

World Religions for Peace

Different Faiths – Common Action

Religions Together for a Better World

Hinduism's Vision for Building a Non-Violent Peaceful World

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Wesley's Chapel

49 City Road

London

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Nearest tube station: Old Street

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Violence, Extremism and Religion
3. Core Beliefs of Hinduism – Love, Compassion, Unity, Nonviolence and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family)
4. Faiths Working Together for a Better World
5. Conclusion and Way Forward

Introduction

Chair, distinguished speakers and respected audience, welcome to the Religions for Peace conference. I am going to speak about Hinduism's vision for building a nonviolent peaceful world. In the Hindu religion, Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu the Preserver; Shiva the Destroyer exist simultaneously and represent the multiplicity of God. The mystic experience of Hinduism is a sense of oneness with All Being – whether that is described as God, Nature or the Real. Hindu teachers have always made clear, there's only one spiritual reality. Brahman is the One Reality which is the principle of All Beings. Brahman is described as Being, Consciousness and Bliss (Sat, Chit, Ananda).

India is a nation of more than 1.2 billion people with 1 billion Hindus also close to 200 million Muslims, 25 million Christians, 20 million Sikhs – a diverse world getting along with its secular constitution, plural society but witnessing pressures and threats as more than 500 million people are illiterate and live in absolute poverty, more than 600 million lack basic sanitation and more than 200 million lack safe drinking water.

India is the only world culture to have been ruled by four leading religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. In that respect, its history is unparalleled. What other people can claim the likes of Gautam Buddha, Mahavir, Vivekaanand, Sri Ram Krishna, Shankracharya and Mahatma Gandhi.

The saint Rama Krishna often described different religious experiences as different melodies of music. The Rig Veda, considered to be the oldest book on earth have described the reality of the world as:

Truth is one: paths are many

Reality is one: sages call it by various names

Gandhi believed in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. He said that we should read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of these faiths as we should find that they were at the bottom one and all helpful to one another.

Interfaith meetings like today and around the world increase understanding and cooperation with other faiths for peace, social justice and the common good of the humanity. On a positive note, religions of the world have been source of major social, economic, political changes and advancement. The concept of

nonviolence, enhanced capacity for empathy, tolerance, forgiveness and compassion has its roots in religions of the world such as respect of other faiths. Religion is an instrument which refines one's mind, for inner development for building a peaceful society. Throughout ages faiths have been the very bases of our understanding. The very origins of nonviolence is brought to us by religion, not to hurt no creature even the humblest as we are all interconnected.

I will, in my talk today, explore how faiths in general and Hinduism in particular can promote peace, nonviolence and work in cooperation for a better world. In short, how we can have a strategy between hostile communities and faith traditions for peace building, conflict prevention, dialogue and diplomacy.

Violence, Terrorism and Religion

One of the most pressing contemporary issue threatening peace in Europe, Middle East and elsewhere is violent religious extremism leading to rampant terrorism and civil wars. While religious zeal can be a healthy and constructive component of life, when religious passion promotes violence towards those with different values and beliefs, it becomes a threat to the wider society and religion can be seen as a cause of conflict rather than a solution. In these troubled times, how can we keep our values and keep major faith communities to work together while isolating extremism. There are many excuses for violence, such as race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation, but perhaps the saddest one of all is the violence in the name of religion.

Religious intolerance is on the increase leading to violence, extremism, terrorism and Islamophobia. The roots of the problems are complex mix, involving historical grievances, contemporary wars and occupations of Muslim-majority lands, religious intolerance and social polarisation closely linked to injustice, austerity and globalisation. The increasing failure of neo-liberal economic model resulting in inequality and widespread marginalisation of educated and knowledgeable population are some of the other root causes of extremism. It is naive to think it is possible to overcome terrorism by military means.

Religion or faith is an instrument of inner transformation of human beings so that they can behave ethically in a nonviolent way towards all living beings. If we kill those who do not subscribe to one's view, it negates its very meaning. A religion that enslaves, tortures and kills is no religion at all. It is a travesty, a monstrosity in the guise of a spiritual path. In our times, we have observed this phenomenon in the way in which a violent few have perverted and deformed the beautiful and

venerable religion of Islam, but we have seen it happening before with other faith traditions.

Our goal of peace fuels an ardent desire for dialogue about the issues around this violent conflict. A nonnegotiable condition for this dialogue, however, is that violence needs to stop.

Those who subscribe to violence as a method to achieve their goals need to stop or be stopped. The innocent need to be protected and safeguarded, the displaced need to return safely to their homes, and then in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, we can find a way to move forward to our goal of peace.

Peace requires action. Immediately. Today we look back with horror to contemplate tragedies like the Rwandan and Armenian genocide or the Jewish holocaust and wonder "How could this happen?" "Why didn't anyone do anything to prevent it?" All tragedies emerge from seeds of hatred, and prejudice leading to violence and killing.

Core Beliefs of Hinduism – Love, Compassion, Unity, Nonviolence and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family)

The ultimate goal of Hindus refer to spiritual peace or peace in the society and nature. It is through unity and giving up ones separateness, universal peace can be attained.

Traditionally, Hinduism has adopted an ancient Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, which translates as "The world is one family." The essence of this concept is the observation that only base minds see dichotomies and divisions. The more we seek wisdom, the more we become inclusive and free our internal spirit from worldly illusions or Maya. World peace is hence only achieved through internal means – by liberating ourselves from artificial boundaries that separate us all. As with all Dharmic religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism), ahimsa (avoidance of violence) is a central concept.

From the Hindu perspective, to move human beings towards truth through unselfish, open minded thoughts and behaviour which encourages people to act and live in harmony.

One of the root causes of violence is lack of inner peace. There are five obstacles to inner peace which are aptly described in the Indian scriptures in various ways

in Vedic culture, Bhagavad Gita, Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism. They are Kam (lust), Krodh (rage, anger, fear and hatred), Lobh (greed of wealth, power and fame) – excesses of capitalism and corporate power, Moh (attachment, delusion, ignorance or obsession) and Ahankar (Vanity, pride or ego) destroyer of the tranquillity of the mind. These are five basic causes of violence leading to suffering of human existence. The self-control of all these five evils is the key to inner peace and also the core contribution of many major religions of the world.

Inner peace comes from within and it is futile to seek it elsewhere. It radiates from within and our behaviour will be its own manifestation. What you do towards people is a reflection of who you are and what you feel inside.

Emperor Ashok (304BC - 232BC) who, when Romans were busy killing each other, created an exceptional doctrine of life in which subjects of all faiths in his kingdom were protected under his code. He was one of the first Emperor to put the doctrine of nonviolence into practice to the extent that even deer hunting was banned by him in his kingdom. The teachings of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, promoted that there is no Hindu or Muslim, “All beings and creatures are His (God’s). He (God) belongs to all” – Guru Granth Sahib 425

Hindus believe that life is a series of beginnings, not endings. Creation is an ongoing process and when we aim to create a perfect world, where love and compassion are shared by all for suffering to cease, is the ultimate goal of Hinduism

Like all great religious traditions, Hinduism is complex and multifaceted when it comes to the question of peace and war, violence and non-violence. Although many critics claim that violence is also part of Hinduism, but others argue that Hinduism is essentially a religion of peace like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, leaving unsettled whether religious sanction of violence is essential to each religion in question or a departure from its primary message.

Can religion show the way for co-existence, heal the wounds and bring peace, reconciliation and harmony in the world? Religion often has been misused for divisive political purposes, but the essence of true faith is to motivate and inspire for peace and harmony.

Gandhi stated Hinduism’s unique contribution as “Non-violence is common to all religions but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human

life but in the oneness that all that lives. Hinduism is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and therefore, sacredness of all life.

Faiths Working Together for a Better World

Uniting for Peace (Edinburgh and London) and many more faith organisations are sharing wisdom, understanding of different religions for co-existence, peace, religious pluralism and tolerance.

Another way of working together is to celebrate and participate in festivals of different faiths which can enhance understanding of other religions an uplifting experience for all.

Conclusion and Way Forward

In yoga, according to its founder Patanjali, one of the first precept of Ahimsa (nonviolence) is do not kill, do not hurt or harm anyone, do not think ill of others. In other words, The Hindu ethos permits co-existence , mutual respect and harmonious living of different groups as this world view is based on emphasising the origin of all existence in one truth, God or Brahman.

We all want to see a world free of pain, cruelty, free from violence and barbarity that perpetuates suffering on earth and revalidate the power of love, compassion and forgiveness.

On reflection, one must take into consideration that progress has its own strange ways of manifesting itself. In the 17th and 18th century in the age of reason, we had spread of science and industrialisation in the midst of rampant slavery, which carried on business as usual. Lord Wilberforce had 40 years of struggle to finally pass the bill in the parliament for the abolition of slavery bill. That also needed manipulating as he had to do it by the back door. He did it by giving MP's tickets to go and watch racing in Derby so that they will abstain from the parliament on the day of voting.

Holding meetings like today to foster values of oneness, harmony, multiculturalism and diversity brings a sense of our common humanity, at its deepest, which flows from a mystical experience of oneness. This is why the growth of inner peace, advocated in Hinduism is a vital contribution to the peace of the world. Nonviolence is nurtured by inner peace, unity and spiritual development leading to universal peace.

Spiritual and religious leaders should pledge to do all to end wars and violence that has been plaguing mankind for too long, especially the wars that have an element of religious and ideological disagreement and help remove any possible religious justification for these wars and violence. Instead of killing one another, we encourage one another towards personal and universal enlightenment and pledge to work towards this end. Peace requires the spiritual transformation of mankind and as faith communities, we should be prepared to answer that call.

In conclusion, let me say that, civilisation in the long run can only prevail if a society is based on moral and ethical values and standards. What we need is more faith, more inner peace to rectify the dire situation of the universe. I think that is the essence of Hinduism and all faiths. We as spiritual followers of all faiths have the widest, largest and deepest reach. We can make a huge difference for us and future generations. Let's do it, our work starts right here, right now. To follow the line of Hinduism's vision to build a nonviolent peaceful world, we should invoke the strength of Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver and pray for the powers of Shiva, the Destroyer to remain dormant. In essence the message of Hindu religion is to work for building a peaceful world.

Thanks for listening.

Notes:

1. Mohandas Gandhi, The Gospel of Non-Violence
2. Vijay Mehta, Celebrating and learning from Diwali - Festival of Lights, House of Lords, 18th of November, 2009
- 3.
4. Vijay Mehta, Faiths Together for a Better World, May 2016, Eastbourne, UK
5. Daniel Mayton, Nonviolence and Peace Psychology, Springer Science & Business Media, 2009
6. Marcus Braybrooke, What we can learn from Hinduism, O Books 2002
7. Hall, Tarquin, Makers of India – Fifty people who shaped the subcontinent, The Times, 2016
8. Mehta, Vijay, From Inner Peace to Global Peace, Budapest, April 2016
9. Mehta , Vijay, Is Nonviolent Future Possible?, International Peace Conference, Jaipur, India, 2014
10. Rodriguez, Guillermo, Interfaith: Do We Still have a dream? 22 May 2016, Ventura County Star

Vijay Mehta is an author and peace activist. He is Chair of Uniting for Peace and founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity. His books include United Nations and its Future in the 21st Century (2005), Arms No More (2005), The Fortune Forum Code: For a Sustainable Future (2006), “The Economics of Killing” (2012) and “Peace Beyond Borders” (2016).

The Sunday Times described him as a “longstanding activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment, who along with his daughter Renu Mehta has set a precedent for striving to change the world” (**The Sunday Times, February 01, 2009**).

In 2014, Vijay Mehta’s bio “**The Audacity of Dreams**” appeared in the book form “**Karma Kurry**” published by Jaico Publishing House, India with a foreword to the book by Nelson Mandela.

“Thank you for all you do Vijay – both the organisation Uniting for Peace and yourself are inspiration and give us all hope that both yourself and the organisation can bring a world without a war. Indeed it is possible, even in our own time.” – **Mairead Corrigan Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate 1976**

“This book, Peace Beyond Borders by Vijay Mehta, an astute non-European observer, uses this unprecedented, extraordinary experience as the centrepiece of a carefully crafted theory on the construction and maintenance of peace and prosperity on a global scale. It is my hope that many non-Europeans will use it as a source of inspiration as they attempt to carve out long-lasting peace in other parts of the world.”
- **Jose Ramos-Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate 1996 and Former President of Timor-Leste**