



Let us Reach out to Extend the Circle of Global Harmony

His Holiness, Mahamahopadhyay Bhadreshdas Swami

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Benediction

ॐ ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्॥

om īśāvāsyamidam sarvaṃ yatkiñca jagatyāṃ jagat|
tena tyaktena bhujñithāḥ mā ḡrdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam||

Everything and everyone within this entire creation
is pervaded by the divine presence of God, our creator.
Rejoice in surrendering unto him.
It – WE – all belong to him.
So covet not what is another's. (Isha Upanishad 1)

ॐ सह नाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं करवावहै।
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥

om saha nāvavatu| saha nau bhunaktu| saha vīryaṃ karavāvahai|
tejasvi nāvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai| om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ||

May we progress together.
May we be nourished together.
May we grow stronger together.
May we excel together.
May we never quarrel with one another.
May there prevail peace, peace, and peace! (Yajur Veda)

Introduction

Respected divine souls of this blessed earth,
Fellow pilgrims of peace and seekers of truth,
My humble greetings to the Divine presence within each and every one of you.



My special appreciation also
to Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staqf,
to Shaykh Mohammad Bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa,
and to the organisers
for inviting me to address this esteemed forum.

This inaugural R20 summit reminds me of the inspiring words spoken at the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in New York City. My guru, His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj – the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and whose centennial birth anniversary is being celebrated this year – he shared a universal message for global peace and interfaith harmony. He said: **“At this hour in human history, we religious leaders should not dream of only one religion in the world, but dream of a world where all religions are one – united. Unity in diversity is the lesson of life.”**

This summit is another opportunity for celebrating such rich multi-religious diversity.

Celebrating Diversity

I wish to elaborate upon the value of diversity through two analogies. Imagine a garden – a beautiful garden with flora and fauna of every species, creating a kaleidoscopic landscape rich in assorted colours, fragrances and songs.

Now imagine the whole *world* as a garden – a beautiful, diverse garden where every faith, culture and race blooms in symbiotic harmony with each other.

Upon arriving here in Indonesia, especially at this summit, I feel as if I am pleasantly strolling through a beautiful garden of religious and cultural diversity – just as I was in India.

How pertinent, then, is it that this summit is being hosted in Indonesia, whose very motto is **“Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.”** Unity in diversity.

Yes, we are different. Yet we are one. ONE human race. ONE family of ONE home. Just as the ancient Rig Veda proclaims: “यत्र विश्वम् भवति एक नीडम्।” “yatra viśvam bhavati eka nīdam।”

A second analogy: Imagine an orchestra. Different instruments. Different roles. Different sounds. Yet each one playing in perfect harmony with the others, creating a wonderful, joyful symphony. *This* is the power of celebrating diversity.

Universal Definition of Dharma

I draw your attention now to a universal definition of ‘dharma’.

When we delve deeper into each faith, we find such universal aspects that transcend gender and geography, race and rank. In Hinduism, ‘dharma’ has been a topic of profound discussion and contemplation for millennia.

For example: Purva Mimamsa Darshan, a school of thought dedicated to the Philosophy of Action, begins with “अथातो धर्मजिज्ञासा।” “athāto dharmajijñāsā।” (1.1.1) “Now, therefore, the inquiry into dharma.”

Vaisheshika Darshan, another school of classical Indian philosophy, begins similarly with “अथातो धर्मं व्याख्यास्यामः।” “athāto dharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ|” (1.1.1) “Now, therefore, we define dharma.”

The very next aphorism offers a universal definition of dharma: “यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः।” “yato:bhyudayaniḥśreyasasiddhiḥ sa dharmah|” (1.1.2) “Dharma is that which elevates in this world and beyond.”

This is known as Sanatan Dharma, or “Eternal Dharma.”

Universal Values of Dharma: Peace, Love, Friendship, Respect and Compassion

Such a universal dharma for humans is rooted in universal human values – values such as peace, love, friendship, respect and compassion.

If we take each value in turn:

Peace, in Hinduism, is profusely exalted. Vedic prayers, such as the Shanti-Path, invoke universal peace across all aspects of creation. They often conclude with the calling: ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः॥ om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ||

Love is also emphasised as a defining quality of religion. His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj used to say: “परस्पर प्रीति प्रसरवे ते धर्म” “paraspara prīti prasarāve te dharmā” “True religion is that which fosters mutual love.”

Another invaluable value is friendship. We hear a ‘Song of Universal Friendship’ among the Yajur Veda chants. “मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम्। मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे॥”

“mitrasya mā cakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtāni samīkṣantām| mitrasyāhaṁ cakṣuṣā sarvāṇi bhūtāni samīkṣe mitrasya cakṣuṣā samīkṣāmahe||”

“May I see all beings with an eye of friendship. May all beings see me with an eye of friendship. May we all see each other with an eye of friendship.”

Avoiding violence and hatred are also essential for resolving conflict peacefully and fostering religious harmony.

In canto 12, the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita illuminates: “They who hate no one, and are friendly, forgiving and compassionate to everyone... [are] true devotee[s] of God.” “अद्वेषा सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च।” “adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca|” (12.13)

Bhagwan Swaminarayan also propounded dharma as grounded in noble conduct, and inspired a fellowship that lived by such universal values.

Accepting, Respecting & Learning From Each Other

When empowered by these universal meanings and values of dharma, we, too, will be able to truly serve our own faith as well as the global family of faiths.

Because then, we are able to *accept* the existence of other faiths – accept them as they are, without needing to discriminate or disparage.

Because then, there can be mutual *respect* among faiths – respect of human dignity and spiritual integrity, without inciting hurt or hate.

Because then, we can *learn* from one another – learn all that is good and noble, without ourselves feeling inadequate or insecure.

Interfaith harmony does not require that one relinquish or relax one’s faith, but rather, that we grow stronger within it.

And as we grow stronger in our own faith in God, we become more accepting of his loving, all-pervading presence in others.

I thus wholeheartedly thank and commend the organizers of this ground-breaking summit for affording us this invaluable opportunity to dialogue freely with each other, to learn from one another, to grow closer together.

Together, we are stronger. Together, we move faster. Together, we climb higher.

Role of Dialogue in Religious Harmony

I believe such summits – not just large and grand, but also small and simple – play an integral role in facilitating dialogue (*‘samvāda’*) and fostering harmony. When conducted with noble intentions – with love, courage and humility – such sincere dialogue can yield priceless rewards.

In Hinduism, dialogue has been emphasised since Vedic times as a fundamental human virtue. The Rig Veda sings: “संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम्।” “saṅgacchadhvaṃ saṁvadadhvaṃ saṁ vo manāṁsi jānatām|” (10.191.1)

I regard these Divine words as a universal ‘Hymn of Harmony,’ which, translated, means: “May we all progress together in harmony. May we all speak together in one voice. May all our minds be one in agreement.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to say:

let us celebrate religious diversity; let us endeavour to understand the universality of religion; and let us be empowered by the universal values of religion, by loving love, respecting respect, befriending friendship, and learning to learn from each other. May we continue to convene and deepen our dialogue in the service of global religious harmony.

I end with the inspiring words of my guru, the sixth successor of Parabrahma Bhagvan Swaminarayan, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj:

“In the spirit of ‘वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्’ ‘vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam’ ‘The whole world is one family’, let us reach out to extend the circle of global harmony.”

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥ om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ||