



Salāma: an expansive understanding of safety

ISP's flagship curriculum is called **Salama**. Its name is both an aspiration and an admission—an aspiration that folks who have endured war can and will come to live lives marked by **salāma**, (roughly meaning “safety” in English) and an admission that safety feels unfairly and unfortunately distant for millions of people around the world. Simply, the fact that safety remains an aspiration, and not a familiar state, is an implication of unrectified harms that continue to shape the psychospiritual and somatic lives of millions of nonconsenting victims of war, violence, and adversities.

Our curriculum is called Salama as a way to honor folks' simple and articulated longing for safety.

The Arabic and Swahili word **salāma** (سلامة) carries far more than its common English translation of “safety” or “well-being.” Rooted in the deep semantic field of the triliteral Arabic root **s-l-m** (س-ل-م), *salama* suggests a multidimensional state of **wholeness, integrity, freedom from defect, and preservation from harm**, inseparably integrating moral, spiritual, and material dimensions. While colloquially used in Arabic and Swahili to mean “safe,” the word carries simultaneous suggestions of inner and outer conditions of being safeguarded, intact, and well.

Of note, the root **s-l-m** is among the most generative in the Arabic language. From it emerge words such as: **Salām** (سلام): Peace, tranquility, **Islām** (إسلام): Surrender or submission (to God), and **Salāma** (سلامة): Safety, soundness, wholeness

Salāma is a verbal noun (*masdar*, مصدر) of the form **fa'āla** (فعالة), which often expresses a *quality* or *enduring state*. In this way, **salāma** suggests a quality of intactness, of being unharmed, of being whole. In lexicons such as *Lisān al-‘Arab* and *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, *salāma* carries various meanings, including deliverance from afflictions, harm, or defects; freedom from injury, corruption, or flaw; or remaining in one's unaltered, whole, and unblemished state.

As indicated, while the translation of the word **salāma** as “safety” is not inaccurate, linguistic scholarship establishes **salāma** as more than the absence of harm, but as the **active preservation of uncorrupted essence**—bodily, moral, or spiritual.

In Islamic theology and spirituality, **salāma** features prominently as both a metaphysical and moral ideal. The richness of **salāma** also surfaces in Arabic translations of the Bible, especially as a rendering of the Hebrew word **shalom** (שלום) and the Greek **eirēnē** (εἰρήνη)—terms which imply not only peace but also wholeness and divine deliverance. Indeed, various renderings reflect semantic and theological overlap between Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek traditions that share a vision of safety as wholeness and divine preservation.

Relevance to Salama's Inner Safety Framework

Framing a conversation about trauma recovery or psychosocial care through the lens of **salāma** may not radically change practical steps with folks navigating the somatic, emotional, psychological, and social adaptations caused by traumatic experiences; however, it expands the conversation from pathology and treatment to preservation, coherence, and multidimensional wholeness. Particularly in contexts where **salāma** exists in common parlance, a deeper contemplation and exploration of its meaning offers a powerful complementary narrative, suggesting that healing is not only about recovering from what was lost, but about stewarding what remains intact and the various dimensions of the self where wholeness, preservation, and deliverance are felt, sensed, and imbued with meaning.

In this light, **salāma** is not simply a protective state but can also be considered an ethos of design, relation, and responsibility; a commitment to living and building in ways that reduce harm, preserve integrity, and honor the elements of self and essence that remain intact, preserved, and deeply generative, even in the face of life's adversities.