

CLOSING CANDELIGHT SERVICE

The ecumenical conference closed on Sunday afternoon with an interfaith candlelight service in the main Dharma room of the Providence Zen Center, attended by some 150 people. Representing a wide spectrum of religious traditions, the presenters filed in and lit their individual candles from the main candle on the altar, then placed their candles in an array around the main candle. Moderator David Sullivan introduced each person as the candles were lit. Representatives from the major traditions present at the conference offered short rites. as follows:

Representing the Jewish tradition, Rabbi James Rosenberg: A person should put all his strength into the words, proceeding from letter to letter with such concentration that he loses awareness of his bodily self. It then seems to him that the letters themselves are flowing into one another. This uniting of the letters is his greatest joy. This joy is felt as two human bodies come together, how much greater must be the joy of this union in spirit.

In prayer, seek to make yourself into a vessel for God's presence. God, however, is without limit, ANSOF, endless is his name. How can any finite vessel hope to contain the endless God? Therefore see yourself as nothing. Only one who is nothing can contain the fullness of Shakinah, of the divine presence.

There are two rungs of service that a person can come to know. The first is called Katnut, the lesser service. In this state you may know that there are many heavens encircling you, that the earth on which you stand is but a tiny point, and all the world is nothing before Ansof, the endless God. But even knowing all of these things, you yourself cannot ascend. This is still Katnut, the lesser service. It is of this state that the prophet says, "From afar God appears to me." But the one who serves God in God-lut, the greater service, takes hold of himself with all his strength and his mind soars up, breaking through the heavens all at once, rising higher, higher even than the angels.

Representing the Sufi tradition, Nancy Bara-Norton: The essence of our practice in Sufism is recalling the one and only being, the presence of the one and only being. I would like to read to you some poetry that expresses the emotion of order, of our path. I would like to preface that with the statement that we often use the language of love. We use the terms "lover" and "beloved" to express the one traveling out into the many, and the many returning to the one. "Every form I see is thine own form, my lord.

Every sound I hear is thine own voice.
In the perfume of the flowers I perceive the fragrance of thy spirit.
In every word spoken to me I hear thy voice, my Lord.
All that touched me is thine own touch.
In everything I taste I enjoy the savor of thy delicious spirit.
In every place I feel thy presence, beloved.
In every word that falleth on my ears, I hear thy message.
Everything that toucheth me thrilleth me with the joy of thy kiss.
Wherever I roam, I see thee.
Wherever I reach, I find thee.
Wherever I look, I see thy glorious vision.
Whatever I touch, I touch thy beloved hand.
Whomsoever I see, I see thee in his soul.
Whoever ought giveth me, I taketh from thee.
Whomever I give, I humbly offer it to thee.
Whomsoever I call, I call on thee.
When we are face to face, beloved, I do not know whether to call me thee, or thee me.
I see myself when thou art not before me.
When I see thee, myself is lost to view.
I consider it good fortune when thou art alone with me.
But when I am not there at all, I think it is the greatest blessing."

Representing the Christian tradition, Episcopal Bishop George Hunt: For the Christian, the fullness of our faith is understood as being totally possessed and totally inhabited by Jesus of Nazareth. One must be totally empty in order to be totally filled. Reading from a letter from one who follow-

ed Jesus of Nazareth: "My dear friends, this command I am writing you is not new. It is the old command, the one you have had from the very beginning. The old command is the message you've already heard. However, the command I now write you is new, because its truth is seen in Christ. Its truth is also seen in you, for the darkness is passing away and the real light is indeed already shining. Whoever says he is in the light, and yet hates his brother, is in the darkness to this very hour. Whoever loves his brother, lives in the light, so there is nothing in him that will cause someone else to stumble or fall. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness. He walks in it and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has made him blind.

"Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. And whoever loves is a child of God. Whoever does not love, does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is. It is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

"Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another."

And Jesus himself said, "I am come that you might have life and that you might have it in all its abundance."

St. Francis' Prayer for Peace: Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love.
Where there is anger, pardon.
Where there is discord, union.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.



photo by Eugene Richards

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Representing the Hindu tradition, Shuma Shakravati: Brothers and sisters in the one reality, it is my profound privilege to share with you a few prayers from the ancient tradition of India. This particular prayer was composed 5000 years ago in Sanskrit.

The translation of the Sanskrit text is as follows:

"May there be peace in heaven.
May there be peace in the midspace.
May there be peace on the earth.
Peace upon the waters,
Peace upon the trees and the forest,
Peace for the healing herbs,
Peace for those who dwell in the universe everywhere.
May all be peaceful.
Peace, peace, peace."

I don't think that one as a finite individual can have the strength or the audacity to heal the world. But as instruments of the one reality we can light the candle of our own being, which is a spark of the great reality. We can all light the candle of our being in celebration, in resonance, and in a profoundly joyful and humble spirit of gratitude and fellowship. It is indeed the grace of the one reality emanating through each and every one of us that makes this gathering possible. It is true, that his, her, that, whatever you wish to name the one reality

—the instruments are many, the paths are many, and yet it is my profound belief that the source is one. The roads are many, leading to the one reality.

In conclusion, please allow me to offer a prayer that was composed by a mystic, a lover of truth, the founder of the Vedanta Centre. The first prayer was composed 5,000 years ago. The second one, in the same spirit and the same tradition, was

"From hopelessness a new energy is created from within, and an ability to redescribe (one's) experience."

Sister Vilma Seelaus

composed 50 years ago, and yet truth is timeless. Swami Paramananda, the founder of the Vedanta Centre in Cohasset and elsewhere, composed the following prayer:

"That one who is the mother, father, friend, beloved, companion and guide, one in all, all in one, surround and protect us with love and blessings. May that one who is the father in heaven of the Christians, Eloheem of the Jews, Allah of the Moslems, Ahuramazda of the Zoroastrians, the one truth reality of the Buddhists, Chang-di of the Chinese, Brahmin, Ishwar, Shakti of the Hindus, may that one reality protect and surround all with peace and blessings. Peace, peace, peace be unto us and unto all living beings everywhere."

Representing the Native American traditions, Barbara Dubois: Our ancestors on this continent that we call Turtle Island knew that each one of us was connected with every one of the others of us. The grass people and the rock people and the sky people and the bird people, the people who

mind." So how are these different, these three minds—lost mind, one mind, clear mind?

A boyfriend and his girlfriend are enjoying themselves, when a thief appears. "Give me money!" he orders. They scream, "Oh please help us!" and lose their minds. But if you chant Kwan Seum Bosal and a bad man appears and says, "Give me money!" you can answer, "How much do you want?" "Shut up, just give it to me!" "OK, here it is, no problem." But when he is leaving, you can say to him, "Keep a clear mind, OK? In this world cause and effect are very clear. Someday you will go to jail. When that happens, try Kwan Seum Bosal, then you will have no difficulty." "Shut up!" he may yell. But someday when he does go to jail, perhaps he will remember and try Kwan Seum Bosal, and be saved.

So Kwan Seum Bosal means perceive world sound with great love and great compassion. We will try it briefly.

(Hitting a wooden moktak to mark the rhythm, Zen Master Seung Sahn led the gathering for several minutes of chanting "Kwan Seum Bosal.")

"Thank you very much. Now we have become one mind, and you can perceive your sound. When you return to your true self, from moment to moment it is possible to keep your correct situation, your correct function and your correct relationship. But first you must take away your opinion, your condition and your situation, and return to your true self. Then you will find your correct idea, correct function, correct situation. If you have no idea, your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body—can all see correctly, hear correctly, smell correctly, taste correctly, do correct actions and think correctly. We call that love and compassion. Thank you.

(Following these talks and prayers, the moderator called for the gathering to light their individual candles "as a symbol of our common prayer for peace." When all the candles were lit, everyone joined in reciting the following prayer.)

"If I have done anything to hurt or offend another being, through word, thought or deed, I ask for forgiveness. Likewise I forgive any being who may have hurt or offended me through word, thought or deed.

May I be happy, may I be peaceful, may I be free from suffering, may I love other people. May this entire world find lasting peace.

May you be happy, may you be peaceful, may you be free from suffering, may you love other people. May this entire world find lasting peace.

May all beings be happy, may all beings be peaceful, may all beings be free from suffering, may all beings love each other. May this entire world find lasting peace."

(The assembly remained standing and joined in several minutes of silent meditation "on the light we are holding before us." The closing prayer was offered by moderator David Sullivan.)

"May we through our mind-heart extend this hope to the entire world. I would now ask you to extinguish your candle by bringing the light inside yourself, and then out into the rest of the world. I would like everybody to exchange an appropriate gesture of peace with your immediate neighbors in the gathering. Peace to you all.

On behalf of the members of the family of the Providence Zen Center, I would like to thank all of you for coming and participating in this service. May you find the power to bring peace and joy to all the beings of the world. Go in peace." □

Representing the Buddhist tradition, Zen Master Seung Sahn: Just now the candle is burning. It gets shorter and shorter and soon will disappear. So the Diamond Sutra says, all formations are impermanent. If you view all appearances as non-appearance, you can see your true nature. In our tradition we have chanting meditation, a form of prayer. We chant the words "Kwan