the commitment, to support each other and the wisdom to look beyond the current challenge, to the reshaping of our lives in the world beyond.

Address by: Lord Mayor of Oxford, Councillor Craig Simmons

My thoughts go out to those essential workers who are continuing to deliver services at increased risk to themselves and to those suffering at home or in hospital.

We are in the midst of a pandemic that is challenging the world; our economy, our health services and our systems of governance. But it is also testing our resolve, our faith and our humanity. We are being asked to give up some of the very hard fought human rights enshrined since 1948 within the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights; such as the right of free movement (Article 13), the right of peaceful assembly (Article 20), the right to an education (Article 26), the right to participate in the cultural life of a community (Article 27) and, yes, for many the freedom to gather for religious services (Article 18).

We are being asked to give up these rights – the very fundamentals of what the United Nations calls the ‘global standard of rights and freedoms’ for the common good – to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. We are being asked by Government, by the scientists to trust them that this is what needs to be done. We being asked to trust them that these erosion of our fundamental rights and freedoms will last no longer than is necessary.

It is nothing less than an act of faith. One which challenges individuals and communities to take responsibility for doing the right thing based on science they may not understand and a virus they cannot see. This is why gathering such as this are so important. They remind us of our common humanity, our

collective faith and that the community is so much more powerful than any one individual.

Thank you.

Multi-Faith Prayers

The Rt Revd Bishop Colin Fletcher OBE, Bishop of Dorchester

Caring Father, just as you share our human joys, you share our fears. Your world - our world - is facing challenges few have experienced before. Regardless of class, faith, colour, income, or personal need, suddenly our world is for the first time united in uncertainty, and for many of us, fear. But we are also united in our resolve to defeat this new, common, unseen enemy. Everything we thought we knew about our world has been changed and no-one can be untouched by these unfolding events.

May we find inspiration, encouragement and comfort from the kindness of strangers, the steadfast love of our families and, for those of us who have faith, the assurance of your unceasing care.

For those who are sick, restore health.

For those who are frightened, bring calm.

For those who are confused, bring clarity.

For those who are lonely, bring companionship.

For those who are exhausted or overwhelmed, in body or spirit bring peace and restoration.

Father, remember us as we start each day, unsure of what lays ahead. Calm our fears and our imaginations and - when we reach out to you – may every one of us

find your hand and experience your presence in our lives so that at the end of the day we will be reassured that you have never once left our side.

This we ask in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our solace.
Amen.

Penny Faust from the Jewish Community

I am grateful to acknowledge the framework for much of this prayer which came last Friday from the Current Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.

Heavenly God, we turn to You at this time of deep global concern, to bestow Your mercy upon all the inhabitants of our vulnerable world, which is now so seriously afflicted.

Almighty God, who sustains the living with lovingkindness, supports the fallen and heals the sick, grant consolation to the bereaved families and send a speedy and complete recovery to all who have contracted the virus.

Bless with strength those who are suffering. Bless with resilience those in isolation. Bless with hope those who are despondent. Bless with wisdom all those who seek a cure and bless with compassion all those who offer comfort.

Bless the leaders of our nations. Give them and their advisors knowledge and foresight to act with wisdom and sincerity for the wellbeing of all whom they serve.

Bless the doctors, nurses, all healthcare professionals and key workers who tirelessly seek to heal and help those affected, while in so doing put themselves at risk.

Open our hearts in prayer and our hands in generosity to guarantee that the physical distance between us that this virus creates will be bridged through compassion and kindness.

Almighty God of healing and hope, at this time of heightened global awareness of our mutual interdependence, enable all of humankind to appreciate the strength that comes from being united in concern and love, rather than divided with hate and prejudice. As we look to the future, may You endow all people with the capacity to build and sustain societies of unity, tolerance, harmony and peace.

O God, our Rock and Salvation, lead us speedily from despair to hope, from fear to trust and from the dread of death to the celebration of life.

May this prayer of ours come before You at an auspicious time.

And may this be Your will,

Amen.

Psalm 121

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from where does my help come?

My help cometh from God, maker of heaven and earth, who will not let us lose our footholds.

For your Guardian does not sleep.

The Guardian of the earth neither slumbers nor sleeps.

The ever present God is your protection, your shade at your side.

The sun will not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Eternal One shields you against evil: and shelters your soul.

The Eternal One will guard your coming and going both now and for evermore.

Jawaid Malik from the Muslim Community

In the Name of Allah, The Most Kind, The Most Merciful

Oh Lord of the universe, we seek your Blessings and Mercy;

Lord, your love for your creation is 70 times greater than the love of a mother;

Lord, we know you never forsake us. Your Mercy is far greater than your wrath.
By Your Mercy and Benevolence, forgive us our shortcomings;

Lord, we seek Your Refuge from all calamities and serious illnesses. Protect us
all from Coronavirus and all other afflictions as You are the ultimate Protector;
Grant quick and complete recovery to all who have contracted this virus as You
are the ultimate Healer;

Enable us to look after and support the sick and needy as You are the ultimate
Enabler;

Grant us strength to bear this suffering and make it easy for us to deal with this
calamity;

Help us find a cure for this terrible disease as You are the ultimate Helper;
Help and bless our NHS staff and the emergency services and grant them
strength to bear with this enormous task;

Save our beautiful city, its people and our country;

Oh Lord, burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear;

This Islamic month of Rajab is known as the month of the universal waterfall of Divine Mercy; Have Mercy on us and all those who are suffering from any illness, problem or hardship. Relieve their difficulties and provide them with what they need, as You are the best of Providers;

Lord, have mercy on my brothers and sisters in faith and my brothers and sisters in humanity;

Lord our Creator, increase us in love for and mercy toward the sick, hungry, poverty-stricken, the lonely and oppressed wherever they are;

Lord, have mercy on everyone who is struggling financially. Relieve their suffering, help them pay off their debts, cover their expenses, and provide them with sustenance;

Oh Lord, Impossibility and possibility are merely concepts of our minds – to You nothing is impossible.

“Indeed distress has befallen me, and You are the Most Merciful of the Merciful”;

Oh Merciful of the Merciful, hear our pleas; You are All Hearing, All Knowing.

Aameen.

Gian Gopal from the Hindu Community

1. Om Bhoor Bhuvah Svah | Tats-a-vitur Varenyam, Bhargo Devasaya Dhimahi.
Dhiyo Yo-Nah Pracho-Dayaat !

O Lord, the giver of Life, Remover of pain and sorrow, Bestower of happiness and Creator of the Universe, thou art luminous, pure and adorable. We meditate upon thee and seek your inspiration and guidance in this time of immense anxiety and uncertainty.

2. Om Trayam-Bakam Yajaa-Mahe Sugandhim Pushti-Vardhanam | Urvaa-Rukmiva Bhandhnaan Mrtyor-Mukshiya Maamritaata |

O Sustainer of the world, Destroyer of illness and supporter of all, as a ripe fruit gets it release from its branch, so free us from disease and grant us long life.

3. Om Asato Ma Sad-Gamaya | Tamaso Ma Joytir-Gamaya | Mrytor Ma Amritam-Gamaya |

O Lord, Lead us from Untruth to Truth, from darkness to light and from illness to well-being.

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| 4. Om | <i>O Lord</i> |
| Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah | <i>May all beings be happy</i> |
| Sarve Santu Niramayah | <i>May all be free from Misery and Ill-health</i> |
| Sarve Bhadraani Pashyantu | <i>May all be in harmony and Friendship and</i> |
| Maakash-Chit Baagh-Bhavet | <i>May all be free from Pain</i> |

O Lord,

We seek your help in overcoming this pestilence that has infected the whole world.

May we all find the strength to stand together and support each other – young and old -through this difficult and uncertain period. May we come out of it with renewed strength and civility in all.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih, Om!!

O Lord may there be Peace in the World, Peace around me and Peace within Me.

Davinder Singh from the Sikh Community

Ik onkar. Sat nam. Karta purkh. Nirbho, Nir vair, Akaal Moorath, Ajooni
Sehbhang, Gurparsad

There is only one God Eternal truth is his name. He is the creator. Without fear. Without hate. Immortal without form. Beyond birth and death. Self-existent. By the Guru's grace.

We pray to vaheguru that the world has been unsettled due to the situation with Corona Virus. In every country, there have been so many deaths and so many families are in mourning over their loved ones.

We, as Sikhs, around the world are supporting anyone and everyone however we possibly can. There are Sikh charities coming together to help those who are unable to shop for whatever reason, by doing shopping for them and bringing it not only to their front door, but into their fridges and freezers. Gurdwaras (Sikh place of worship) are staying open to provide langar, which is free food for all and also delivering that to those in need.

We pray for the people who are working face to face with the virus especially in the health sector. We pray to keep them healthy and high morale while supporting one another.

Please help us with the blessing of chanting and remembering your name during this hard time we face. So no matter what is going on, we are in high spirits.

Sabhae Saajheevaal Sadhaaein Thoon Kisai N Dhisehi Baaharaa Jeeo ||3||

All share in Your Grace; none are beyond You. ||3||

Through your praises, we establish a bond with your court. Help us to overcome this hardship we are all facing.

VAHEGURU JI KA KHALSA

VAHEGURU JI KI FATEH !!

Satyadasa from the Buddhist Community

The Buddha often pointed to the uncertainty inherent in life. Plans fall apart and we naturally feel angry, upset and bewildered. His encouragement was always to look after our “heart and mind” as if it was the most precious jewel. Often we create fear and negativity out of uncertainty, but it can also be an opportunity to dig deeper into our inner resources. I think of Nelson Mandela guarding his mind in a prison cell all those years. How much poorer the world would be had he not, in that dreadful circumstance, cultivated qualities like forbearance, kindness, understanding, even gratitude and appreciation. So, hard though this is, perhaps there is a real opportunity to put into practice teachings from our various traditions. Speaking personally, wise teachings are easy to defer while the going is good. Drawing strength from our communities, maybe we can we find creative ways to look after each other and turn this difficulty into an opportunity, even on a global scale.

The words of the Buddha below call on a universal spirit of friendship and love, greater than our limited personalities and biases, a possibility lying within us like a hidden gem. When we emerge from this period, it will matter most what we have done with our hearts and minds.

"In order that I may be skilled in discerning what is good, in order that I may understand the path to peace,

Let me be able, upright, and straightforward, of good speech, gentle, and free from pride;

Let me be contented, easily satisfied, having few duties, living simply, of controlled senses, prudent, without pride and without attachment to nation, race, or other groups.

Let me not do the slightest thing for which the wise might rebuke me. Instead let me think:

“May all beings be well and safe, may they be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be, whether moving or still, without exception, whether large, great, middling, or small, whether tiny or substantial,

Whether seen or unseen, whether living near or far,

Born or unborn; may all beings be happy.

Let none deceive or despise another anywhere.

Let none wish harm to another, in anger or in hate.”

Just as a mother would guard her child, her only child, with her own life, even so let me cultivate a boundless mind for all beings in the world.

Let me cultivate a boundless love for all beings in the world, above, below, and across, unhindered, without ill will or enmity.

Standing, walking, seated, or lying down, free from torpor, let me as far as possible fix my attention on this recollection.

This, they say, is the divine life right here.”

[Metta Sutta (On Loving Kindness)]

Philip Koomen from the Baha’i Community

Oh God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart.

Illumine my mind. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand.

Thou art my Guide and my Refuge.

I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being.

O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me.

I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life.

O God! Thou art kinder to me than I am to myself.

I dedicate myself to Thee, O Lord.

Have patience – wait, but do not sit idle;

work while you are waiting;

smile while you are wearied with monotony;

be firm while everything around you is being shaken;

be joyous while the ugly face of despair grins at you;

speak aloud while the malevolent forces of the [...] world try to crush your mind;

Do not yield to the overwhelming power of tyranny and despotism.

Serve the cause of justice and freedom.

Continue your journey to the end.

The bright day is coming.

Oh God, Guide us

Protect us

Illumine the lamp of our hearts

And make us brilliant stars

Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful

Conclusion by Imam Monawar Hussain

Thank you for joining us for this virtual multi-faith prayer. Please keep safe and do please look out for those who are vulnerable, self-isolating, and lonely, in your communities. Through the aid of patience, prayer, love and care for each other, we will get through this.