

Circle of Peace – Interfaith Address
Rabbi Debra Kolodny
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I've had the blessing to practice several of the world's great spiritual traditions. I've noticed that many have a form of call and response in their practice. Hindu or Hebrew Kirtan, responsive readings, the declaration of Ameyn.

In the heights of prayer, in our most vulnerable and available state we call out to G!d to Mystery, to one another.

Why is this practice so common? It seems that it reflects an essential truth about our humanity. When we are bursting with joy we want to see our delight mirrored in the eyes of another. When times are scary or confusing or painful beyond measure, as they were 10 years ago at the twin towers, in a field in Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon, we needed to know that we were not alone.

And when we call out and hear a response, we feel some measure of comfort, some reduction in fear, and over time, the more we experience response, the closer we move to wholeness. Shalem, from the same root as Shalom, peace.

In this wholeness, born from loving response, we experience an essential truth of Creation. We need one another. We are ezer cnegdo to one another-help mates. And when we open to one another, free of fear, we actualize an intention of our Creator. That we complete one another.

Of course it is not just the form of prayer that teaches us this. The words of our sacred texts do too. When we experience fear and despair, Jew and Christian alike could turn to Psalm 23:

Gam ki elech b'gei tzalmavet, lo, lo ira ra. (2x)
Lo, lo lo...ira ra ki atah imadi

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. No, no, I will not fear, because you are with me.

And then what? With what do I replace my fear and despair? Jewish holy text offers the following response, over and over again:

Hezekiah said, "Great is peace, for every commandment is written, "if". If such a thing occurs to you, you must do the commandment. But about peace it is different. There it is written, "seek peace and pursue it", which means seek peace at the place where you are, and if you do not find it, seek it in other places."

Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace.

R. Jehoshua of Sachnin said: Great is peace. All the benedictions and prayers conclude with "peace."

Said R. Jehoshua b. Levi: The Holy Blessed One said to Israel... Pray for peace and I will forgive you, as it is written [Ps. 122. 6]: "Pray ye for the peace of Jerusalem." Therefore the one who loves peace, runs after peace, offers peace, and answers peace, the Holy Blessed One will make that one inherit the life of this world and the life of the world to come, as it is written [Ps. 38. 11]: "But the meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves because of the abundance of peace."

Talmud, Tractate Gitten, The whole of torah is for the purpose of promoting peace.

We cry out in fear, and psalms respond to comfort us.
We ask for what is next, and holy writings guide us to peace.

Psalm 122

Because of my brothers and friends

Because of my sisters and friends

Please let me ask, please let me say, peace to you

This is the house, the house of the Lord I wish the best for you (2x)