

Resources for Use in an Interfaith Memorial Service

Litanies, Prayers, Readings and Songs

An Interfaith Litany

“Ashes, Stones and Flowers”

(A litany by Rev. Patricia Pierce, pastor, Tabernacle Church modified by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director, The Shalom Center, Philadelphia)

(During the litany, the names of US soldiers and the names of Iraqi civilians who died in the Iraq war will be projected on a screen and will be voiced by two persons during the time of silence.)

Leader: For vibrant lives suddenly and shamelessly sacrificed we lift up the ashes of our loss, O Source of Life.

Congregation: For the lives that continue, haunted forever by the pain of absence, we lift up the ashes of our remorse, O Wellspring of Compassion.

Leader: For the conflagration of flames and nightmare images forever seared into our memories we lift up the ashes of our pain, O Breathing Spirit of the World.

Congregation: For the charred visions of peace and the dry taste of fear we lift up the ashes of our grief, O Infinite.

Leader: For all the deaths that have been justified by turning the love of God or country into fanatical arrogance, we lift up the ashes of our shame, O God.

Congregation: As we cast these ashes into the troubled water of our times, Transforming One, hear our plea that by your power they will make fertile the soil of our future and by your mercy nourish the seeds of peace.

Silence

Representatives of families of soldiers will come forward and light candles on the communion table or altar.

Leader: For the ways humanity pursues violence rather than understanding, we lift up the stones of our anger, O Breathing Spirit of the World.

Congregation: For the ways we allow national, religious and ethnic boundaries to circumscribe our compassion, we lift up the stones of our hardness, O Wellspring of Compassion.

Leader: For our addiction to weapons and the ways of militarism we lift up the stones of our fear, O Source of Life.

Congregation: For the ways we cast blame and create enemies we lift up the stones of our self-righteousness, O God

Leader: As we cast these stones into this ancient river, Transforming One, hear our plea:

Congregation: Just as water wears away the hardest of stones, so too may the power of your compassion soften the hardness of our hearts and draw us into a future of justice and peace.

Silence

Representatives of families of Iraqi civilians will come forward and light candles on the communion table or altar

Leader: For sowing seeds of justice to blossom into harmony, we cast these flowers into the river, O Source of Peace.

Congregation: For seeing clearly the many rainbow colors of humanity and earth, we cast these flowers into the river, O Infinite.

Leader: For calling us to life beyond our grieving, we cast these flowers into the river, O Breathing Spirit of the World.

Congregation: As we cast these flowers into this ancient river, Transforming One, hear our plea:

All: Just as water births life in a desert and gives hope to the wounded, so too may the power of your nurturing renew our commitment to peace.

From the Buddhist Tradition

The Four Noble Truths

Buddhist Text from the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta

“Now this is the noble truth concerning suffering. Birth brings pain. Decay is painful. Disease is painful. Death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful. Separating from things pleasant is painful. Any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, the five aggregates that spring from attachment, the conditions of individuality and their cause, are painful. This is the noble truth concerning suffering.

Now, this is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering. Truly, it is thirst or craving, causing the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, seeking satisfaction now here, now there. That is to say, it is the craving for the gratification of the passions, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for success in this present life. This is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering.

Now this, is the noble truth concerning the cessation of suffering. Truly it is the cessation, in which no passion remains, of this very thirst. It is the laying aside of, the getting rid of, the being free from, the harboring no longer of this thirst. This is the noble truth concerning the cessation of suffering.

Now this is the noble truth concerning the way that leads to the cessation of suffering. Truly it is this noble Eightfold Path: right views, right intentions, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the noble truth concerning the way that leads to the cessation of suffering.

From the Christian Tradition

A prayer by Archbishop Desmond Tutu

May God free you, may God guard you night and day.
May God set you in your right place, and may you spread out like the grass of a prairie.
Spread out like palm leaves; continue your walk, and may life be with you.
May God place you where God's stars are placed at dawn and night.
Spread out like water of a lake.
Be numerous like the feet of a millipede.

May God raise you up above everything.
Spread out like the water of a lake.
Be abundance that never ends, that never changes.
Be like a mountain.
Be like a camel.
Be like a cloud- a cloud that brings rain always.
And God promised that it would be so.

A Prayer for Peace in a Time of Fear, Anger and Violence

From the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Isaiah 65:17-25

Lord, somewhere deep inside we know that it's not supposed to be like this. People are not supposed to strap themselves with explosives and stroll into crowded markets. People are not supposed to be assassinated with missiles leaving places of prayer. People are not supposed to fly airplanes into buildings. People are not supposed to lose their loved ones on fields of battle. People are not supposed to dance over the charred remains of their enemies. Neighborhoods are not supposed to be turned into battle zones, children are not supposed to be casualties, and war is supposed to be the last resort, if even then.

It's the Garden that we miss, Lord; it's the Garden that we need. We carry its memory; we hum its melody; we mourn its absence. The echo of Eden is peace. It's faint, but we still hear it. The temptation to hate, to seek revenge in the guise of justice, to let our anger and fear stake us into the descending spiral of violence is almost irresistible. We all want to be safe. We all want to be secure. And we think that it's force that will deliver our safety and security. So we put our trust in chariots, and we give ourselves to princes, and we place our confidence in the strength of our own feeble arms, and then we're surprised by wars and the rumor of wars. So God of Peace, teach us another way; teach us the ways of peace -

Let us know the peace that we have with you because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us (Romans 5:1).

By Your indwelling Spirit in our hearts, cultivate the fruit of your presence, one of which is peace (Galatians 5:22).

Just as in Christ you broke down the walls of hostility that used to keep us separate from each other, leaving peace in their place, so let Jesus be our peace in all of our relationships. (Ephesians 2:11ff).

Let your daughters and sons be known in this world as peacemakers (Matthew 5:9); use us as your ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20).

And as the angels sang of peace on earth on the day the Prince of Peace was born, so inspire us now to beat our swords into plowshares and to lean into that day when the lion sleeps with the lamb and your children study war no more.

Plant a seed of peace in New York and in Kabul, in Washington D.C. and in Baghdad, in Madrid and in Morocco, in Gaza and in Jerusalem, over there and right here, in them and in us, and let that Garden of shalom we remember sprout and bloom, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ who is our peace. Amen.

From the Hindu Tradition

A Prayer:

May the winds, the oceans, the herbs, the nights and days, the mother earth, the father heaven, all vegetation, the sun, be all sweet to us.

Let us follow the path of goodness for all times, like the sun and the moon moving eternally in the sky.

Let us be charitable to one another.

Let us not kill or be violent with one another.

Let us know and appreciate the points of view of others.

And let us unite. May the God who is friendly, benevolent, all-encompassing, measurer of everything, the sovereign, the lord of speech, may He shower His blessings on us...

Oh Lord, remove my indiscretion and arrogance; control my mind.

Put an end to the snare of endless desires.

Broaden the sphere of compassion and help me to cross the ocean of existence.

From the Upanishads

“Lead us from unreality to reality;

Lead us from darkness to light;

Lead us from death to life.”

From the Islamic Tradition:

Excerpt From A Prayer for Peace

Praise be to the Lord of the
Universe who has created us and
Made us into tribes and nations,
That we may know each other, not that
We may despise each other.
And trust God, for the Lord is the one that
Heareth and knoweth all things.
And the servant of God,
Most gracious are those who walk on
The Earth in humility, and when we
Address them, we say "peace."

From a Muslim's daily prayer

Oh God, You are Peace.
From You comes Peace,
To You Returns Peace.
Revive us with a salutation of Peace,
and lead us to your abode of Peace.

From the Jewish Tradition

Micah 4:1,3-4

Lo yisa goi el goi cherev lo yilmedu od milchama

In the days to come,
The Mount of Adonai's House shall stand firm above the hills.
The peoples shall gaze upon it with joy.
They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
nor ever again shall they train for war.
Then everyone shall sit under their own grapevine or fig tree
with no one to disturb them.

A Prayer for Peace: Sim Shalom

(From Gates of Prayer, CCAR, 1975, page 695)

Sim shalom tovah u'vracha chen v'chesed v'rachamim alienu v'al cal Yisrael amecha

Grant us peace, Your most precious gift, O Eternal Source of peace, and give us the will to proclaim its message to all the peoples of the earth. Bless our country, that it may always be a stronghold of peace, and its advocate among the nations. May contentment reign within its borders, health and happiness within its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship among the inhabitants of all lands, and may the love of Your name hallow every home and every heart. Blessed is the Eternal God, the Source of peace.

From the Native American Tradition:

A Litany for the Four Directions

Written by Jay C. Rochelle

Leader: Let us give thanks for the East, for the ancient hills and valleys and streams without end, for the green Atlantic from the reaches of Maine to the Florida Keys, for larch and hemlock, for black bear and mountain trout, for cardinals and eastern bluebirds, for heat in the hayfields of late August:

Response: We bless you, O God, for the East.

Leader: Let us give thanks for the West, for soaring mountains and searing deserts, for waters roaring into the Pacific Ocean, for Columbia River salmon, snow buntings and western meadowlarks, for ponderosa and Jeffrey pine, for the mists of the Oregon coast and for the Olympic peninsula:

Response: We bless you, O God, for the West.

Leader: Let us give thanks for the North, for the bright band of prairie and wheatfields stretching across the land, for the jayhawk and the loon, for the badlands of the Dakotas and the lakes of Minnesota, for northern pike and steeleye, for winding two-lane blacktops in the heart of Wyoming.

Response: We bless you, O God, for the North

Leader: Let us give thanks for the South, for the broad Mississippi delta and the great Smokey Mountains, for the bayous of Louisiana, for magnolia trees, for the kiskadee and egret, for catfish and parrotfish and for the cotton and the colors on the sands and strands of the southland:

Response: We bless you, O God, for the South.

A Cheyenne Prayer

Let us know peace.

For as long as the moon shall rise,
For as long as the rivers shall flow,
For as long as the sun will shine,
For as long as the grass shall grow,
Let us know peace.

From the Shinto Tradition

O Most High, help to bring thy Light into the darkened conditions of the world!
Be gracious to us thy humble servants and bless us with illumination as to that which is Divinely relevant to the fulfillment of thy will!
O Most High, inspire thy servants throughout the world to further efforts towards leading back thy children who are led astray to the right way, and to live and act on the faith of what has been taught by the great founders of the religions!
Bless all spiritual leaders with thy power and enable them to give help, joy, comfort and reassurance to those suffering, to whom they minister!

From the Sikh Tradition

May the kingdom of justice prevail!
May the believers be united in love!
May the hearts of the believers be humble, high their wisdom,
and may they be guided in their wisdom by the Lord.

O Khalsa, say "Wahiguru, Glory be to God!" . . .
Entrust unto the Lord what thou wishest to be accomplished.
The Lord will bring all matters to fulfilment:
 Know this as truth evidenced by Himself.

From the Taoist Tradition: By Lao Tzu

I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others.
Be gentle, and you can be bold; be frugal, and you can be liberal;
avoid putting yourself before others, and you can become a leader of men.
Gentleness brings victory to him who attacks, and safety to him who defends.
Those whom Heaven would save, it fences round with gentleness.
The greatest conquerors are those who overcome their enemies without strife.

From the Zoroastrian Tradition

With bended knees, with hands outstretched,
do I yearn for the effective expression of the holy spirit
working within me:

For this love and understanding, truth and justice;
for wisdom to know the apparent from the real
that I might alleviate the sufferings of men on earth. . . .

God is love, understanding, wisdom and virtue.

Let us love one another, let us practice mercy and forgiveness,
let us have peace, born of fellow-feeling. . . .

Let my joy be of altruistic living, of doing good to others.

Happiness is unto him from who happiness proceeds to any other
human being.

RESPONSE:

We will practice what we profess.