

Prayer for Workers' Memorial Day

By Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman

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Friends, let us bless.

Let us bless the workers.

Let us bless the workers who died too soon, who died because of negligence and apathy. Because the boss wanted to cut corners, because the corporation had to drive up profits, because no one cared, because time was short.

Let us bless the thousands of workers who died this past year across the nation.

We take a moment of silence.

Let us bless the millions of workers who have become injured at work or ill because of their jobs. Who were simply earning a living to feed their families. But who came home broken and ailing, cast aside, used up, no longer able to produce profit, their stories forgotten.

We take a moment of silence.

And let us bless the millions of undocumented immigrants, many of them workers, who have no legal protections or recourse, who are susceptible to exploitation, who die needlessly in the shadows.

We take a moment of silence.

In their memory I offer a Jewish prayer, El Malei Rachamim:

God, full of compassion, who dwells on high:
Grant peace beneath the shelter of Your presence
To these beloved souls.
Let them rest in the heights of the holy and pure
Who shine with the splendor of the heavens.
May they rest in the garden of Eden.
Please, Source of Mercy,
Guard them beneath the protection of Your wings
For all eternity.
Bind their souls in the bonds of life.
You are their inheritance.
May they rest in peace.
And let us say: Amen.

In Judaism, when someone dies we are commanded to remember. We say, "Let their memories be for a blessing."

We remember the workers, their contributions, their labor, their sweat, and their tears. We remember their will to survive.

And we say: Let their memories be for a blessing.

We remember the workers, their determination to provide food for their families, to give them shelter, to buy them clothing, to take them to the doctor.

And we say: Let their memories be for a blessing.

We remember the workers for who they were, unique beautiful souls, each with an individual story, with dreams of a better life.

And we say: Let their memories be for a blessing.

Source of Life, help us to take risks in the name of justice
To love our neighbors as ourselves,
To protect the immigrant and the stranger,
To act with strength, determination, and power,
To raise our voices,
To challenge prejudice, inequity, and oppression,
To create a world where no worker dies in vain.

We end our prayer with the words of the great Mother Jones: Let us “pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living.”

And we say, amen.