

*“Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city; but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.”*

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Prayer does not stop bullets, it does not change policy. But it does, if we let it, change us.

If I thought my prayers could make it so, I would pray that everyone who picks up a gun today find that their hands are suddenly empty. Or rather, that their hands are suddenly overflowing instead with the thing they actually need: money, food, the respect of their peers, security, a safe place to sleep, a stable future, the opportunity to get free from whatever corner they find themselves backed into, thinking a gun is the only way out.

If I thought by my prayers alone I could make it so, I would pray that the legacy of violence, of poverty, of white supremacy, be lifted off the shoulders that continue to bear it in this nation.

If our prayers alone could make it so, then every gun carelessly or maliciously pointed at another human being would be transformed into anything, anything other than a gun.

Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, cannot mend a broken bridge or rebuild a ruined city. There is so much our thoughts and prayers cannot do, cannot change.

But what prayers do change are those who speak them, and those who hear them. They do change us. By turning our thoughts toward this, by refusing to look away, we invite ourselves to be changed by what we witness. And praying for that transformed world reminds us what it is we must fight toward. Reminds us that if what we want is a world without gun violence, we must act. Act to build a world without poverty, without neglect, without racist institutions or toxic gender expectations.

So let us pray, today, for action, for real change, and for ourselves to be transformed. May our eyes stay open and our hearts stay tender to the humanity behind the headlines. May we have the compassion to genuinely listen to those affected by gun violence. May we have the spine to do something about what their stories teach us.

In memory of those who are gone, in gratitude for the life we've been given, in hope that we will learn from our mistakes, all this we pray.

Amen