

KC Holy Water



Interfaith Observance, Independence Day Week-End at Berkely Riverfront Park arranged by CRES at the request of the Economic Development Corporation as part of the 2005 Kansas City Riverfest

Participants were (front) *Hindu* Anand Bhattacharyya, *Muslim* Ahmed El-Sherif, *American Indian (Ojibway)* Karen West, *moderator* Vern Barnet, *Pagan* Star Kenny, *Freethinker* Robert Madison, *actress* Linda Sher, *actress* Diane Bulan, (back) *Christian* Josef Walker, *Buddhist* Chuck Stanford, *Jew* Allan Abrams, *actor* Roshan Paiva, *Sikh* Kartar Singh Khalsa, *Bahá'í* Riaz Castillo, *singer-actor-factotum* Sam Wright.
The water ceremony text appears below; the logo is explained on page 3.

We had a bit of rain, but we all enjoyed each other's company and were grateful for the folks who sat in the sprinkles to affirm the importance of interfaith understanding — or to satisfy their curiosity about the many faiths of our area!

One of our participants, Josef Walker, writes, "Even though the crowd was sparse it is always good for faith leaders to have a reason to gather and pray and fellowship. Therefore the event was a rich blessing for us and our City."

THE PROGRAM, 10-10:30a

- ❖ **SONG** — Sam Wright
- ❖ **WELCOME** — Vern Barnet
- ❖ **EXCERPTS** from
*The Hindu and the Cowboy
and Other Kansas City Stories*

About the play, Alvin Brooks, Mayor Pro-tem, KCMO, has said: "Moving . . . meaningful . . . a wonderful event. We all need to hear these stories."

Players — Diane Bulan, Roshan Paiva, Linda Sher, Sam Wright

Five performances of the complete play are already scheduled in various parts of the metropolitan area this fall:

- ▶ Sep 11 Sun: Blue Ridge Presbyterian Church in Raytown
- ▶ Oct 13 Thu: Unity Temple on the Plaza
- ▶ Oct 28 Fri: Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village
- ▶ Nov 5 Sat: Community of Christ Temple in Independence
- ▶ A performance in Rosedale at KU Medical Center, Date to be announced.

Watch *Many Paths* and the CRES web site calendar for more details.

❖ WATER CEREMONY

Preface — Vern

Vern explained the history of water as an interfaith symbol in Kansas City, noting the logo included in the photo on this page. (See text below) He thanked Sam for collecting water from the Missouri River, a few yards from the stage, now in nine small containers, each of which was ritually poured into the large container above the logo banner.

Response words: "We give thanks for the waters of freedom."

American Indian — Karen West

Oh Great Spirit, we give thanks to you in the West from whence the Thunderbeings' cleansing rains

come to replenish our Mother the Earth. Oh Grandfather, may the element of water remind us always of your blessings so that we may walk in compassion and Love for all our brothers and sisters. Aho, mitakuye oyasin. — *Response*

Bahá'í — Riaz Castillo

The founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Baha'u'llah, often used water to symbolize the life-giving properties of divine revelation. This prayer is an example:

“What tongue can voice my thanks to Thee? I was heedless, Thou didst awaken me. I had turned back from Thee, Thou didst graciously aid me to turn towards Thee. I was as one dead, Thou didst quicken me with the water of life. I was withered, Thou didst revive me with the heavenly stream of Thine utterance which hath flowed forth from the Pen of the All-Merciful.

“O Divine Providence! All existence is begotten by Thy bounty; deprive it not of the waters of Thy generosity, neither do Thou withhold it from the ocean of Thy mercy. I beseech Thee to aid and assist me at all times and under all conditions, and seek from the heaven of Thy grace Thine ancient favor. Thou art, in truth, the Lord of bounty, and the Sovereign of the kingdom of eternity.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations CLXXIII, pages 264-265) — *Response*

Buddhist — Lama Chuck Stanford

As waters flow purifying the stream, so may the stream of our consciousness be cleansed of anger, fear, and envy so that our hearts may be like the universal

solvent accepting all in compassion. — *Response*

Christian — Josef Walker

Creator God, you have made water a symbol of your gift of freedom. We are mindful of Noah and the flood, Moses and the Exodus, Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, and the Baptism of the early Church. As we combine these waters today may we be grateful for your gift of freedom. Amen. — *Response*

Jewish — Allan Abrams

For thousands of years, Jews have migrated around the world, with many of us now blessed to be Americans, and always with the words of the prophet: "Let justice well up like fresh water, and honesty roll in full tide." — *Response*

Hindu — Anand Bhattacharyya

Hindus recognize water as an important natural element to sustain life. So, water has a special place in Hindu faith. Water not only purifies our body, it also has spiritually cleansing power. Hindus revere rivers and mountains which are the sources of rivers. Ganges is the most important of all sacred rivers. Many places of pilgrimage are located on the bank of river Ganges. To Hindus morning cleansing with water is a basic necessity. Sacred river water is required for worship services. At the start of a worship service the priest sprinkles water over and around his body and chant mantras for purification purpose. At the end of a service water is sometimes sprinkled over wor-

shippers with the peace chanting. Thus, in Hindu faith water symbolizes life, purity and peace. — *Response*

Muslim — Ahmed El-Sherif

Islam offers brotherhood and humanity. Religion gives us the means to smooth human arrogance, vanity, and hatred as this water smoothes rocks and mountains. As Muslims wash themselves before prayer, so we all are cleansed by the kindness we offer to one another as Americans and citizens of the world. Our faith gives us the courage of the holy and divine that illuminates our way to civility, humbleness, justice, and peace as this water douses fires and flames. — *Response*

Pagan — Star Kenny

Water is the life blood of Gaia, our Earth Mother, as well as of us, her children. Water connects us not only to each other but also to our Earth Mother. Water allows us to speak the thoughts of our hearts, our deep compassion. May this water enable us to live in compassion with ourselves, each other, and our Earth Mother. So Mote It Be. — *Response*

Sikh — Karta Purkh Singh Khalsa

As each drop of water represents a soul and we combine to form the God seen in all the oceans, the rivers, and the streams, and indeed in all of creation, may we acknowledge our divinity as One, separate from no one, united with all — at peace, whole and forever holy. — *Response*

*Zoroastrian — Sam Wright for
Daryoush Jahanian*

The Wise Lord made the wind and the clouds, and the refreshment of the rains on the parched soil. Let us become the refreshment in our community that new life may grow and flourish. — *Response*

FreeThinker — Robert Madison

America gained its independence, in part, because the waters that distanced us from British rule, suggested the colonies could govern themselves. And water has remained an important part of our history ever since, from Washington crossing the Delaware, to Lewis & Clark, and the expansion West to the Pacific.

Today our thirst for freedom - shared by those of all faiths, and of no faith at all — is nurtured by the First Amendment to our Constitution, which protects our freedom of faith in the same way the Atlantic protected the colonies, and allows us to govern ourselves as we search for meaning and purpose in the world. — *Response*

❖ **SUMMATION** — Vern

Water —

An Interfaith Symbol

Water, used for its spiritual significance in many faiths, has become a symbol of interfaith cooperation here, drawing on our “City of Fountains” designation. (Kansas City is said to have more fountains than any city in the world except Rome.)

For years I have been collecting water, from my journeys and

from friends as they travel. Into a jar I have poured water drawn from the Rhine, Seine, Tiber, Danube, Nile, Jordan, Thames, Mekong, Amazon, Ganges, St Lawrence, Yangtze, Volga, Colorado, Mississippi, Missouri, Euphrates, Kaw, the Bosphorus, the Sea of Japan, and many other rivers, lakes, puddles, and such around the world. This collection has been the basis of the waters described below.

● In 2001, at Kansas City’s first interfaith conference, water was collected from 14 area fountains — from Independence to Lenexa — and 14 representatives of different faiths poured the waters together to emphasize that our many faiths make one community. These were added to the collection of waters of the world noted above, just as folks from around the world have come to Kansas City and blessed us with their traditions. When the 250 participants unanimously adopted a Concluding Declaration, and came forward to sign it, each person received a vial to dip into the mingled waters to take home to pour on something to grow, as a reminder of the growth we experienced by mingling with one another. This added meaning to the logo for the “Gifts of Pluralism” conference, evident in the photo on page 1.

● On the morning of September 11, 2002, members of many faiths gathered for an anniversary observance by pouring waters from their own religious centers into the pool at Ilus Davis Park, between City Hall and the Federal Justice



New logo for the interfaith play originating from the 2001 *Gifts of Pluralism* conference.

About the play --

■ “Amazing . . . It makes us laugh, cry, and pulls us into the hearts of others and depths of our own soul.” — Mahnaz Shabbir, Shabbir Associates; interfaith activist

■ “. . . A powerful experience . . . It engages youth -- and all ages — in understanding people and cultures outside their own.” — Will McDowell, Managing Director Youth Programs, People to People International

■ See also the comment from Al Brooks on page 1 of this Supplement.

Center, to represent the tears we have offered for those who have suffered because of the terrorist attacks, and for all who have been injured in any way. CBS-TV showed a portion of the ceremony in a nation-wide broadcast.

The waters thus joined were taken to Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral where the city’s central observance was held that evening. There each member accepted a portion of the mingled water to take to each respective religious community.

It was said, “Peoples of many faiths were killed by the terrorists. Tears are an honorable part of our response to the horrors. In our common grief, we are united. But



2002 —
The Catholic Key

Diocesan Chancellor George Noonan pours water in a symbolic gesture of unity with members of the Kansas City Interfaith Council at Iilus Davis Park. The council poured waters from fountains in the metro area, along with waters from the Ganges, Nile, Amazon, Thames, Yangtze, Kaw and Missouri rivers. The service affirmed that ultimately our lives flow together from one Source and toward one Source.

now it is time to transform the water of tears into waters of purification, renewal and refreshment. The waters need to extinguish the fires of hatred, wash away our self-righteousness, and well up as healing fountains of the heart.”

The waters were also taken to sites around the metro area for use in other interfaith services that evening. For example, St Mark’s Catholic Church liturgist Susan Walker, with her interfaith ritual team, used the water to speak the best of America at the Community of Christ Auditorium.

Water as an interfaith symbol speaks of cleansing, renewal, rebirth, and refreshment. But it also recalls the countless people who found ways to respond to the tragedy, including the emergency workers. (It evokes memories of frontier America: if the barn caught fire, the entire community came out, formed a bucket brigade from the nearest water source, and did their part to put out the fire.)

The fountain on the rostrum was silent until Independence Mayor Ron Stewart and Raytown Mayor Sue Frank received buckets of water being passed the entire length of the north aisle, hand to hand, by more than 50 uniformed police officers, fire fighters,

emergency medical personnel and others. As the fountain filled, the water began speaking, circulating and spilling from an upper basin to the larger lower pool.

With the physical act of handing off buckets, the brigade volunteers became members of each other, and those who were witnesses gazed deeper into the best of humanity, and found comfort and consolation.

Something as ordinary as water, transformed by the intentions of those of many faiths in ritual reminder, can speak to us as words cannot. A simple action like handing a bucket of water to another person, deepening community, helped us face a tragedy that is unspeakable.

● The waters have also been part of interfaith explorations of high school students. Each year fifty gather at the Kauffman Foundation for a day of encountering students from other schools and other faiths. American Indians, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, FreeThinkers, and others have brought water collected from their institutions to share with the others, and taken a vial of the mingled waters home with them as a reminder of the shared experience of growth.

● Jews may bathe in a mikvah, Christians practice baptism, Muslims observe ablutions, the Shinto tradition includes *misoge* — almost every faith has some way of using water to develop a sense of transcendent reality, as the Water Ceremony above demonstrates. While the different ways the various faiths use water should not be confused, water is a natural symbol of the spirit in interfaith settings. Without water, we die.

● About *misoge* —At the Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Mie Prefecture some years ago, I came to understand what encountering *kami* might be like. After dressing in a white loincloth and headband, clapping and bowing, some physical exercises, and a drink of sake with salt, I was placed under a waterfall so strong that I felt I merged with the stream, itself considered *kami*. My skin vibrated as much as the water, it seemed. This ritual cleansing is called *misogi* and aims to restore the union of the *kami* with the *human*.

The rush of the water and the loss of my sense of personal identity in its flow helped me understand why sometimes *kami* is considered more a verb than a noun. The divine is not so much a being as a process. *Kami* is less a way of saying that there are gods and more an affirmation that the universe is “god-ing,” like water flowing onward, outward, inward.

—Vern Barnet



SOME WATER QUOTATIONS

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. . . . I am haunted by waters. —Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*

You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you. —Heraclitus

And he showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God. . . . —Revelation 22:1-2

The fall of dropping water wares away the stone. —Lucretius

How do you preserve a drop of water? Throw it back into the ocean. —the Buddha

Foul water will quench fire. —British proverb

The best is like water. Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them. It dwells in [lowly] places that all disdain. This is why it is so near to Tao. —Lao-tzu