

Shawn Sanford BECK

# Binding the Strong Man:

A Liturgy of Exorcism of the War Spirit

The *purpose* of this liturgy is to gather together in a spirit of hope and resistance; to name and “bind” in prayer the forces at work in the war in Afghanistan; and to celebrate and “empower” a vision of peace.

The *people* participating are the new “peace coalition” which has been gathering every Friday since the beginning of the war. This is a very mixed group, religiously and ideologically, with many ages and socio-economic backgrounds represented. Ideally, the group will have been prepared through Bible study to understand the relationship between “heavenly” and “earthly” realities within apocalyptic, but this will rarely be possible with such a group. Usually, the mythological images will have to speak for themselves within the logic of the ritual.

The *items* needed are the following: fire barrel, four drums, rattle, rainstick, conch shell, large ceramic bowl, filled with dried leaves, spruce needles, herbs, etc. (for incense); thin but strong rope, hot apple cider in thermos and plastic, recyclable glasses; and oat cakes in a basket.

The seven *officiants* are: convener (conch), four “quarters” (drums), and two readers (rainstick and rattle). Throughout the liturgy, the four “quarters” will be playing the drums, modulating tempo and volume according to the rite and the energy. The fire will have been prepared before the rite, and will be blazing throughout.

## THE GATHERING

*CONVENER WILL BLOW CONCH THREE TIMES TO SUMMON PEOPLE TO THE CIRCLE. THE READERS WILL MAKE SURE PEOPLE ACTUALLY FORM INTO A CIRCLE, AND THE QUARTERS WILL PLACE THEMSELVES IN THE FOUR DIRECTIONS. THE CONVENER WILL GIVE A FEW WORDS OF WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION OF THE LITURGY, AND THEN THE DRUMMERS WILL BEGIN. ONCE A TRANCE MOOD HAS BEEN REACHED, THE “NARRATIVE” BEGINS*

**Convener: At once I was in the Spirit, and there in heaven stood a throne, with One seated on the throne! And the One seated there looks like**

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jasper and carnelian, and around the throne is a rainbow that looks like an emerald. Coming from the throne are flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and in front of the throne burn seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God; and in front of the throne there is something like a sea of glass, like crystal. Around the throne, and on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature is like a lion, the second living creature is like an ox, the third living creature has a face like a human face, and the fourth living creature is like a flying eagle. (Rev. 4:2-7)

My friends, as we gather this evening, we can be sure that we are not alone. All the creation is here with us; all the powers of Heaven and Earth stand ready to lend us their strength. Let us therefore call on the four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind, to bear witness to our intent.

*AFTER EACH INVOCATION, THE CONVENER BLOWS THE CONCH.*

**East Quarter:** Spirit of Air, bless us with Vision! Come and bear witness: we pray for peace.

**South Quarter:** Spirit of Fire, bless us with Courage! Come and bear witness: we pray for peace.



**West Quarter:** Spirit of Water, bless us with Depth! Come and bear witness: we pray for peace.

**North Quarter:** Spirit of Earth, bless us with Strength! Come and bear witness: we pray for peace.

## THE NAMING

**Convener:** Sisters and brothers, in our struggle against the brutal war machine, we must remember that our enemies are not individual people, but the system itself. **For our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.** (Eph.6:12) Our ancestors, in their wisdom, passed down to us stories describing the origins of the transhuman, *systemic evil* which we face today. We may blink at their mythology, but we neglect our ancestors' insights to our own peril.

**Reader 1:** And it came to pass, after the children of men had increased in those days, beautiful and comely daughters were born to them. And the angels, the sons of the heavens, saw and lusted after them. And they took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go into them, and mixed with them. And they became pregnant and brought forth great giants, who devoured all the acquisitions of humankind till people were unable to sustain themselves. And the giants turned themselves against humankind in order to devour them. And they began to sin against the birds and the beasts, and against the creeping things, and the fish, and devoured their flesh among themselves, and drank the blood thereof. Then the earth complained of the unjust ones. And Azazel taught men to make swords and knives and shields and coats of armour. (Enoch 6:1-2a, 7:1-6, 8:1)

**Convener:** In the old, old stories, it is the fallen ones, the corrupted angels, who teach humankind the arts of war. At the root of the patriarchy, these demons rape women, and giants are brought forth as the fruit of this violence. These giants are the mighty ones, the strong men, the kings of old. It is in the spirit of their dominion that *systemic evil* takes root, and when we engage the war machine, we must realise that we are confronting the spirit within it: Azazel, Satan, the destroyer of the Earth and the master of war. Today we gather to confront this spirit of war, and to bind it through the power of prayer. Yet it is well known among exorcists and shamans throughout the ages that you cannot defeat the demon until you can name it. (*Convener holds up rope.*) This

rope is the strength of our collective intention. It is the strength of our circle. As it is passed around the circle, I would invite each person to name an aspect, a part, a face of the spirit of war that is being fought in our name. It can be a force “out there” in the world, or “in here” in our own attitudes and ways of being. As you name this force, tie a knot in the cord, praying that the force would be bound by the power of Love. *CONVENER BEGINS THIS PROCESS AND THEN PASSES THE CORD ON. AS EACH PERSON TIES THEIR KNOT, THE READERS SOUND THEIR RAINSTICK AND RATTLE.*

## THE EXORCISM

**Reader 2:** And behold, a great portent appeared in Heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in Heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of Heaven and threw them to the Earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to the divine throne; and the woman fled to the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that she can be nourished. And war broke out in Heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. (Rev. 12:1-4,5b-9)

**Convener** *HOLDING ROPE UP FOR ALL TO SEE:*

A promise was made in the days of old, when a prophet from Nazareth said, **I give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on Earth will be bound in heaven.** (Matt. 16:19a)

**Reader 1:** And I looked and turned toward another side of the Earth, and I say there a deep valley with a burning fire. And they brought the kings and the powerful, and put them into the deep valley. And there my eyes saw how they make instruments for them, iron chains of immense weight. And I asked the angel of peace, who went with me, saying, “These chain instruments, for whom have they been prepared?” And he said to me, “These have been prepared for the hosts of Azazel, to imprison them and bind them.” (Enoch 53:1-5a)

**Convener** *THROWING THE ROPE INTO THE FIRE:*

**I watched Satan fall from Heaven like a flash of lightning.** (Luke 10:18)

**Reader 2:** Then I saw an angel coming down from Heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, and bound him for a thousand years, so that he would deceive the nations no more. (Rev. 20:1-2,3b)

*CONVENER BLOWS CONCH SHELL, LONG AND LOUD.*

## THE CELEBRATION

**Reader 1:** Then I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth; for the first Heaven and the first Earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And people will bring into the holy city the glory and the honour of the nations. (Rev. 21:1-4,26)

**Convener:** The time is coming when the City of Peace will be a reality. Indeed, when we gather together in prayer, when we imagine counter-reality to the war machine, when we covenant to live our lives according to the way of non-violence and love, then we already inhabit the New Jerusalem. The spirit of war and oppression is doomed, it is bound, it is over! We are no longer constrained to pledge our loyalty to a *system of death*. Instead, we are invited to bring our gifts for the service of the City of Peace. What do we have to offer? What will we bring for the service of Life? (*Convener picks up ceramic bowl full of “incense”.*) I would invite you to come forward, as you feel led, to take a small handful of this fruit of the earth. Throw it on the fire to symbolize your own “thank-offering” in commitment to our work for peace. Feel free to speak this offering aloud, or hold it in the silence of your heart.

*AS PARTICIPANTS COME TO THE CENTRE OF THE CIRCLE, THE READERS SOUND THEIR RAINSTICK AND RATTLE EACH TIME A HANDFUL OF “INCENSE” IS OFFERED.*

**Reader 2:** Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar, and was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before the Holy One. (Rev. 8:3-4) *AS THIS PASSAGE IS BEING READ, CONVENER HOLDS UP THE BOWL WITH THE REMAINING*

*“INCENSE”, AND POURS IT INTO THE FIRE.*

**Reader 1:** Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! Our God reigns! Let us rejoice and exult and give God the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure,” for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” (Rev. 19:6-9)

**Convener:** The Great Feast of Peace is ready! Let us prepare our hearts with song!

*THE CONVENER THEN BEGINS SINGING, “SHALOM, MY FRIENDS, SHALOM, MY FRIENDS, SHALOM, SHALOM”, WHILE INSERTING HER OR HIMSELF INTO THE CIRCLE, TO LEAD A CIRCLE DANCE. MEANWHILE, THE READERS WILL POUR OUT AS MANY GLASSES OF CIDER AS THERE ARE PEOPLE, AND GET THE BASKET OF OATCAKES READY. IT WILL BE UP TO THE DRUMMERS TO “READ” AND ENHANCE THE SPIRIT OF THE CIRCLE AS IT DANCES. WHEN THE ENERGY IS CLOSE TO PEAKING, THE CONVENER WILL “DETACH” AND GO BACK TO THE CENTRE, PICK UP THE CONCH AND BLOW IT LOUD AND LONG, AT WHICH POINT THE DRUMMERS WILL PEAK THE DANCE AND THEN GO SILENT.*

**Convener:** The gifts of Peace, for the people of Peace!

*THE CONVENER AND READERS DISTRIBUTE THE OATCAKES AND CIDER. WHEN EVERYONE HAS RECEIVED, THE CONVENER WILL BLOW THE CONCH TO GET PEOPLE’S ATTENTION (IF NECESSARY).*

**Convener:** We go in Peace, to work for Peace. May the circle be unbroken!

*THE CONVENER BLOWS THE CONCH LONG AND LOUD TO SIGNAL THE FORMAL ENDING OF THE LITURGY. PEOPLE ARE FREE TO STAY AND VISIT OVER MORE CIDER AND OATCAKES.*