

***Shalom Aleichem. As-salāmu 'alaykum. Shamatha. Eirini umin. Pax vobiscum. Peace be with you.***

Peace in our various faiths is a name of the Most High God. It is a gift we implore of the Almighty, one we never fully deserve but always deeply crave. It is a habit of heart and of relating which we cultivate. It is a prayer or blessing or greeting that we use when meeting friends, neighbours, even strangers. We are praying for them that they might know God and know the peace God brings.

This week, like no other, in which violence and death have so deeply touched us, the people of Sydney cry out for peace.

It can be difficult to speak of peace in such a troubled context. It can almost seem insensitive, as if we were papering over the ugly realities of violence and division. But just as evil must sometimes be named, so must the alternative for which we aspire.

As I understand the Hebrew word 'shalom' that inspires the Abrahamic religions, it is not just about an absence of conflict, but a sense of completeness, prosperity, well-being. It is therefore a beautiful salutation. It is heard again and again in the Holy Bible. It is a name for God and the principle underlying His holy law. And it is a blessing: "May the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Num 6:26; cf. Ps 29:11).

It's Arabic cognate, 'salaam' is I understand one of the 99 most beautiful names of God in the Islamic tradition, and it too is used as a salutation and blessing. I believe that in Buddhist tradition "shamatha" refers to calm abiding or peacefulness and in Sanskrit, "shanti" meaning tranquillity, calm, bliss, eternal rest and happiness.

In the Christian liturgy, we have the greeting "Peace be with you". We sing echoing the angels at the first Christmas, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to people of good will" (Lk 2:14). Our Lord Jesus used this Jewish salutation often Himself (e.g. Lk 24:36; Jn 14:27; 20:19,21,26). He told His disciples to do likewise and so they did (e.g. Mt 10:12-13; Acts

16:36; 2Thess 3:16; Rom 1:7; 2:10; 15:13; 1Cor 1:3; 2Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Col 3:15 etc.)

So all of us reflecting together today know the importance of peace. It is at the heart of our faiths. We pray today for eternal peace with God for those who have died. For Katrina Dawson and Tori Johnson. And after a time of disturbance in our city we want to give common witness to our belief that genuine religion promotes peace, not division. We join together in repudiating hatred and violence. We salute and pray for each other the Peace of God which is beyond all understanding (Phil 4:7). And we affirm in common: God, the Holy, the Divine, the All Powerful, the All Merciful, wants peace.

Christians believe the Prince of Peace (cf. Isa 9:6) came as a babe born in a manger at Christmas time. It is my prayer that His peace may

shine on our heart-broken city this Christmas. May God's peace be with you all and with all Sydneysiders.

Thank-you all for coming this morning and participating in this Interfaith Memorial Gathering, especially members of the Catholic and other Christian communities. I thank Mr Brian White of the Buddhist Council, Mr Jeremy Spinak of the Jewish Board of Deputies, Prof. Nihal Singh Agar of the Hindu Council, Mrs Kulwant Kaur of the Sikh Community, Dr Basim Alansari of the Shiite Community and Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammad, the Grand Mufti of Australia. My thanks also to our civic leaders present here today and who have given us such good leadership throughout the recent crisis.

As we conclude our gathering, my prayer to God is:

*O God of Peace, who are peace itself  
and whom a spirit of discord cannot grasp,  
nor a violent mind receive,  
grant that those who are one in heart  
may persevere in what is good  
and that those in conflict  
may forget evil and so be healed. Amen.*

(from Roman Missal, Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice)