

## About Mosaic

My experience as compiler and editor of prayers and reflections of contemporary Australians  
By Rosalind Bradley

If a man reaches the heart of his own religion,  
he has reached the heart of others too.

There is only one God, but there are many paths to him.

This quote, by Gandhi, forms the preface of my book *Mosaic*. It sums up my thoughts behind this compilation of favourite prayers and reflections chosen by contemporary Australians from different backgrounds and faiths. My vision for *Mosaic* was to show that whatever a person's ancestry or faith, we can appreciate the aspirations that are common to everyone, especially in our quest for God or purpose in life.

How did *Mosaic* begin? The London bombing of July 2005 set this book in motion. This incident really disturbed me especially as I was in London at the time with my family and England is my country of origin. The subsequent backlash against many Muslims really upset me. It made me want to do something positive and non-judgmental to highlight the diversity of faiths found in Australia.

From this thinking, arose the idea of an anthology – or mosaic – of prayers and reflections chosen by inspirational Australians from different religious traditions and backgrounds. My hope is that *Mosaic* will build bridges and assist in the dialogue of living within Australia's multicultural and spiritually diverse society.

How did I set about writing such a book? Finding the publisher and whom to include were my two main concerns. Amazingly, securing the publisher was easier. I attended a course called How to Publish Your Book and asked one of the co-presenters for some publishing advice. She replied that the ABC might be interested in my idea; so being in the right place at the right time led to my proposal being accepted.

Whom to include was much trickier. I brainstormed with friends, read the papers avidly, listened vigilantly to the radio, went to meetings and researched many different people from all backgrounds. I bought Margaret Gee's annual *Australian Celebrity Contact Book*: expensive but invaluable! Likewise, the internet was extremely useful for researching and sourcing information. I wrote emails and letters inviting people to participate, and over the months

the contributions trickled in. My first was from Ken Done followed by Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton, John Newcombe and Harry Miller.

I concentrated on reaching a balance of contributions from many walks of life: artists such as John Olsen, or writers Les Murray or Tim Winton, as well as from prominent religious leaders. The Primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Phillip Aspinall enclosed two Michael Leunig's poems and Cardinal Pell chose the traditional prayer O Memorare, attributed to St Bernard of Clairvaux. Peta Jones Pellach, from The Shalom Institute, chose a touching prayer she wrote for a Regional dialogue Inter-faith Cooperation meeting in Indonesia.

Most (but not all) religious traditions are represented including Judaism, Aboriginal Spirituality, Sikhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Baha'ism. Within Christianity, there are Quakers, Anglicans, Catholics, members from the Uniting Church, Church of Christ and Salvation Army as well as from the Armenian Church, Antiochian Church, and the Greek and Syrian Orthodox Churches.

Aboriginal people are well represented – from law Professor Larissa Behrendt who chose a quote from Martin Luther King Jnr to the first female NSW State MP Linda Burney (1 Corinthians 13,) and author Dr Ruby Langford Ginibi who wrote tenderly about her family.

Altogether, I contacted nearly 500 people and I received over 165 responses. I believe *Mosaic* represents a snapshot of contemporary Australia, with words of wisdom, faith and hope from both quiet achievers and high-profile individuals. Many contributors are well-known in their particular field: Justice Michael Kirby, Sr Veronica Brady; the Buddhist Jenny Kee; some have survived severe trauma or shown great resilience in adversity: Petrea King, Mahboba Rawi and Khoa Do; and others have dedicated their time and energy to building bridges across the divisions in our society: Camilla Cowley, Kareena Clifford and Fr Frank Brennan.

There are too many gems to mention but they include a poem written by rugby player John Eales for his father's funeral; an excerpt from Unesaneh Tokof, the Jewish prayer attributed to an eleventh century German Rabbi, chosen by Westfield chairman Frank Lowy and a Lakota native America prayer chosen by Tasmanian author Heather Rose: 'O Tunkashila, Wakan Tanka, Tatuya Topa, Unci Maka, Wapila, Wapila' – which means 'Grandfather, Great Spirit, the four directions of East, West, North and South, Mother Earth, thank you with deepest gratitude'.

After the London experience I had a personal interest in including Muslim contributions. In *Mosaic*, fourteen Muslims reveal many interesting insights into their faith. They include the all important prayer The Opening or Al -Fatiya, Qur'an 1:1-7, a prayer which is recited many times daily by all Muslims. This was chosen by Zuleyha Keskin, a prominent Muslim in Sydney and Melbourne scientist Dr Nouria Salehi. Qur'an 49:13 highlights the equality between men and women and was selected by lawyer and author Randa Abdel-Fattah. Islamic scholar and translator of the Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, was quoted by Aziza Abdel-Halim, President of the Muslim Women's National Network of Australia. This passage has a universal message of inclusiveness and could be written from many different religious perspectives:

Goodness leads to happiness  
Happiness leads to forgiveness,  
Forgiveness leads to love,  
Love leads to giving,  
Giving leads to receiving,  
Receiving leads to joy,  
Joy leads to appreciation,  
Appreciation leads to understanding  
Understanding leads to God,  
God, The One and Only!

One of the many delights, whilst writing the book, was receiving the unexpected contribution. I received a page written in beautiful calligraphy by John Olsen offering his choice of Pied Beauty.

As I was compiling this book, some patterns emerged which point to a universal need for a connection with others and the deep sense of comfort given by a familiar prayer or poem such as the Lord's Prayer, The Opening from the Qur'an or No man is an Island. Other themes include a desire to reinforce the mystery, power and celebration of 'God'; the significance of individual identity; the importance of hope and forgiveness; faith in action; the mapping out a sense of purpose in life and the fulfilment of dreams.

The most popular choice was the St Francis Peace Prayer which is not a fourteenth century prayer but likely to have been written during the First World War; it was the favourite of Tim Costello, Richard Gill, Fr Chris Riley and Holocaust survivor Sabina Van Der Linden. Tim Costello writes:

I use this prayer frequently, both personally and in leading church services. It is associated with St Francis because it was published on a card with his portrait. But apparently it was written in 1912 in France by a priest. It was widely circulated during World War I. It is this historic context – ‘the war to end all wars’ – which makes its words most meaningful as a plea for courage, hope and love in the most difficult of human situations. The emphasis on seeking the welfare of others instead of pure self-interest also stands in stark contrast to the mood of modern times.

Other popular choices were *The Lord’s Prayer*, favoured by Rev Bill Crews, and Uniting Church minister of Beaconsfield Frances Seen; and *I Will not Die an Unlived Life* by Dawna Markova chosen by Aden Ridgeway and Dorothy McCrae-MacMahon. Dame Elisabeth Murdoch’s favourite ‘To every thing there is a season...’ is from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Greig Pickhaver (also known as HG Nelson) chose *Ripple* written by Robert Hunter, the chief lyricist of the Grateful Dead throughout their career. Two stanzas are especially striking:

Ripple in still water

When there is no pebble tossed

Nor wind to blow

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty

If your cup is full may it be again

Let it be known there is a fountain

That was not made by the hands of man.

*Mosaic* cannot be all things to all people so while I endeavoured to discuss the book with as broad a cross-section of people as possible, I soon realised that I had just scratched the surface. Given more time, there are many other inspirational Australians from different faiths and backgrounds whom I would like to have included.

What is the format of *Mosaic*? Each contribution features a short biographical note followed by their chosen passage and their reflections on their choice. In many cases, these latter words are as powerful as their selected words, making *Mosaic* both unique and personal. Dani Haski of the ABC’s Australian Story fame writes beautifully about grief and how it evolves. Sudanese refugee Adut Dau Atem writes about being in a refugee camp and how

she misses her father's wise words. Sources of the extracts along with other useful information are included with each contribution.

*Mosaic* has affected me deeply. Whilst reading the many proofs, and waiting for the permissions to be cleared, I was able to spend time reflecting on the many words of wisdom and personal affirmations. I have become passionate about the need for interfaith dialogue and am assisting The Aquinas Academy in Sydney ([www.aquinas-academy.com](http://www.aquinas-academy.com)) to organise a course on Women's Voices from different faiths to be held in May and June 2008. Through meeting so many devotional Muslims, I was inspired to undertake a Summer School on Islam – an intense but worthwhile experience. And thanks to actor Peter Carroll and his contribution, I was introduced to the world of John Main and to the World Community for Christian Mediation.

I hope you too will enjoy *Mosaic* and find it not only enjoyable and informative, but also a guiding compass to look beyond your own 'patch' and engage with others. I hope too that these prayers and reflections will encourage a greater depth of contemplation and discovery during those quiet moments we all need.

The proceeds which I will receive from this book will go to two non-profit organisations: The Asylum Seekers Centre of New South Wales, which offers welcome and support for community-based asylum seekers, and Bethlehem Communities Australia which assists disadvantaged people in the Philippines, especially families who live on rubbish tips in Cebu.

To conclude, here is the Buddhist-like prayer, (author unknown) chosen by Andrew Denton who selected it because he thinks it is true and so do I.

Watch your feelings; they become your thoughts  
Watch your thoughts; they become your words  
Watch your words; they become your actions  
Watch your actions; they become your habits  
Watch your habits; they become your character  
Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

Rosalind Bradley was born and raised in the UK and has lived in Australia for nearly 25 years. After working for two years in Papua New Guinea as a volunteer teacher, she later returned to live in Australia. She has worked in PR and marketing for several charities including The Fred Hollows Foundation. Rosalind's spiritual background is eclectic. She had

a Jewish heritage, agnostic upbringing, was baptised and confirmed Anglican in her late twenties, worked in 'world development' for the Methodist Church, London and was received into the Catholic Church in Sydney 2002. She lives in Sydney with her husband and three children.

<http://www.mosaicbook.com.au>