

The Nadder Valley Inclusive Worship Service





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This worship service is named after the Nadder Valley, where it was written and first held.

The Nadder Valley is the rural valley around the River Nadder in south-west Wiltshire, bordering north-east Dorset, in the south of England, UK. The valley is more or less bounded by a triangle drawn between the towns of Wilton to the east and Shaftesbury to the west, and the village of Chicklade to the north. There is a charming map © Jane Alyson Smart at the link below.

http://www.nadderfocus.co.uk/village_pages.html

The Nadder Valley Inclusive Worship Service¹

This is a ceremony where all participants are welcome to share the essential gifts of togetherness, bread and water, as reminders of the presence of the Divine² in the world, and as an inspiration to purposeful life.

All who can approach the table in reverence are welcome.

People from all faith communities, and people who are not part of any faith community, are equally welcome.

There is no bar through age, previous rite, or personal doctrine.

Children who can understand something of what is going on are also welcome.

There are notes on the roots of the service, and its references, at the back of this booklet.

The service begins with the lighting of the candle and a few moments of silence follow.

Gathering

Lighting of the candle

President **Words of introduction**

Musical interlude or hymn

President We draw together here today
to affirm and strengthen ourselves for our lives ahead,
to be at one in quiet,
to make new connections and re-connections,
to prepare for enriching ourselves and others around us,
to become a resource for the world,
and to speak the name of Love in freedom and community.

All **Amen.**

Silence or the ringing bowl³

Reconciling

President

We are not as clean-hearted as we would like.

All

We are not as good at living as we would like.

We don't always treat people, animals or our surroundings, as we know we ought.

We often don't understand what is happening to us and around us.

We're small in the universe.

We're lonely and incomplete.

We want to do better.

We need help from outside ourselves to be better people.

We come here, because in community and in quiet we hope to find that help.

President

We each come here to gather ourselves,
to centre ourselves,
and to offer ourselves to a bigger experience.

In the quiet, we call to mind there have been things we have not done well,

President

things we have avoided doing,
things we have forgotten to do,
and times when we have done better.

We seek help and open ourselves up to receive it,
so that in future we can do much better than we have done
in the past.

Silence

Musical interlude or hymn

Silence

Interceding

President

We come here as a body of people to remember, together, that other people need our help and our love.

We come here to focus our attention on the needs of others.

We remember those without the basic human needs of water, food, shelter, warmth, good health, companionship, a sense of self-worth, a place in society. We remember especially today.....

In the name of Love.

All

Amen.

President

We remember those suffering physically or mentally; those imprisoned in some way, or oppressed; those threatened by violence or war; for those waiting behind for loved ones in danger. We remember especially today.....

In the name of Love.

All

Amen.

President

We remember those whose relationships are dysfunctional, crumbling, or otherwise ending.

We hold in mind those who are angry. We remember the bereaved. We remember especially today.....

We ask for help for them, for comfort, for relief, for mending, as we ask for mending also for ourselves.

In the name of Love.

All

Amen.

President

And we call to mind people who are using their lives to making things happen for others:

for leaders, for healthcare workers, teachers, shapers of the world, for carers and those who devote time and energy to the concerns of others.

We ask to be shown what we can do to help others, and for the strength and the will to do it.

In the name of Love.

All

Amen.

President

We also come here as a body to support each other, in peace and welcome.

Though we humans are many, we are one body.

For we are all composed mainly of water; we are all nourished by the same bread. The same oxygen supports us all, and we all are raised from the stardust that is the Earth's crust.

So we say together:

All

Let people worship with their eyes and ears and fingertips.

Let people learn to love the world with their heart-mind-body.

Let people worship with the opening of all the windows of their being, with the full outstretching of their spirits.

Let people learn to worship and let people learn to love.⁴

Amen.

President

In a spirit of openness and togetherness, let us give each other outward signs of the deep, interior peace that is the mysterious gift of God.

All present shake hands, or give the Eastern “hands together” sign of peace, or some other sign.

When people have settled, a second candle on the table is lit, is passed in silence between everyone present, and is then replaced on the table.

Naming

President

We come here from a range of backgrounds in response to a call to worship.

We each try to seek and face the Divine in whatever way holds meaning for us.

Here we do not presume on each other's beliefs.

Here we leave space for each other for the tasks of translation and contemplation.

There are many names and metaphors for God.

Where we feel able, let us speak some of those names now.

All

Participants say aloud any name or names for the Divine that hold meaning for them personally.

A space for quiet is left after a person has spoken.

An ADDRESS may be given at this point.

The service is founded on developing practice in common. The Address will deal with what we have in common: how we might better live together, in order that we better encounter the Divine.

President

We are balanced creatures, mixtures of mind and body,
imagination and sensing,
reason and emotion.

For each of us there must be times of action and reflection,
of creativity and learning,
of pouring out and taking in
of busy-ness and stillness,
and of nurturing of the heart.

We know something of the divine mystery from all these ways
of being.

But there are some knowings that come to us in ways we
cannot fathom, through intuition.

Some revealed truths come to us only in practices, beyond all
explanation.

We sense an Unseen Power in all, and over all, beyond all,
and more than all.

Across all time and all space, behind all creation.

In the atoms and between the atoms,

President

Before time and silence began and after time and silence
have passed away.

In our every act and thought.

And we also sense that if we are able to see aright, see to the
truth of things, to the very heart of being,
then we can catch something of that Divine Power in this
quiet,
feel something of the Ultimate Pattern even in this water and
this bread.

If we clear our minds, all of the Way of Things can be
reflected in this bit of nourishment, which we share.
All the laws of physics and the laws beyond physics that
create the universe,
that bring into being all life as we know it and life beyond our
knowledge of it:
all these laws apply here to this bread and this water.

All the Love and Light and Life that create and sustain our
human experience:
all here
all now
all Love
in this water and this bread.

President

As we step towards this food we step towards an awareness of what is beyond ourselves.

We bring ourselves in the mystery of our incompleteness and step before the Ultimate Mystery of completeness, that some call God.

God here.

God now.

God meeting us and working through us.

And we say together:

All

**Loving Giver,
Great Creativity,
Universal Rule of all that is,
We bring ourselves to You.**

Each person in turn steps up to the table, and takes and eats bread⁶, and may use these words, or similar,

“In the name of Love”.

then takes and drinks water and may use these words, or similar,

“In the name of Love”.

then steps back to their place.

When all have taken nourishment, there is silence.

Ringing Bowl

President

Unseen Power and Pattern,
We live this life through You.
By Your laws and Your grace we meet you here today
In our hearts, our minds, our bodies.
May this holy inspiration keep us in awareness of You in all
times and all places,
So that like people of all ages we may continuously say:

All **Holy, holy, holy**
Power beyond and Power within.
Heaven and earth are full of Your glory.
Glory be to You,
O Source Divine.
Amen.

President The Laws of Love and Light and Life extend wherever we are,
wherever we go.

Let us go out into the world,
ready to recognize God in all whom we meet,
in all that we see, in all that we touch.

Let us go out ready to meet God in those who need our help,
ready to listen to God in the activities of humankind as well in
the sights and sounds of nature,
and ready to quieten the clamour of our minds and hearts, the
better to receive God.

And may we find Peace within us always.

All **In the name of Love,**
Amen.

Closing music or hymn

**Donations towards the cost of holding the meeting may
be offered on exit.**

**Doctrinal and theological discussions and conversations
are reserved for after the close of worship.**

NOTES

¹ This is a religious service of worship for everyone. It has been written by a Unitarian as a means to provide common ground for worship for people of many beliefs (more about Unitarians below).

There is no particular claim to ownership of the practice in it. The service is loosely based on an analysis of the worship rituals of many faiths, carried out by Erik Walker Wikstrom. Wikstrom found that the same four themes come up in nearly all of the world's religions: Naming the Holy (praise and thanksgiving), Knowing (confession), Listening (contemplation), Loving (intercession). (Source: *Prayer*, Erik W. Wikstrom, published within "*Everyday Spiritual Practice*", Editor Scott W. Alexander, Skinner House Books © 1999 ISBN 1-55896-375-8).

Because British custom and culture has been strongly affected by Judaeo-Christian influences since Roman times, this service unmistakably inherits flavours from Judaism and Christianity.

In the Jewish mystical tradition, what we view as Nature is considered to be the very embodiment of God, called *malkuth*, translated as "Kingdom" (source: Dr Robert May, "Physicians of the Soul", White Cloud Press © 2003 ISBN 1-883991-42-0). In this way, all that we see is essentially Divine.

For Christians following the traditional doctrine, the focus on the embodiment or Incarnation of God rests in the second person of God, with Jesus of Galilee identified as God made manifest on Earth. All Jesus' followers would recognize the ritual he instituted during the Passover meal, in which he blessed bread and wine before sharing them round. This ritual is seen as an incarnate symbol of a new covenant between God and humankind.

Judaism and Christianity are not the only faiths accommodated in this service. Earth-centred beliefs, pre- and post-Christian, as well as the ancient Chinese philosophical system, Taoism, all highlight that the pattern or rules of the Divine can be seen in Nature, in the food we eat, and in us, as this is all part of Nature.

Other religious perspectives will place more meaning in the act of sharing, rather than paying much attention to the nature of the food being shared. Sikhism in particular places great emphasis on the sharing of food.

Taking part in this service, each participant will place their own meaning on the taking of water and bread. The silences in the service are designed to allow the thinking that is needed for this.

Unitarians (www.unitarian.org.uk) are people who are driven by conscience and enquiry to work hard, and look where they can, to find what they **can** believe about life, the universe, and everything, rather than what other people **say** they should believe. Unitarians' journeys in belief take them in all sorts of different directions. Some find great worth in the role models of certain teachers; others centre their beliefs in the natural world; others look for what is of ultimate worth in the human dimension; others head for the mystery within. Some are students of scripture, literature or science; others explore through outward expression of the arts; others base their understanding on their personal experience in the world.

Unitarianism is at heart a fully spiritual, religious way of being, and people who call themselves Unitarians find they can unite around

- a celebration of oneness of creation and the laws behind creation;
- the principles of reason, freedom, tolerance; and
- the central call to love.

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<sup>2</sup> The service tries not to elevate before others any particular pilgrim path, any particular name for the Divine, or any particular character or property of the Divine.

Unitarians find that many people think deeply about their personal beliefs, yet do not find themselves fully supported by any single faith community, or any faith community at all. When people commit and hold fast to their personal integrity they may find that no one shares the hard-won beliefs particular to themselves. They may find no one shares their language about what is the ultimate. Unitarians notice that this can feel isolating.

However, isolation in matters of religion or philosophy is avoidable. Just as people who do not see the world alike, who do not have preferences in common can do secular things together, people living different faiths can carry out religious ceremonies or activities together. We do not all have to think or feel the same to act together. This Inclusive Worship Service can be undertaken by people with many different doctrines, many different faiths. What it requires is that people act in focused reverence, mindful of their own beliefs; and that they do the internal work to connect the words and actions with their own beliefs. The speed of the service is slow, and contemplative spaces are made, precisely to permit this personal, private work to be done.

In taking part it is also required to be generous to the beliefs of other participants. Those who come not to judge, but to nurture and give support, as well as those who come to receive support, will be made welcome.

There will generally be a space left after the completion of the service as people disperse. Quiet, conversation is encouraged, where desired. In this conversation it is requested that people's own views, where they are volunteered, are not challenged, but supported as unfamiliar versions of an overall fabric of faith. Listening is counted as very important.

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³ Ringing bowl – a device made famous by Tibetan prayer practice. This is a resonant bowl of brass or bronze that reverberates for a long number of seconds after it has been struck. It provides a sound to be focused on and yet provokes feelings of great stillness.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a prayer by the American Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807 – 1892).

<sup>5</sup> In the Islamic tradition God has ninety-nine names. There are Bahá'í prayers that consist of nothing but lists of names and attributes for the Divine. The Psalms in the Hebrew Scriptures are full of ways of calling out to Yahweh. This is your chance to name the sacred, to give voice to what you consider holy or where you have felt the Divine in your life. You might use the names of God, gods and goddesses from the world's religions and you might make up your own.

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⁶ The bread offered in this service should ideally be gluten-free so that those with gluten intolerance are not excluded.

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Errors of fact in these notes may be highlighted by contacting the author via Lulu Enterprises UK Ltd, 263 Putney Bridge Road, London SW15 2PU tel 0044 56 01 29 24 85. Apologies are offered in advance for any wrongness that may be felt in reading these notes.