

FROM INNER PEACE TO A VISION OF UNIVERSAL PEACE

A Conference on “Universal Wellness through Meditation, Yoga and Holistic Health”

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Introduction:

The concept of Inner Peace is as old as the hills. It is part of the rich Indian tradition which can be traced back thousands of years in our history, when our sages and saints have been meditating to find Inner peace as a way to attain Moksha or salvation. Our conference on **‘Universal Wellness through Meditation, Yoga and Holistic Health’** is in a way to attain inner peace which can be expanded to bring universal peace in a world full of hatred, violence and wars.

How do we attain inner peace? Well when you look around, most of the world is peaceful. We are at peace with our family, neighbors, and people around us in offices, streets, shops meetings and conferences as we are here today. However it is the one percent or less, a tiny minority of the people in the world who are violent in nature, and are culprits. For their profit, greed and dominance, they engage in endless warfare. They make it worse for everyone. It is the one bad apple in a box of apples that makes the whole rotten, or a bad fish in a pond which makes the whole water poisonous.

So what we do to attain inner peace and how we can transform that to attain universal peace in which all mankind can live in peace and harmony. Change ourselves as Gandhi said, “We must become the change we want to see in the world” what we need to do is expand our horizon of inner consciousness to attain wider peace in the world. Path of peace brings peace. In our individual life we can be actively engaged as peacemakers in our homes and communities, thus becoming instruments of peace instead of war. The whole world can join in to follow this principle.

Peace is sometimes seen in negative terms as the absence of war. But, the Sanskrit shanti, Hebrew shalom and the Arabic salaam more positively suggest an integral wholeness resulting from the right relationship with others, nature and the Absolute. Peace has an inner dimension and an outer one, the latter unattainable without the former.

In his book Being Peace, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh writes: “Without being peace, we cannot do anything for peace”. He adds: “How do you want to create peace, if there is no peace inside yourselves?” Peace must dwell deep within one’s own being before it overflows to others. The essence of shanti emphasises the inner source, the absence of peace being due to interior unrest and ignorance.

Everybody wants to have a peaceful life free from fear and hunger escaping any kinds of unpleasant and stressful experiences, anything which could make life more difficult and miserable. Whenever the people experience unhappiness and no longer able to enjoy the peace, they tend to seek a remedy which could alleviate their sufferings and quite often they look for a peaceful solution through the religions they believe in by praying and undertaking religious deeds. Have not we muttered a word of praying to God whenever we are under difficult and dangerous circumstances? Whether one is a Christian, a Buddhist or a Moslem, he or she prays for a peaceful life and a peaceful future. It is important for every single human being to have peace and strive for peace almost all the time although peace could be interpreted differently by different people in the world. For some people, peace means healthy life while others believe peace means material wealth. Yet, a millionaire could fall sick in the nick of time and he or she suffers not only physically but experience the most unpleasant state of mind. To treat the physical sufferings, most people rely on antibiotics, chemically formulated and produced medications but how do we cure the mental sufferings?

How do we attain mental peace of mind, serenity and calmness? Not only the mental sufferings can be alleviated but even many of the physical sicknesses can be treated through the exercises of cultivating a peaceful mind, for example, through the practices such as meditation and yoga. We go to Church, Temples, and Mosques not simply to practice religious deeds but to create a peace of mind as an immediate consequence. We share the merits and peace among churchgoers, pilgrims to the temples and monasteries as well as those fasting during the Ramadan. We try to build and share the peace we enjoy with our friends, families and everyone in the world. We all want to spread this valuable peace of mind across the world and consequently help create a peaceful and beautiful world free from hatred, vindictiveness, greedy and unethical practices.

However, have we ever wondered that how many people can enjoy peace in the world today? The world we live in has experienced enormous changes of happiness, sadness, poverty, wealth, life and death over the centuries. The life and death here means the miserable life in inhumane and sub-standard circumstances due to extreme poverty or chronic and pandemic diseases and the untimely death as a result of wars, global pandemic, poverty and natural disasters due to environmental irregularities such as the climate change. The two world wars cost millions of precious lives - combatants as well as civilians - across the world, drove many countries towards extreme poverty and millions of the members of global society experienced horrible and the most unpleasant time in their lives. And we never know whether there would be another disastrous world war in the future.

Wars, Militarism, Hunger and Poverty

As long as there are people who advance the culture of militarism, who foster the hatred through extreme terrorism and the 'greed' for power that drive the evil minds to possess weapons of mass destruction which could not only devastate the people but destroy our own peaceful, precious and beautiful home, our planet, we all will be in constant fear of uncertain life ahead. In estimate, the First World War and Second World War claimed 11, 016, 000 and 59, 028, 000 lives which totalled more than 70 million precious lives.¹

Can we say that we are in peace after the World War II? No more wars, no more suffering? According to the Global Security, there are currently 29 countries engage in armed conflicts and majority of these countries have been at wars for decades. Most of the conflicts in the world these days are civil wars or 'intrastate wars' which are internal conflicts based on different grounds such as religion, ethnic or racial issues and ideological cleavages.² There were eight major wars in the world by mid-2005 compared with 15 major wars by the end of 2003.³ The 'major wars' means *military conflicts inflicting 1,000 battlefield deaths per year* by the United Nations.⁴ The number of civilians such as the wounded and casualties during the wars today increased significantly compared with WWI as there were less than 5% civilian casualties during the WWI but more than 75% of total casualties and fatalities are civilians in the conflicts of the world today.⁵ The civilian deaths are far higher in post World War II conflicts. Further,

¹ Three World Wars

<http://www.threeworldwars.com/overview.htm>

² The Global Security

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/index.html>

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

not only the precious human lives are wasted, billions of dollars have been consumed for these atrocious wars. The recent publication of the US Congressional Research Service revealed that the Congress has approved a total of \$1.121 trillion for the terror operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and other necessary counter-terrorism measures.⁶ According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the world military expenditure in 2009 was estimated to be \$1.53 trillion which is 2.7% of the world's GDP (Gross Domestic Product).⁷ The United States of America is ranked as the top spender in military affair which accounts for 43% (\$663 billion) of total world military expenditure whereas China with 6.6% (\$100 billion) and, France and the UK at the trails with \$67 billion and \$69 billion respectively.⁸ Obviously, the major powers spend unimaginable amount of funds on military advancement and the culture of militarism has built up significantly. While the budget for military expansionism is increased there are growing concerns for malnutrition, pandemic diseases such as swine flu, avian flu – and eventually the climate change.

The Indian Armed Forces is one of the world's largest military force, with roughly 1.32 million active standing army, with 2.14 million reserve forces and 1.3 million paramilitary forces thus giving India the third-largest active troops in the world as of 2006. India's official defence budget stands at US\$32 billion for FY2010. but the actual spending on the armed forces is estimated to be much higher than that. Undergoing rapid expansion and modernization, the Indian Armed Forces plans to have an active military space program and is currently developing a missile defence shield and nuclear triad capability. The Armed Forces of India possess nuclear weapons and operate short and intermediate-range ballistic missiles as well as nuclear-capable aircraft, and naval vessels. India is the world's largest arms importer and ranks among the top thirty in arms export. Currently, India imports close to 70% of its weapons requirements largely from Russia, Israel, and more recently, the United States. The country's defence expenditure will be around \$112 billion by 2016.

We need to take urgent attention and actions to address these global crises effectively and the substantial amount of funds are needed to save millions of lives across the world. With reference to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Hunger Education Service (WHES) pointed out that there are 925 million hungry people in the world in 2010.⁹ The majority of these hungry or malnourished people are in Asia-Pacific region and in Sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, the people in developing countries or the Third World countries are the hardest hit of poverty. The WHES claimed poverty as the major cause of hunger and underlined the other factors which make people poorer, hungrier and shorter life span such as economic mismanagement, conflict and climate change. The changing climatic patterns cause drought, flood and chaos in agricultural matters, for instance, farming practices and these disasters consequently create other disasters such as famine and diarrhoea. Unnoticeably, millions of people are at these greatest risks of becoming the victims of natural disasters besides the man-made barbaric wars.

It would be completely immoral and unethical if we let the majority of the poorest people on the planet die of hunger, diseases, as a result of armed conflicts. The developed or the First

⁶ Congressional Research Service: The cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and other global war on terror operations since 9/11

⁷ SIPRI: Recent trends in military expenditure

<http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/resultoutput/trends>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ WHES: World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics

<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

world countries need to take a lead on resolving these dire circumstances across the world instead of advancing the military strength and spending millions of dollars on making innovative killing machines. According to the World Bank statistics in 1985, the First World or developed countries of Europe and America generated 63% of world's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) although the population of the First World constituted only 15% of the world population.¹⁰ The Second World or communist countries such as Russia, Eastern European countries and China generated 19% world's GDP and the population was 33% of the total world population.¹¹ The Third World countries or the developing countries accounted for 52% of world population but its total GDP was only 18% of the world's GDP. These figures represented the situation of the world 25 years ago and even after 25 years the initiatives for reducing global poverty could not meet the targets yet. Still these developing countries in Asia and Africa are struggling with poverty and other disasters.¹²

It is the responsibility of everyone to make peace happen and enjoy the life free from fear and want, free from hunger, free from chronic and communicable diseases and free from untimely death. We need to work together through transparency, accountability and harmony to address these issues. We need to strive for universal peace and then we can work together peacefully and effectively to overcome the challenges we are facing. It is time for the super powers to disarm the horrendous nuclear weapons, divert the funds spending on military to humanitarian causes and work harder for the development of the world's poorest and disastrous societies. The nuclear armed states of the world must disarm these satanic weapons which could not only destroy the planet world but eventually extinct the human race. Currently there are about 23400 nuclear warheads in the world and the consequence is unimaginable if these weapons are used in the future man-made disasters.¹³ However, the world is now facing severe threats imposed by the nature such as global warming, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes and other natural disasters and rather than preparing for unseen enemies by growing the military strength, the people in the world, particularly the governments of the world need to work in unity to overcome the challenges imposed by the nature.

Way Forward

Over the decades, the world has experienced the peaceful solutions through nonviolence which have been successful in ending conflicts. We have seen the historic nonviolent achievements of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence. Martin Luther King's victory for civil rights and equality continues to bring more successes as seen in the election of the first black President of the United States of America, Barack Obama. The nonviolence has been the most favourable means of promotion and protection of human rights and civil liberties. The world has given birth to prominent nonviolent campaigners along with the subsequent victories over the years such as Nelson Mandela against Apartheid in South Africa, the 14th Dalai Lama for freedom in Tibet and Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma against military dictatorship. Although Tibet and Burma are still under the oppression and tyranny, both nonviolent campaigners for freedoms, the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi have achieved enormous support from around the world for their peaceful approach and there is a certain victory at the end as the justice always prevails. Resolving the conflicts through political solution instead of armed struggles has been effectively practised in many parts of the world. The UN has been at the

¹⁰ Heywood, A (2002) Politics

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: Nuclear Weapons States Briefing

forefront of maintaining international peace and security. After the atrocities of the Second World War it has been trying to fulfil its mandate “*to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind*”.

Professor Stephen Zunes, an academic and advocate of nonviolent movement highlighted that why nonviolent actions need to be followed instead of warfare in resolving conflicts. There are significant and undeniable facts about the benefits of nonviolent approach and Zunes explicitly portrayed these in his article, for instance, the cost of armed conflicts, the consequences of armed struggle on both sides such as the displaced people, destroyed infrastructure and devastated economy during and after the conflicts and so on.¹⁴ He rightly pointed out that the armed revolution needs to advance its military strength and therefore consistent relying on external support for ammunition and weapons cost hard-to-break dependence on the outside arms suppliers which could lead to unfavourable situation. Further, he claimed that even if the outcome of armed struggle is favourable, such status quo is often reverted to violence. When addressing the pressing issues such as potential armed conflicts or existing wars among different races or nations, diplomacy, dialogue and decommissioning or disarming are critical tools of conflict prevention and resolution. There are histories of successful peaceful resolutions or victories that achieved through nonviolence and political solutions.

The well-known transition from Apartheid regime to democratic rule under the leadership of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nelson Mandela in 1990s was claimed as the South African ‘miracle’ or the ‘negotiated revolution’. One of the greatest histories of peaceful change in the world and the different players such as the international community, various organisations and communities in South Africa and INGOs (International Non-governmental Organisations) played a crucial role in the transition. For instance, a recent development in dismantling of the nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia has been the significant outcome of successful consensus building process between the two countries. The Senate ratified the New Start Treaty, the nuclear disarmament agreement with Russia in December, 2010. According to the Treaty, both the US and Russia will reduce deployed nuclear warheads by thirty percent.¹⁵ That means both countries will only possess no more than 1, 550 nuclear arsenals. Russia has now ratified the Treaty in 2011. Although this move should be welcomed, the complete disarmament of nuclear weapons needs to be in a significant progress. In order to achieve such a progress, all the nuke states need to work together towards a goal of nuke-free world through the process of transparency, harmony and solidarity which could pave the way for building a peaceful future. There are significant peace processes in the world which have ended the bloodshed. For instance, the Northern Ireland peace process which eventually led to the decommissioning of the IRA in 2005 is a milestone of peaceful resolution.¹⁶

Happiness comes from living in peace with yourselves and surroundings. This happiness can only be achieved when the people across the world live in harmony. Mahatma Gandhi said ‘happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony’.¹⁷ That harmony leads to inner peace which we can transform to a vision of universal peace.

¹⁴ Zunes, S (2005) Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action (Foreign Policy Focus) re-posted by Commondreams.org <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0331-31.htm>

¹⁵ BBC (23 Dec 2010) Obama hails Senate vote to back Russia nuclear treaty

¹⁶ BBC News: IRA has destroyed all its arms

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4283444.stm

¹⁷ Famous Quotes & Authors: Mahatma Gandhi Quotes

Ideas and Actions for Universal Peace:

The concept of inner peace to universal peace is not pursued actively, that is the reason that 1% of the top leaders elites and corporations for their profit and greed have plunged the rest of the world into continuous warfare from one part of the world into the other, bringing untold violence, deaths, destruction and suffering to mankind. Some of the ideas and actions for Global Peace are below:

- Demilitarisation- work for dismantling military policies and institutions for reducing arms race and military expenditure
- Disarmament- promote reduction and abolition of military hardware- nuclear weapon, small arms tanks, military aircraft
- To nurture Culture of Peace- put mechanism for dialogue, diplomacy, negotiations, conflicts resolutions and offset individual, state aggression and absolute obedience to authority
- Work for Abolition of War- Strengthen- non violent means and peace processes to end conflicts
- Work for wiping global poverty, hunger and invest in achieving sustainable development
- Build initiatives necessary for peace- justice, rule of law, solidarity
- Give voice to the people to stand up and act for their values and what is right
- Fostering a notion of unity- introduction of liberal education, formation of a mature democracy and raising our level of consciousness to recognise we are all one

There are various examples from inner peace to universal peace through non violence which have ended conflicts. Some of the famous ones are;

- Indian independence was gained from the British without any bloodshed
- Mutual trade benefits have ended wars in Europe
- Polish solidarity movement of the 1980s ended Soviet control of Poland
- Costa Rica, a country which lives in peace and harmony without weapons and army

Conclusion

In order to work together and march towards the goal of peaceful coexistence, we need to get rid of suspicions among us and ought to stop fostering the mentalities and attitudes such as hatred, arrogance, prejudice, vindictiveness, rivalry and envy. We can then make a peaceful world and strengthen our relationships among different people and countries across the world. We can then spread the inner peace to create a universal peace. The 14th Dalai Lama stressed the importance

of inner peace in the world as *the question of real, lasting world peace concerns human beings, so basic human feelings are also at its roots. Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear; an atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet.*¹⁸ Therefore, it is essential and very important to make one peaceful and then share this happiness and peace among friends, relatives and people all over the world. We need to build up a vibrant, tolerant and a peaceful global society full of loving kindness and filled with caring and sharing environment. We need to cultivate not only the loving kindness but encompass the value of truth, justice and good governance. Whenever there are disagreements and debates, we need to find a peaceful and non-violent solution which would lessen any kind of tensions among and between the parties concerned.

In classical Hinduism, the Vedas (considered to be the oldest book on earth) pray for peace. In the Atharva Veda we read “May there be peace to the heavens, peace to the sky, peace to the atmosphere. May there be peace on the Earth and peace in the waters. May there be peace to the forests and peace to the mountains. May there be peace to the plants, animals and to all creatures. May we all live in Peace”

Thank you for listening.

The full version of this speech can be downloaded from:

VM Centre for Peace

www.vmpeace.org

Vijay Mehta is president of VM Centre for Peace www.vmpeace.org , Founding Trustee of Fortune Forum Charity www.fortuneforum.org, Chair of Uniting for Peace (Action for UN Renewal and World Disarmament Campaign). He is an author and global activist for peace, development, human rights and the environment. Some of his notable books are *The Fortune Forum Summit: For a Sustainable Future*, *Arms No More*, and *The United Nations and Its Future in the 21st Century*.

He along with his daughter Renu Mehta founder of Fortune Forum charity held two summits in London in 2006 and 2007. The summits raised over a million pounds for charity and attracted a worldwide audience of 1.3 billion people (one fifth of humanity) including print and media coverage. The keynote speakers for the first and second summit were Bill Clinton, former US President and Al Gore, former US vice-President, and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007.

Vijay Mehta has appeared in various TV programmes including BBC World, Press TV, Ajtak-24 hour Indian news channel, and Think Peace documentary, Canada, among others. The Sunday Times, Independent, Observer and Guardian newspapers, among other journals have written about him. His life is devoted to the service of peace, humanity and our planet

At present, Vijay Mehta is writing a book to be published in 2011. The subject is "Wars, Military Expenditure and its Relation to Poverty Reduction"

¹⁸ Kraft, K (1992) *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism and Nonviolence*