

**9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
PEACE AND NONVIOLENT ACTION**

Anuvihba Jaipur Kendra

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*“Interfaith and Inter-Philosophical Peace or Endless Religious Wars” is the theme of this session.*

I would like to begin by saying, path finders in the world from the Buddha and Mahavira to recent history-Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, to our own times-HH the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and many others with or without Nobel Peace Prize in their credit, have worked to showed us ways and methods of approaching peace.

I am someone who believes that Inter religious and inter-philosophical dialogue; and mutual respect among the religions can bring out lasting peace in the world. I also believe religions play a crucial role in building a Culture of Peace. But it is important that the followers of each religion are truly sincere to the essential of their own religion.

Religion can not be taken for granted and practiced as a cultural relic. Our practice has to have more conscious direction. When this is lost, there is no point following a religious tradition. Religion exists in the temple of our mind; external temples are there only to help us for activating the positive qualities of our mind. The external traditions and practices which some times look so glamorous and some times bizarre, are not essential, what is important for us is to understand and follow the basic messages of the root teachers of the religions.

The purpose of religion is not only to liberate the mind of humankind and set on the path that leads to spiritual realization, but also to foster amity and fraternity among all human beings. Therefore, the very word for religion in Sanskrit “dharma” means to bind together, in a sense, shows us where the key to unity and harmony lies.

I feel we have to talk about working towards creating culture and atmosphere of peace through human actions. Therefore, peace also has to be achieved through collective and individual human actions. The acts which help to reduce hatred, tension and jealousy need to be directed towards benefit for individuals, communities and nations, blocks of nations. That is what I call peace work.

The common enemy of all religious disciplines, the target of all the moral precepts laid down by the great teachers of mankind, is selfish instinct of mind. It is again ignorance that leads to selfishness, anger and passion, which lie at the root of all the troubles of man and the world. The great teachers wanted to wean their followers away from the path of negative deeds caused by ignorance, and to introduce them to the path of righteousness.

One has often heard it said that they who are true to the essentials of their own religion are also true to the essentials of all religions. By concentrating on the earnest practice of our individual tradition, we shall discover that all religions share the same sublime aim.

All the religions agree that the prime necessity for achieving this aim is to discipline the mind which harbors selfishness that is the origin of all evil. Selfishness, on the one hand, leads us to the thoughtlessness and self-defeating pursuits of fruitless indulgences; on the other, it leads to aggressiveness in our social relations. Aggressiveness in turn leads to suspicion, tension and conflict.

Numerous seminars, workshops and discussions have taken place. In fact, around 1960s and 70s, it was a kind of fashion to organize events related to the theme of peace, which was gradually replaced by environment. To follow a trendy subject is fine in its own place. However, the effort here is to try and find a way to Peace and Nonviolent action. The key word here is *Action*. Just being a passive well-wisher, it is not possible to achieve any peace. I agree the statement in the theme paper: *“too often vested interests in religious hierarchies resist theological reform or spiritual insight, and, remain wedded to outmoded formulae that define religious groups as separate to one another...”*

It is essential to develop a culture of mutual respect amongst all the faiths and spiritual philosophies. Differences between one religious tradition and another are there. What is important is to learn, understand and accept these differences through inter-religious dialogues. When we look at dogmas, interpretations, the rituals that are prescribed, or the authorities that are cited, we can see that these disparities are the reflection of the particular conditions prevalent in the time, place, culture, language and traditions of the historical setting in which each tradition was born and fostered.

We must remember what is essential, and to appreciate the fact that these differences in approach are positive, enriching factors of human culture rather than being points of disparity. We do not need or want one single approach to the spiritual situation of man. Diversity is both useful and necessary. When we look at the various religious traditions as instruments for developing a good heart, love for others, respect for others, and a true sense of brotherhood, then all is seen as equally useful and valid. The most important thing is to focus upon this common purpose in our dealings with those who follow other paths.

For many centuries human beings have been talking about peace and harmony. In these days of material abundance and advancement in science and technology, it seems that the more sophisticated our lives become, the less we are conscious of these ideals. Yet there is no doubt about the need for these values. Without them the very survival of humanity is placed at risk.

The world has shrunk and has become more inter-dependent than ever before. All of us, individuals as well as nations, therefore must become concerned with the welfare of others. This is not only true from the spiritual perspective, or because universal altruism, but also because of self-interest.

The ultimate purpose of all religions is to benefit and uplift humanity. It is important for us to ensure that we are always aware of this purpose. Our aim should not be to convert others to one's own religion or to harm follower of other religions.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama always points out that all the religions of the world are basically methods for turning the living beings towards positive and creative ways. Each religion has its own particular characteristics, and therefore it is important for all of us to learn from each other.

All those concerned with spiritual ways are deeply concerned today about the restlessness that is afflicting the mind of man everywhere. Improvements in standards of living and the power that scientific technology has placed at the disposal of man do not seem to have succeeded in improving our peace of mind nor in enabling nations to live together in peace.

Man seems to be becoming increasingly materialistic, and driven by an insatiable desire for power and possessions. More and more religious intolerances are witnessed. We seem to be wandering further away from inward peace and happiness of the mind, rather than coming closer to it. At such a time, it is important for people from various traditions to come together.

I have been going through a book titled Ignited Mind by APJ Abdul Kalam, former President of India, and it seems this is right place to mention an episode contained in that book. This is about an incident that took place in Kanchi during Paramacharya's time which APJ heard from Mr. Venketaraman, also a former President. There stands a very famous 300-year-old mosque in the same vicinity as the Kanchi Mutt. Sometime back, the mosque jamayatha (authorities) and the district authorities decided to relocate the mosque to some other suitable place as its present location was inconvenient both for the mutt and the mosque. As a large number of people visit the historic mosque and there is huge gathering at the mutt too, the traffic was becoming difficult to manage. The mutt would rebuild the mosque in its new location. The Paramachrya, when heard this decision, vehemently opposed the whole idea. He said that when at 4.30 a.m. the call for namaz comes from the mosque, it acts as a wake-up call for my divine duties. He made this clear to both the district authorities and the mutt. And the shifting of the mosque was stopped.

We can draw admiration and inspiration from this story. I can say that currently prevailing religious politics and political religions, if I can call it, are not conducive to bringing about interfaith or inter-philosophical peace. To avoid the fear of religious wars, all the concerned people must engage themselves in a positive, meaningful and doable act. One must try to build a culture of mutual respect. This is not necessarily done through conferences, conventions, meeting of top people and declarations. Sometimes we get to hear about "minimal points that two sides can agree". For example, one may think about pledging not to use religion for selfish oriented political gains.

There are other activities which may be considered as secular. Art is one such thing. It has healing power of people's spiritual and mental hurt. It has the capacity of conveying your goodwill towards others.

In my own small ways, I have been passionately making effort in bringing together people from all walks of life through art and culture as the Managing Trustee of World Buddhist Culture Trust. It is of utmost importance that we keep the talks going between inter-religious traditions and that is what I will continue to do.