

“Peace, Harmony & Coexistence” – Sri Swami Vidadatmananda’s Talk at the United Nations

The 2600th Anniversary of the Enlightenment of Buddha was Commemorated at the United Nations General Assembly on the 16th of May 2011. Sri Swami Vidadatmananda was invited to speak at the Inter-faith Dialogue By the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka to the United Nations.



Peace, Harmony, and Coexistence

I thank you, Your Excellency, for inviting me here to participate, and my greetings to all the dignitaries and all the friends. We heard the earlier speakers speaking about what we should be doing to establish peace. Here, I would like to touch upon the cause of violence, what it is that brings violence. Lord Buddha pointed out that there is *duḥkham* or pain and sorrow in the life of a human being, and the cause is *tanhā*, desire for what is unreal, desire for what is false, meaning desire which will never be fulfilled in a real sense. For human beings, desires, of course, are for peace and happiness; and, generally speaking, a human being has taken it for granted that peace and happiness will come from the objects of the world. This is a false perception—that something other than me can bring me happiness. This is what the Buddha calls *tanhā*. We are seeking happiness or peace from where it is not; and, therefore, our attempts are bound to fail. This frustration makes our desires more and more intense and that results in greed and in the need to snatch away what others have, because there always is discontentment within.

Regardless of how much or what a human being gets, there is no contentment within, and that discontentment brings about more and more greed, which in turn brings about injustice. Injustice brings about conflict, and conflict brings about violence. So it turns out, ultimately, that the cause of violence lies within ourselves, resulting from the false perception of what will give us happiness and peace. So, in my opinion, the problem of violence and conflict is primarily a philosophical problem rather than a problem of religion or a problem of society or politics. Then it becomes a political problem, no doubt. Hinduism sees it as a philosophical problem. Right now we see that the whole world has a value for accumulating more and more comfort and pleasure, thinking that that is what will bring satisfaction or contentment to the human being. Therefore, science, technology, economics, and politics, all of this, attempts to provide more and more to human beings, thinking that the more you have the happier you will be. Unfortunately, that equation does not work.

Happiness has to come from within, and what is within cannot be obtained from without. It is this frustration that brings about conflict and violence, greed, and the need to dominate others. I do not think that religions are a problem or the diversity of religions is a problem. In fact, diversity is the very nature of creation, and diversity is an embellishment, a beauty of creation that you can enjoy. All that is needed is to give the

freedom to others to exist and pursue their own ends in their own way, the mutual respect and acceptance of each other and of each other's views, whether others are in agreement with us or not. It is not important whether you agree with me or not. It should be enough for me that you are a good person and also a religious person pursuing your life or your goals in your own way. My attitude should be to accept you and assist you in any way I can. If this is the attitude, then let there be any number of religions. In fact, there are as many religions as there are human beings because everybody has his or her own concept of what God is and what the form of worship is. Everybody is doing it in his or her own unique way; and, therefore, in the opinion of Hinduism, which I represent, religion is not the cause for conflict. I am very happy and proud that Buddha came from the land of India, and that, in fact, there is no conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism. Hinduism, being what it is, has always learned from and accommodated and absorbed other traditions. There is a feeling that Buddhism has been eliminated from India. On the other hand, Buddhism has been absorbed in India and in Hinduism, and that is the reason there is no need for a separate religion.

Buddha was a great reformer. In his time, there were many corruptions in the Hindu practices, which he revolted against. One of the important lessons or messages that Buddha emphasized was *ahimsā*, nonviolence, and *karuṇā*, compassion, which, of course, are there in the *Vedas*, but these are emphasized in Buddhism. India and Hinduism have accepted that message and all kinds of violence that had entered into religious practices has been eliminated. The great *Mahabhārata* says a number of times, *ahimsā paramo dharmah* that nonviolence is the supreme *dharma*. I want to live and live happily, and every living being wants to live and live happily. There must be the sensitivity and respect for the right of other living beings to live in their own way as long as their way does not interfere with the basic harmony or laws of creation. Violence can be eliminated only when our values are right. As long as our life is lived with the wrong values of searching for happiness where it is not, resulting in more and more discontentment because of frustrations and disappointments, violence cannot be eliminated.

Thus, what is most needed is an understanding on the part of every human being that what we want or what we are seeking is to be found from our own self. And for that there should be a way of life as taught by the Buddha and also taught in the Hindu scriptures, the life of selflessness or *yajña*, a life of offering, of contributing. You change or transform from being a consumer to being a contributor. Instead of one's attitude being how to use the other person, the attitude should be how to become useful to the other person. The real happiness, success, or peace comes when there is cooperation rather than competition; when there is contribution rather than consumption. That is how we can establish peace and harmony amongst ourselves. This is the teaching of Hinduism and also the teaching of Buddhism. And I think this is the most fundamental aspect that is important for people to see. When we talk of religion as the cause of conflict, that is the wrong understanding and wrong value. We need to transform ourselves from being a consumer, a grabber, to being a giver. This is what is most important for bringing peace, harmony, and co-existence.

Thank you very much.