



## Society for Humanistic Judaism

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To: The Organizers of the Interfaith Healing Service in Boston

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist bombings at the Boston Marathon, the attention and sympathy of the entire nation were rightfully focused on the loss of lives and the suffering of the victims and their families. Now, however, we consider it appropriate to voice our disappointment about the denial of humanist representation at the community-wide memorial service that followed this tragic event.

The ceremony, which was attended by President Obama and Governor Patrick and aired on all the major television networks, took on a quasi-official cast. The exclusion of humanists and other nontheists who wished to participate meant that the voices of approximately one in five Americans went unheard at a devastating time. And this was despite the fact that Greg Epstein, Harvard University's humanist chaplain and an ordained rabbi in the Humanistic Judaism movement, repeatedly requested inclusion.

In the process of bringing comfort to the community at such a moment, it is important that no one be treated like an outsider. And this is particularly true when government officials are invited to attend or speak. They represent every citizen. When public memorial services exclude nontheists, we feel like second-class citizens in our own country. It is demeaning to be prevented from participating in the grieving process of the rest of the community and nation.

In the future, when tragedies strike, we hope that public memorial events will be expanded to embrace nontheists. This does not mean that we wish to alter the name or the essential nature of such a program. We simply want a seat at the table. A policy of inclusion is not only a matter of fairness but a benefit to society as a whole, for it will mean that we Americans are ready to embrace our diversity. The inclusion of nontheistic voices will allow a community to truly heal by removing those fractures that exclusionary events inevitably foster.

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