Mourning Black Lives and Police Violence

a JFREJ ritual toolkit
This toolkit is an offering of prayer, ritual, and action for mourning Black lives lost to police violence and racism. It is structured after the following Jewish phases of mourning, acknowledging the natural course of grief and bereavement:

**Shiva** *The first seven days following the burial of the deceased*

**Shloshim** *The first thirty days following the burial of the deceased*

**Yahrzeit** *The anniversary of the deceased*

**Yizkor** *A moment to remember the deceased during Jewish Holidays*

The intention of this toolkit is to provide both immediate support for the bereaved as well as sustained practices to honor the memory of Black Lives lost through suggested offerings of prayer, ritual, and action. The prayers and rituals listed are offerings for Jewish communities to incorporate into their communal prayer services. Please adapt these offerings in ways that are most meaningful for your community.
PRAYER

*El Maleh Rahamim* with the inclusion of names of Black people lost to racism (*Appendix 1*)

*Kaddish* with the inclusion of names of Black lives we mourn (*Appendix 2*)

RITUAL

Light a *Yahrzeit* candle in your home and/or communal prayer spaces.

*Kriyah* is a physical embodiment of mourning by tearing ribbon or clothing. Tear a cloth when these tragedies occur at an appropriate space in services, perhaps before reciting *Kaddish* or *El Maleh Rahamim*.

ACTION

Make a Shiva call to Black families and communities in mourning. Find out where to send food to or make donations for food to be delivered to the families in mourning.

Organize a 7-day fundraising drive for bail funds and mutual aid funds.

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PRAYER

Psalm 23 (*Appendix 3*)

*El Maleh Rahamim* with the inclusion of names of Black people killed by police/lost to racism (*Appendix 1*)

*Kaddish* with the inclusion of names of Black lives we mourn (*Appendix 2*)

RITUAL

Light a *Yahrzeit* candle in your communal prayer space.

ACTION

Host a day of learning in memory of the Black lives we mourn. Share stories of the people who have died to illuminate their humanity. We often lose sight of the lives and stories behind the names.
El Maleh Rahamim with the inclusion of names of Black people killed by police/lost to racism (Appendix 1)

Kaddish with the inclusion of names of Black lives we mourn (Appendix 2)

Unetaneh Tokef for Black Lives (Appendix 4)

Light a Yahrzeit candle in your communal prayer space.

Kriyah is a physical embodiment of mourning by tearing ribbon or clothing. Tear a cloth when these tragedies occur at an appropriate space in services, perhaps before reciting Kaddish or El Maleh Rahamim.

Create a calendar of Yahrzeit dates to honor Black lives lost. (See Appendix 5 for a list of dates)

Organize a memorial day by volunteering or fundraising a drive for bail funds and mutual aid funds (or other appropriate funds).

In tradition with pledging tzedakah in the Yizkor prayers, consider making a donation to organizations in memory of Black Lives.
1. **EL MALEH RAHAMIM** with the inclusion of names of Black people lost to racism

Exalted, compassionate God, grant perfect peace in your sheltering presence, among the holy and pure, whose radiance is like the heavens, to the souls of all the Black people killed by police or by racist vigilantes: men, women, and children. May their memory be a blessing, and may they rest in paradise. God of mercy, may they find eternal shelter beneath your sheltering wings, and may their souls be bound up in the bond of life. God is their portion. May they rest in peace. And let us say: Amen.

*(from Siddur Lev Shalem)*
2. **KADDISH** with the inclusion of names of Black people lost to racism

This Kaddish, traditional Jewish prayer said for those who have died and to bring comfort to those in mourning, is adapted following a model that was created to uplift those lost in the Holocaust/Shoah. The Kaddish itself is in ancient Aramaic (not Hebrew) and is transliterated. As a resource, [here](#) is one well researched, but not comprehensive, list of names of numerous Black people killed by the police.

Adapt the example below for what is of most meaning in your community:

Yitgadal v’yitkadash George Floyd
sh’mei raba Breonna Taylor
B’alma di v’ra chirutei Tony McDade
v’ymlich malchutei, Jamel Floyd
b’chayeichon u’v’yomeichon Sandra Bland
u’v’chayeichon echol beit Yisrael, Eric Garner
baagala u’v’iz’man kariv. Philando Castile
V’im’ru: Michael Brown
Amen.

Y’hei sh’mei raba m’varach, Bettie Jones
l’alam ul’almei almaya. Tamir Rice
Yitbarach v’yishtabach Akiya Gurley
v’yitpaar v’yitromam v’yitnasei, Mary Truxillo
v’yitbadar v’yitaleh Tyree Crawford
v’yit’halal India Kager
sh’mei d’Kud’sha Lamontez Jones
B’rich Hu, Billy Ray Davis
l’eila min kol birchata v’shirata, Janet Wilson
tushb’chata v’nechemata, Victor Manuel Larosa
daamiran b’alma. Alteria Woods
V’im’ru: Alton Sterling
Amen.

Y’hei sh’lama Atatiana Jefferson
raba min sh’maya, Akia Gurley
v’chayim aleinu Walter Scott
v’al kol Yisrael. Demarcus Semer
V’im’ru: Natasha McKenna
Amen.


May the one who creates peace on high bring peace to us and to all people. And we say: Amen.
3. PSALM 23

A psalm of David.
The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me to water in places of repose;
He renews my life;
He guides me in right paths as befits His name.

Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness,
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.
You spread a table for me in full view of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my drink is abundant.
Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for many long years.

4. UNETANEH TOKEF FOR BLACK LIVES

by Imani Chapman

Each day we hazard our Black lives in the Court of the White World
We know our worth
Yet the white world is judge-self-appointed
We pass before you to be counted
12.5 million bodies stolen
1.8 million mercifully avoided your shores
Stolen shores, stolen land
10.7 million arrived unsafely
...times 401 years
...times infinite human indignities
...times 35 of a human being
We now number 47.8 million

In the morning it is written and by curfew it is sealed
• Who shall die while jogging (#AmaudArbery)
• Who shall die while relaxing in the comfort of their home (#BothamJean #AtatianaJefferson)
• Who shall die while seeking help after a car crash (#JonathanFerrell #RenishaMcBride).
• Who shall die while holding a cellphone (#StephonClark).
• Who shall die while decorating for a party (#ClaudeReese).
• Who shall die while leaving a party (#JordanEdwards #SeanBell)

• Who shall die while enjoying music (#JordanDavis).
• Who shall die while selling music… trying to may a way outta no way (#AltonSterling).

• Who shall die while sleeping (#AiyanaJones)
• Who shall die while worshipping the Lrd (#Charleston9).

• Who shall die while for a traffic violation (#SandraBland).
• Who shall die while coming from the store (#MikeBrown and #TrayvonMartin).

• Who shall die while playing cops and robbers (#TamirRice).
• Who shall die while lawfully carrying a weapon (#PhilandoCastile, #FreddieGray).

• Who shall die while on the shoulder of the road with car problems (#CoreyJones #TerrenceCrutcher).
• Who shall die in the first hours of the new year (#OscarGrant).

• Who shall die while shopping at Walmart (#JohnCrawford).
• Who shall die while cashing a check in peace (#YvonneSmallwood).
• Who shall die while reading a book in their own car (#KeithScott).

• Who shall die while taking a walking with their stepfather (#CliffordGlover).
• Who shall die while reaching for their wallet (#AmadouDiallo).

• Who shall die while running away (#WalterScott).
• Who shall die while asking a cop a question (#RandyEvans).

• Who shall die while begging for their life, a breath (#EricGarner #GeorgeFloyd).
• Who shall die by the effects of supremacy, greed, and apathy …who by beast, indeed

“But repentance, prayer and charity temper judgement’s severe decree”
“But repentance, prayer and charity avert judgement’s severe decree”? But turning, connection and giving, these return us to our Gd?
Whose repentance? Whose prayer? Whose charity?
Temper, please temper
Temper already! Temper…

For sins against Gd, the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness; for sins against one’s fellowman, the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness till he has become reconciled with the fellowman he wronged.

“the Day of Atonement brings no forgiveness
till he has become reconciled with the fellowman he wronged.”
When will you atone? How will you atone?

For you, like us, will be judged.
You, like us, will return to dust.
5. YAHREST DATES

Ramarley Graham  FEBRUARY 2, 2012  Philando Castile  JULY 6, 2016
Amadou Diallo  FEBRUARY 4, 1999  Sandra Bland  JULY 15, 2013
Amoud Abery  FEBRUARY 23, 2020  Eric Garner  JULY 17, 2014
Trayvon Martin  FEBRUARY 26, 2012  Michael Brown  AUGUST 9, 2014
Brionna Taylor  MARCH 13, 2020  Emmett Till  AUGUST 28, 1955
Rekia Boyd  MARCH 21, 2012  Eleanor Bumpers  OCTOBER 29, 1984
Freddie Gray  APRIL 12, 2015  Tanisha Anderson  NOVEMBER 13, 2014
George Floyd  MAY 25, 2020  Akai Gurley  NOVEMBER 20, 2014
Tony McDade  MAY 27, 2020  Tamir Rice  NOVEMBER 22, 2014
David McAtee  JUNE 4, 2020  Sean Bell  NOVEMBER 25, 2006
Delrawn Small  JULY 4, 2016  Malissa Williams  NOVEMBER 29, 2012
Alton Sterling  JULY 5, 2016

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Ritual Team

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