

Eichah for my city and maybe yours: Shevat 5782 Edition

Some words to share in grief, in prayer, and in action.

Based loosely on the opening of Lamentations

Originally written around #CloseTheCamps observances, Aug 10-11, 2019 (Tisha B'av 5779). Adapted most recently 1/3/22

Alas! How lonely sits the city

Once great with joyful people!
New horrors fill horizons now
while old pain never left
Each new loss diminishes
the streets themselves bereft

Bitterly we weep all night

cheeks wet with tears unseen
If we are to join together,
we must widen this choir of woe
When some cries are background noise
what's the meaning of "friend" and "foe"?

City crying out with loss:

six-year-old child shot to death
joining a list, far too long,
of youth killed in past years.
Community grief so deep for some
while others escape most tears.

Down our roads, more peril

desolation, violence, fear
systems that crush and jail
separate, cage, and hate
Borders come in many shapes
Too often closed, that welcome gate

Evidence mounts. But do we act?

ICE camps remain; racism persists.
Policing prospers, yet safety eludes
Some thrive, while too many do without.
Must we ignore some of our truths
in chasing a joint goal to shout?

Forging coalition is struggle, tougher in anguish.

Inside affliction, can we hear another cry?
It is painful and complex, but we must keep trying
trying to heed the whole sound
I know you can hear it, God once declared loudly:
that voice of a sibling crying up from the ground

-- V. Spatz songeveryday.org rereading4liberation.com
Background and data sources follow

Sixty-nine people died living on DC streets this year; of those, 21 had housing vouchers but still no home.



The dead include a colleague's brother, while others I know struggle for basic housing and food and health needs.

In our name, DC cleared encampments, destroying vulnerable people's few possessions, in order to "beautify" or permit construction. Cleared areas now house concrete barriers.

Officials responded to complaints on behalf of incarcerated J6 participants, most of whom are white, declaring conditions in DC Jail unacceptable; local people, on behalf of mostly Black inmates, have complained about conditions for years. **Current DC inmates remain imperiled.** Many DC prisoners are moved to facilities far from family, friends, and legal support. Violence of all kinds is widespread within jails. **My neighbor was killed in a BOP facility far from family in December.**

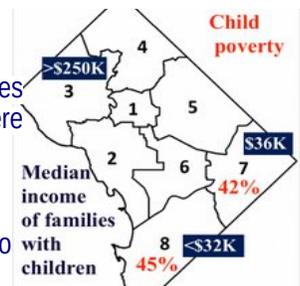
Our city experienced 233 homicides or police killings this year, 193 were gun deaths. **Ten children were killed.** These and other violent crimes leave trauma upon trauma in their wake. **I am regularly one degree of separation from these losses.**

Police in DC killed eight people this year, all Black men with one exception: one white person was shot inside the Capitol while attempting to gain access to the House chamber as part of the J6 insurrection. Every loss in my name breaks my heart, and **one of the dead was an acquaintance's nephew.**

MPD terrorizes Black communities, detaining even children, and quite successfully spreads evil tales about the people most at risk. **People I love are at risk and regularly harmed.**

ICE continues to book over 8000 individuals each month. More than 10,000 people contracted Covid in detention. Thousands were deported, contributing to global spread. My personal circle does not include those most affected, but still I grieve.

Median income disparity in families with kids is 8X, west to east, where childhood poverty is 42-45%. East of the river loses 3-8X more infants and mothers than west. Educational outcomes continue to follow wealth. **The toll is heavy.**



If we do not grieve, what are we? If we cannot grieve and still act, who will?

More on "Eichah for my city and maybe yours: Shevat 5782 Edition"

Data and more background: <https://pffcdc.org/> <http://saythisname.wordpress.com>
 <https://dcjusticelab.org/> <https://dckidscount.org/> <https://www.vera.org>

Some related prayers, meditations:

A meditation for readers of the Book of Exodus:

When Pharaoh tells the people of *Mitzrayim* to “cast (off) [*tashlikhuhu*]” the baby boys, do we ask, horrified: How could any people behave as Pharaoh directs?!

We fail to acknowledge that we are those people. We behave as Pharaoh directs. All the time.

Consider Adele Berlin’s note on the verb used here (*Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, URJ, 2008). Berlin points out that the same verb is used when Hagar [*v’tashleikh*] Ishmael under the bush (Gen 21:15); the verb means that Hagar left, or abandoned, Ishmael -- rather than that she “tossed” him. Berlin cites others examples from Tanakh of the verb used in this way. She adds a comparison with ancient Greek practice of leaving baby girls on hillsides to die out of sight of the parents, saying that here, on the water, as on the hillsides:

“The predictable — but not immediate — result would be the baby boy’s death.”

In how many ways is the predictable -- if not immediate -- result of our actions, inactions, and spending the suffering and death of so many? -- V. Spatz

"A Litany for Those not Ready for Healing" By Dr. Yolanda Pierce

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a bandaid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.....

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

-- full prayer at this site (<https://uuwestport.org/a-litany-for-those-not-ready-for-healing-by-dr-yolanda-pierce/>)

"A prayer service for the elimination of racism"

Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbor. Enable us to see the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world and ourselves. This we pray.

-- From a prayer service organized by [Sisters of Mercy of the Americas](#)

Psalm 30. Psalm 139. Memorial prayers for all who are lost to predictable -- if not immediate -- results.