

COMPASSION FOR ALL LIFE

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Lama Doboorn Tulku

All faiths contain distilled wisdom and they promote inherent compassion. They are engaged in the quest for truth and triumph of devotion. I believe that these qualities are the base of all spiritual traditions. At the same time, some negative elements have also penetrated into the system of these orders.

No practicing religion can be happy with ignoring the suffering of some and alleviating the suffering of a few others. No religion can discriminate between one human being and another, and adopt systems and strategies that ignore some, which results in affluence for some at the cost of increasing misery for others. I understand that all religions believe in the need to end the suffering of all beings. The strategies of harmonious coexistence must, therefore, flow from fundamental perceptions or original teachings of the founders of religions.

Inter-religious dialogue is the need of the hour, but dialogues should not be for the sake of dialogue; we must address the pressing problems that we face. These include the sustainability of our life support system and related to that are ecological issues. Sustainability is based on the utilisation of natural resources and human skills and continuity of human endeavour for common benefit of all life forms.

Natural resources are limited; therefore it will be illogical to believe that there can be unlimited resources of enjoyment. If there are limits to resources, there have to be limits to consumption, as well as equity in access to what are needed to sustain life and make life meaningful.

If it is accepted that there are limits to what is available for consumption, it has to be accepted that multiplication of wants and an attitude that looks upon multiplication of possessions as the hallmark of culture and civilisation are untenable.

A system which denies essentials to many can be maintained only with violent means and suppression. It is, therefore, important that compassion is developed as the basis of espousal of any faith. His Holiness the Dalai Lama while addressing a conference in Amsterdam in 1990 has coined the term compassionate economy.

Ecological responsibility has a bearing on spiritual responsibility. Spirituality to me is a process of looking inward and ecology is to do with relationship between organisms and environment.

Buddha said: Sequential dependence of air on space, of water on air, of earth on water, of life on earth. Buddha's message is of harmonious interdependence. Ecological responsibility includes responsibility to preserve the ecosystem on which all life depends, to abstain from polluting and poisoning the air, water and earth which sustain life, to minimise depletion and to maximise efforts to replenish and include all life in our view of the universe.

The source of the universally acclaimed Buddhist concept of compassion can be found in the phrase from a sutra: *Bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya* for the benefit of many and for the happiness of many Buddha taught us that instead of focusing all thoughts and acts on ourselves or on the circle of our family and friends, we should go beyond the circle, must think of many and must work for many. Infinite compassion and meditation on this, followed by Bodhisattva conduct are the highest sadhana of a Mahayana practitioner.