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- *Reaching for God to help others and yourself means all benefit*

The God for whom you reach is not only the subject for whom you reach but is also a part of the reaching itself. All human beings are engaged especially at this time in a kind of reaching. You reach for one another. You reach for the presence of others. Whether that presence is physical or otherwise, the reach is always there. You reach at times like this not just for your own comfort but in an attempt to provide comfort and peace to another.

The experience of human life for all encompasses the act of reaching. Some reach for personal fulfillment. Some reach for justice. Some reach for understanding. Some reach for various levels of peace of which we last spoke. Regardless of the purpose, the reaching is always present.

There are those who for a number of reasons may deny the reality that they are reaching. It may be very young children who don't think of it so much as reaching. It's just something that they feel. There are those who experience limitations or handicaps that prevent them from acknowledging that they are reaching, but that activity nevertheless takes place.

One form of reaching is simply prayer. Whenever you reach, you recognize that there is something that draws you beyond yourself and encourages that reaching. If you felt there was nothing outside of your own personal boundaries—physical, emotional, intellectual—there would be no need to reach. We have often said that when you pray for help, even when you are not convinced of the reality of God's presence, the mere act of prayer is an expression of uncertainty that is being surrounded by hope. When there is no hope, there is no impetus to reach.

If you reach out to another as an expression of love, that is an acknowledgment that love is being offered. It is not an empty expression. When you reach to another with compassion, you are not reaching in order to receive. You are reaching in order to give. That reaching is an outstretching of the heart. It is not an attempt to grasp something that is not present. The reaching is a gesture of inclusion.

Society is currently pulled in so many directions. Some of those directions relate directly to seeking balance and help, but another kind of seeking is the reach for justice. The justice is not simply an appeal for justice of self but more importantly a universal plea for Justice with a capital J. That embracing of others, other traditions, other identities, is truly a desire to wrap your spiritual arms around those who have suffered untold injustices.

The act of responding to the crying out for justice is a kind of prayer. It is a reaching outward of the heart to embrace another. When you reach with your arms, whether literally or figuratively, you are embracing an idea, a philosophy, a way of life, the principal of justice, the equality of nonjudgment, of balance—balance in health, balance in relationships. All are included in this embrace of the spirit.

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We often will say that you are being embraced by God. That may bring to mind the impression of arms pulling you inward to God, but the embrace of God carries with it an outreach that is far more comprehensive. God embraces all that exists. What does that mean? What does it imply? It implies and means that all that exists is significant. It means that all that exists matters. The relationships between people matter. The dignity of all life matters. For too long, humankind has been reaching outward but in a somewhat limited vision of what needs to be embraced.

Granted you cannot pray for every need of every human being, of every entity on Earth. Your prayers are more often focused on one concern or another. You pray for a society. You pray for a group of people. You pray for a geographic area. You pray in general terms for the dignity of life. But even those grand embraces are in themselves merely a microcosm of the outreach, the embrace, that we attach to the reality of God. When we understand fully that God is the energy that links and combines absolutely all that exists, then the magnitude of that reach, that embrace, that outstretching of spirit is fully beyond understanding. Despite that magnitude being so difficult to comprehend, it is nevertheless present.

The reach of God is comprised in part by your own outreaching. Whenever you extend your heart to others, you belong to that cosmic embrace, for your commitment to going beyond yourself belongs to the very fragment of reality that you can observe which comprises God's response. There are limits to how you can provide the support and loving embrace in full measure. That is beyond the power of any individual, but all individuals have within them a capacity to reach out.

The energy that is exchanged in the outreach flows in all directions. By giving of your heart, you are receiving through the heart. There are no one-way channels through which energy flows in whatever outreach you are engaged in. That energy fragment, filament of God's embrace, always flows in all directions simultaneously. It is not only an energy which is sent outward to the object of your outreach or back to you as the giver. It flows outward in every direction and impacts the entirety of God's creation. When you reach out to another with compassion and understanding, of course the other will benefit, but that energy of compassion is extended in all directions, meaning that all benefit by your outreach.

What is it that you can offer another? Most importantly, it is a sense of caring, of reinforcing the recognition that you and another are bound indelibly together. Your concerns for others in society may be expressed in many ways, but whatever means is employed in the outreach serves in its way to uplift, affirm, to give value, and to include a loving energy. When those moments in your life occur when you reach out not to give but to receive, that same transfer of energy is expressed and radiates in all directions from the giver, not just to you.

Each of you expresses in one way or another your respect for nature that exists beyond human form. That valuation of other life-forms is offered with love, compassion,

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and a commitment to its value, its importance, and as a creation of the spirit presence, God presence.

When those moments come in your own life, when you reach out and ask for help in so many words, you are not merely imploring others to assist you. Rather you are opening yourself to the assistance that is there. It may be a response to your outreach of arms that is invisible to you, but it is there.

Many in your world feel unrecognized, unvalued, or alienated. The response that is most important is the response that *you* choose. For some, it is a physical commitment. It could be demonstrating. It could be speaking. It could be taking other actions in support of others. It could be a prayerful acknowledgment of the sacredness of all. What is important here is the recognition that the reaching out is an act of affirmation.

If you reach out for your own needs, it is an affirmation that there is a response that is present from which you can draw comfort. When reaching out is a sending of your energy outward, it is an acknowledgment of the sacredness and importance of others. It is your recognition that you all are a part of the same whole, the same entity, that which has been created through the Spirit Center, God. The reach, therefore, is truly a sacred act, for you are affirming another, and you are affirming the existence of the possibility that God's help is always present.

When you reach out physically, your arms are open, and they are open to receive. They are not clasped together simply to grasp. God's reach is not a grasping, a pulling. God's reach is an embrace that is freeing. God's reach is an energy that strengthens. It does not control. It does not dominate. It does not limit the lives of others.

You experience your own particular pathway. For some distance along that pathway, you reach out for help, and at other points along the journey, you reach out to give, to embrace, to include, to affirm, to love. But at all times in your life, you are really reaching. Even when you feel comfortable about your life, even momentarily, there is a reach. It may not be expressed in specific words, but there is gratitude, an acknowledgment that in the midst of the push and pull, the giving and the receiving, there is a balance point where one may not feel deeply committed to giving or to expressing one's own needs. One simply is. But that balance occurs because of your reaching beyond yourself on many levels for many purposes.

Your lives are entwined with one another. We say this not just for those of you gathered at this moment, but this is a statement of the nature of all human life. You are all connected. You all have impact on one another. You reach out for help; you reach out to help. You reach out in anguish; you reach out in gratitude. You reach out in your concern for others. You reach out for a sense of peace. You reach out for the materializing of justice in your lives. Allow those gestures of the open arms to mean many things at many different stages on your life path.

Acknowledge the importance of your hands being open and not clasped shut. So many religious practices encourage the gesture of bringing hands together as a way of

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indicating a letting go of self-importance, of lowering oneself in the presence of a greater reality, and while this may have important symbolic meaning to many, we prefer to think of prayer as an opening of the hands to give, as an opening of the hands to receive. The open hands are a welcome. They are an open door, not a closed gate. There is no reason to feel that you must see yourself as somehow insignificant in the reality of God's presence, for you are part of that presence and therefore the gesture of being open is an embrace of that presence, an embrace of your own presence, an embrace of yourself, and an embrace of all others.

The reach of God is therefore universal. It is a gesture you participate in as you travel on your own pathway. So, find peace through your open arms. Find your neighbor through your open arms. Find your friends through your open arms. Find all those for whom you pray with your open arms.

We, your guides, embrace you in these extraordinary ways at all times and always with love.

Amen.