

MUSIC 1: Peter Tchaikovsky, Serenade for Strings in C major, Opus 48 Waltz (04:30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSGKRfEUqVk> **audio**

International Observances: Perhaps a main inspiration for this service came from last Tuesday's International Observance, namely International Day for Dialogue among Civilisations. For a peaceful coexistence a liberal-democratic secular society is arguably the most suitable framework. In faith terms, perhaps this could be encapsulated best by Verse 256 of Surah 2 in the Holy Qur'an which says: "there shall be no compulsion in matters of faith/religion".

Chalice Lighting

We light this candle as a symbol of our faith.
By its light may our vision be illumined;
By its warmth may our fellowship be encouraged;
And by its flame may our yearnings for peace, justice and the life of the spirit be enkindled.

We join together now...

We join together now to worship as a beloved community.
Each individual brings to our gathering faith and ideas, but each of us also yearns to share fellowship one with the other.
May we look beyond any differences to the common bonds that unite us: faith, hope, and love. And may those divine qualities shine through our worship today.

HYMN 1: 218 – With Heart and Mind (purple book)

Ants (Sufi story)

There was an ant with only three legs, who decided to go on Hajj. On the road from Damascus to Makkah, he came to the Hijaz desert. He had travelled for some distance into the desert when he came across another ant, returning from Makkah.

The second ant looked at the three-legged ant and asked, "Where are you going?"

The three-legged ant replied, "I am on the way to Makkah."

The other ant said, "You'll never make it! It's a terribly difficult journey, even for an ant with six legs. You'll die along the way!"

The three-legged ant looked at him. He thought for a moment. Then he smiled and said, "What does it matter if I die?

At least I'll die on the road to Makkah."

READING 1: The Meaning of Faith (Buddhism) – Read by Sheila?

Some people wonder, what does the word faith mean within the Buddhist Faith Fellowship's name? For many, the word faith is very disquieting and conjures up the baggage of the traditional religions from which many of us are trying to escape from. Around the world, many faith-minded people tend to blindly believe in all sorts of unproven dogma that is akin to superstition.

However, faith is not just about believing in the far-fetched and unreasonable or in a fossilized dogma or in an ancient creed or in a set of unverifiable beliefs like those offered by many in today's marketplace of religion and spirituality. Briefly put, the faith in a Buddhist context has several and perhaps refreshing nuances:

- 1) Faith is the inner inspirational energy that draws and opens us to confidence in the Buddha's teachings. Something just clicks within us and we feel a deep and comfortable familiarity with the dharma that gives us the conviction that we with all beings can "wake up" and realise our inner potential.
- 2) Faith denotes the time-honoured process of practice, in which one has personally verified the teachings through investigation (reading, listening, attending gatherings etc.), experimentation (plenty of practice), analysis (reflection), and all this is crossed checked with the experiences of other practitioners covering a span of 2,600 years. The Buddha said, "Do not believe because I tell you so..." First, one must try it out and see or not see the results of the process in one's life's experience.
- 3) Faith signifies the spiritual journey or the evolutionary natural path of the Buddha's teachings that take us into an exciting adventure of inner and outer exploration, in which we will progressively encounter more peace and liberation, and the warm and open heart of boundless life and light.
- 4) Faith does not mean "looking up to" something outside of us in fear or for comfort, but instead means entrusting ourselves to the total dynamic of life and light itself, symbolised as Amida Buddha, which is our true nature. This entrusting faith (shinjin) is a pure, open awareness without any subject or object or belief in any set of concepts. It relates to the Sanskrit word *prasada* which means "tranquillity, stillness and purity" of mind and heart.

HYMN 2: 119 – Source of Many Cultures (purple book)

Reading 2: SIX BIBLICAL QUOTES ON FAITH

Acts 6:5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

Acts 11:22-24 The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 16:13 Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Ephesians 6:16 (KJV) Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

MUSIC 2: Fritz Kreisler, Caprice Viennois (04:36) *play from 0:25 to 05:01 (video)* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYTxEk_SbYg

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS: a short essay on Sharia and the Secular Society

Secularism is a principle that involves two basic propositions. The first is the strict separation of the state from religious institutions. The second is that people of different religions and beliefs are equal before the law.

Separation of religion from state

The separation of religion and state is the foundation of secularism. In theory, it ensures religious groups do not interfere in affairs of state, and makes sure the state does not interfere in religious affairs. In the United Kingdom there are officially two state recognised Christian denominations – the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The King is both head of state and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. There is no established church in Northern Ireland or Wales but the 26 bishops of the Church of England who sit in the House of Lords influence laws that affect the whole of the UK.

Christianity is one major influence among many that shape our current ways of life; we are a nation of many denominations and religions and large sectors of the population do not hold, or practise, religious beliefs. If Britain were truly a secular democracy, political structures would reflect the reality of changing times by separating religion from the state.

Secularism protects both believers and non-believers

In a democratic society, secularism seeks to ensure and protect freedom of religious belief and practice for all citizens. Secularism is not about curtailing religious freedoms; it is about ensuring the freedoms of thought and conscience apply equally to all believers and non-believers alike.

Religious Freedom

Secularism seeks to defend the absolute freedom of religious and non-religious belief, and protect the right to manifest religious belief insofar as it does not impinge disproportionately on the rights and freedoms of others. Secularism ensures the right of individuals to freedom of religion is always balanced by the right to be free *from* religion.

Secularism is about democracy and fairness

In a secular liberal democracy all citizens are equal before the law and parliament. No religious or political affiliation gives advantages or disadvantages and religious believers are citizens with the same rights and obligations as anyone else. Secularism champions human rights above discriminatory religious demands. It upholds equality laws that protect women, LGBT people and minorities. These equality laws ensure that non-believers have the same rights as those who identify with a religious or philosophical belief.

Equal access to public services

We all share hospitals, schools, the police and local authority services. It is essential that these public services are secular at the point of use so that no-one is disadvantaged or denied access on grounds of religious belief (or non-belief.) All state-funded schools should be non-religious in character, with children being educated together regardless of their parents' religion. When a public body grants a contract for the provision of services to an organisation affiliated to a particular religion or belief, such services must be delivered in a neutral manner, with no attempt to promote the ideas of that faith group.

Secularism is not atheism

Atheism is a lack of belief in gods. Secularism simply provides a framework for a liberal-democratic society. Atheists have an obvious interest in supporting secularism, but secularism itself does not seek to challenge the tenets of any particular religion or belief, neither does it seek to impose atheism on anyone. Secularism is simply a framework for ensuring equality throughout society – in politics, education, the law and elsewhere, for believers and non-believers alike.

Secularism protects free speech and expression

Religious people have the right to express their beliefs publicly but so do those who oppose or question those beliefs. Religious beliefs, ideas and organisations must not enjoy privileged protection from the right to freedom of expression. In a liberal democracy, all ideas and beliefs must be open to discussion. Individuals have rights, ideas do not.

Secularism believes it offers the best chance to create a society in which people of all religions or none can live together fairly and peacefully.

The secular society often perceives itself as being threatened by religion in general and Sharia or other 'radical' systems in particular. Sharia, for instance, is a misunderstood and misused concept. Critics of Islam frequently employ terms like "creeping sharia" to stoke fear amongst the masses. Sharia literally means "a path to life-giving water," and refers to a defined path upon which all God-fearing people are advised to tread. It is grounded in the recognition of God's existence. Sharia presupposes there is a God. God reveals a desire of how people should shape their destiny, and God's will is manifested in the form of certain laws/principles. These laws or principles constitute Sharia.

Sharia is not unique to Islam. Every faith has its own form of Sharia. In the United States, for example, the legal system already permits some narrow civil matters to be settled through Alternative Dispute Resolution; in the UK, even more so. Among such alternative mechanisms is the Beit Din, or rabbinical law courts. UK Jews routinely go before Beit Din to arbitrate real estate deals, divorces and business disputes.

In Islam, Sharia can be divided into five main branches: ibadah (ritual worship), mu'amalat (transactions and contracts), adab (behaviour) > (morals and manners), i'tiqadat (beliefs), and 'uqubat (punishments). Islam prescribes certain laws or principles that govern all five main

branches. At its core, Sharia is intended to develop and sustain a moral and just society.

The Qur'an does not specify any specific form of government other than a beneficent one that is based on absolute justice:

"Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency and manifest evil and transgression. He admonishes you that you may take heed." (16:91).

There is no mention of religion in this verse. Pluralism and religious tolerance are Islamic values. The Qur'an stresses: "There is no coercion in religion" (2: 256), as we saw at the beginning of this service. Legislating Sharia would mean imposing practices on people who do not share the underlying beliefs behind those practices. Sharia mandates the strict practice of absolute justice regardless of differences in faith, race, creed or any other distinction. True Islamic teachings, as practised by the Prophet of Islam, promote a secular government with equal rights and privileges for its citizens and a separation of mosque and state. For example, the Prophet of Islam famously applied Talmudic law in resolving disputes among the Jews.

Certain 'Muslim' countries have failed to observe the precondition of absolute justice before imposing Sharia. Instead, they have unjustly imposed Sharia as an instrument of power and control. European states scrutinise and magnify these examples. Certain countries have enmeshed religious extremism with political power resulting in a brutal brand of governance they brand "Sharia." Extremists and their religious clerics invoke Sharia to justify the killing of the innocent and vulnerable. They abandon the Quranic principles of governance in favour of discriminatory and grossly improper applications of Islamic law. They view Sharia as an instrument of conquest and carnage instead of justice and decency.

To end, religion should not be the business of the state. Islam offers guiding principles in matters of man's relation to man. These principles can easily be translated into secular laws based on justice, tolerance and love for mankind. True Sharia is conducive to a system of government that is beneficent, ensures universal human rights and minority protections and dispenses absolute justice for all people.

MUSIC 3: Jean Sibelius, Andante festivo (04:28) video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VRw9N9OIPo>

POETRY: FAITH AND ITS ROLE by Rm. Shanmugam Chettiar

*There are two kinds of faith people live with:
Faith in lordship and faith in fellowship;
The first is that someone will do for you
And the second is others won't fail you.*

*With faith in the shepherd, the sheep follow.
With faith in the fellow sheep, the sheep feed.
Without faith in system, you can't follow.
Without faith in others, you can't transact.*

*Faith in God, faith in fate and faith in luck
Would weaken the faith you have in yourself.
Faith in love, faith in trade and faith in helps
Would slacken the cognizance you possess.*

*Faith can't be dispensed with altogether.
Faith in the unknown has no guarantee.
Faith in the known has no certainty
But can strengthen their faithfulness to you.*

*Faith in parents and faith in teachers,
Faith in doctors and faith in medicine
And faith in judges and in justice
Denounced altogether, one cannot exist.*

*Faith in spouses and faith in children,
Faith in siblings and faith in servants
And faith in professional ethics
Abandoned altogether, one cannot thrive.*

*Without faith, promises bear no meanings.
Without faith, guarantees have no bearings.
Without faith, investments will have no life.
Only with faith could life be felt secure.*

*Faith might crack when it is misplaced.
Faith might break when it's sabotaged.
Faith might crash when it's blindfolded.
Yet, one has to vouch for faith in life.*

*Faith comes from ignorance of things.
Faith comes from lack of influence.
Faith comes in helpless conditions.
Faith exercises no control yet.*

*Have faith in you and accept the outcome.
Have faith in others and give allowance.
Have faith in future and shelve the distress.
Faith vacated, worries will occupy.*

Offertory Prayer

This church is sustained by what we are able to bring to it:
Our time and our energy,
Our love and our resources.

Immediately after the end of this service, the morning's collection will be gratefully received to support the work of this congregation. Thank you.

HYMN 175: To Seek and Find our Natural Mind (purple book)

Closing Words

We are blessed with an abundance of good things for we which we are truly thankful, as long as we remember them.

We are privileged with great freedom and power, for which in return we act with responsibility.

We are lucky to have shared this time and space together, because we are lucky to have each other.

May the spirit of this place and these friends go with us into the busy city.

MUSIC 4: Antonin Dvorak, Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22, 5, Finale <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdUSl9nv5nk> **video (05:54)**

ANNOUNCEMENTS by Sheila

ORDER OF SERVICE

MUSIC 1: Peter Tchaikovsky, Serenade for Strings in C major, Opus 48 Waltz (04:30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSGKRfEUqVk> **audio**

International Observances

Chalice Lighting

We join together now

HYMN 1: 218 – With Heart and Mind (purple book)

Ants (Sufi story)

READING 1: The Meaning of Faith (Buddhism) – Read by Sheila?

HYMN 2: 119 – Source of Many Cultures (purple book)

Reading 2: SIX BIBLICAL QUOTES ON FAITH

MUSIC 2: Fritz Kreisler, Caprice Viennois (04:36) *play from 0:25 to 05:01* (video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYTxEk_SbYg

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS

MUSIC 3: Jean Sibelius, Andante festivo (04:28) video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VRw9N9OIPo>

POETRY

Offertory Prayer

HYMN 175: To Seek and Find our Natural Mind (purple book)

Closing Words

MUSIC 4: Antonin Dvorak, Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22, 5, Finale <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdUSl9nv5nk> **video (05:54)**

ANNOUNCEMENTS by Sheila