

Kaddish for People with Disabilities

A Prayer of Remembrance

by Wendy Elliott-Vandivier

In God's name, we remember you.

The first group to perish during the Holocaust. You were labeled “life unworthy of life”, mass sterilized, and systematically murdered in medically administered “mercy death” in Adolph Hitler’s secret “Operation T4”. 275,000 people with disabilities were killed.

In God's name, we remember you.

Americans with disabilities, who were incarcerated and denied their constitutional rights. You were locked away in poorhouses or institutions, treated like charity cases, tragedies, and freaks. Sterilized without your consent by practitioners of eugenics in the name of improving the human race, forced to undergo radical lobotomies to render your diverse minds ‘harmless’.

In God's name, we remember you.

The unnumbered, denied the chance to be born solely based on your disabilities. Doctors and parents assumed you would live a limited life of suffering or be a burden. Your parents were often never informed of life-saving treatments and therapies, or the reality of what people with disabilities can accomplish.

In God's name, we remember you.

The hundreds of victims of filicide. You were murdered by your caregivers, even your parents: shot, starved, drowned, chained, punched. The media portrayed your killings as justifiable or inevitable, your lives as a “burden to the family”. Your killers were given sympathy and lighter sentences, if sentenced at all.

In God's name, we remember you.

The Black and Brown disabled Americans killed at the hands of the police. Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tanisha Anderson, Deborah Danner, Ezell Ford, Alfred Olango, Keith Lamont Scott, George Floyd and a third of all Black and Brown victims of police brutality were also people with disabilities.

In God's name, we remember you.

The millions of people with disabilities who died of COVID because of your medical conditions, group living settings, or systemic healthcare and social inequities. You perished in large numbers because of policies that ignored your community when distributing protective

equipment, vaccines, and hospital care. In just a single year in the US, over 181,000 people with disabilities died of COVID in long-term care facilities alone.

We remember you. Your lives were worthy and had value.

Blessed is God, Ruler of the Universe, who created people with disabilities in Your image.

Blessed is God, who cherishes disabled lives and desires that they flourish and thrive.

May each human heart and every society respect the civil and human rights of people with disabilities.

May the one who makes peace above, break the deadly cycle of history repeating itself in our midst, in all of Israel, and in the whole world.

And let us say, Amen