



The handshake at the top represents a few things. It means a connection between our communities and our veterans. It means gratitude to our veterans for their military service and sacrifices, some of which are ongoing. It means our communities supporting our veterans as they transition from service into civilian life. It means friendship. Our simple acts of friendship can be so meaningful.

The eagle represents freedom. Our freedom comes with a price. Our freedom was fought for. For this reason, the eagle is depicted in a fighting position. It's just a reminder of the connection between the fighting sacrifices of our veterans and the freedom we enjoy.

The butterfly is a symbol of transformation. Nothing is any more complicated than that. The transformation of service members from the military into civilian life.

The lotus represents growth. It represents how we can grow from our traumas and negative experiences. The lotus is a beautiful flower that grows out of filthy mud. Once we can find meaning in our traumas we can use them in a positive way as a constructive force. We can use our traumas to help others who are experiencing similar difficulties. In this way, something beautiful can grow out of something ugly.

The red poppy is **a symbol of both remembrance and hope for a peaceful future**. We remember all of those who have paid for our freedom through their service. Poppies are worn as a show of support for our military community.

The sunrise represents a new beginning. The soldier is in a warrior yoga pose. If you look at this silhouette long enough you might see a couple of different poses, depending on how you imagine it. The obvious first glance is Warrior 2 from a profile perspective. But I am seeing him/her in high crescent lower body with airplane arms, facing the rising sun. I like this as it reminds me of the original practice of Sun Salutation. To face the rising sun and to offer it a prayer of gratitude through the movement of your body. Sun A, Sun B, Classic ... who cares?!:) I certainly don't. The connection of breathing and movement is what is most important and beneficial to the nervous system, which gets high jacked by traumatic experiences.

Finally, at the bottom, there is the candle with the number 33. We are all familiar with the number 22. We have heard it so much we have become numb about it. I looked it up and currently, it's down to 17 average veteran/active military suicides per day. I have also included Canada and the UK, just two of our brother/sister countries with whom we fought alongside. That all equals 33. I am certain that there are more from other allied countries. Other military brothers and other military sisters. I am going to mention the mathematics of that again. I will just take into account the US in the calculation. At 22 average suicides per day, the totals for month and year are 660 per month and 8030 per year. At 17 average veteran suicides per day, the totals are 510 per month and 6205 per year. So we are down by 150 per month and down by 1825 per year. That is progress, but obviously, when we let those numbers truly sink in, it is still staggering. It ought to be deeply distressing. We still have so much work to do to improve the support for our military and their families. It is the work of organizations like the Veterans Yoga Project and many others that is beginning to provide the necessary support that our government and Veterans Administration is failing to provide. And that support helps to lower these awful statistics. Let us not become complacent about these numbers. The banner says "Lest we forget". It means to let us not become numb and ignorant regarding those numbers of suicides. Let those numbers be the inspiration for action to serve our military members and their families.