

**MESSAGE BY DADI JANKI
CO-ADMINISTRATIVE HEAD
BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY
AT THE OPENING OF THE MILLENNIUM WORLD PEACE SUMMIT OF RELIGIOUS AND
SPIRITUAL LEADERS**

NEW YORK, 28TH AUGUST, 2000

Om Shanti, a greeting of peace.

Let us spend a moment in deep silence, in the remembrance of the loving Supreme Soul. I feel that the loving Supreme Soul, who is called out to as Allah, God and in many other ways, is in each one's heart. Seeing this invocation to God at the United Nations today, I feel that our loving *Mother and Father*, yours and mine, the Remover of Sorrow and Bestower of Happiness, is listening to the voice of everyone's heart. When we bring our hands together and say 'Namaste', it is a sign of remembering God. With humility and a true heart, all of us religious and *spiritual* leaders, can go beyond caste and colour and use the Power of Truth to destroy sorrow and peacelessness in the world. Our loving *Supreme Father* has this hope for us that if we humans adopt the Power of Truth, it would not be difficult to create a peaceful world. Being in the atmosphere of this gathering today, I do not think I have been able to forget the Supreme Father for even a second – He is here, He is watching and He is listening to the voice of everyone's heart. O Lord, with your power, the power of you, Almighty Father, we will personally make this promise to spread peace in the world with tolerance and non-violence. Even though I am speaking in Hindi, I know you understand my feelings. *After you hear the brief translation in English*, I would like all of us to be together in complete silence, in the remembrance of our Supreme Father, so that the silence emerging from within our hearts in this gathering, reaches the entire world.

Seminar on Promoting the Prevention of Violent Conflict and Building Peace.

Gripsholm, Sweden – May 1-4 2001

The Personal and Spiritual Perspective on Non-Violence and Peace

By Jayanti Kirpalani

I would like to thank the organisers here for their vision and courage in inviting us to share the personal and spiritual component within the subject of prevention of conflict, and to probe the meaning of non-violence.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and appreciate the enormous effort that has been put into peace-making and trying to create a culture of non-violence by all those gathered here. I will leave that side of the subject to all of you – the experts - and focus my remarks towards the spiritual dimension, for this is my particular area of experience.

A spiritual truth which is a basic principle, is that whatever is within is reflected without. The inner state of human beings creates the outer state of the world. When there is peace within; peace in the world is not impossible. However whilst there is aggression within then even sticks and stones become weapons of war. So in order to establish a world of peace, it is essential to return to the state of peace within. Today the norm for people seems to be a state of peacelessness. Yet, in fact, the natural state of the human being is that of peace. For those who belong to a faith tradition there will be the awareness of the teaching that ‘human beings are created in the image of God’. Recognizing that the Divine Creator is the embodiment of absolute peace, then surely the Creation also has this quality in its origin. Interestingly, from the scientific point of view this also holds true. In 1986 UNESCO held a conference in Seville where experts presented the results of research that showed aggression and violence were not inherent in the human species but rather were acquired later, and that peace and non-violence were the natural conditions of the human being.

This leads us to another question - Is the original nature of the human good or evil or a combination of both? Today we see a combination, we see divine and devilish traits both functioning together in human life and yet so often it is the devilish traits that dominate. However, if we are the creation of the Divine then surely divine qualities are the original inherent state of the human being. We often too have this experience of the inherent goodness of the soul.

Given the conditions of violence today in every sphere and level of society in the world, the question arises, well, what has gone wrong? Globalisation is the reality of today’s world, with its pluses and minuses. Major factors of globalisation are materialism and consumerism. There has been a loss of the awareness of spiritual identity and only an identification with the external material world. Television has been a major force in the globalisation of the culture of materialism. Research in the USA indicates that there is a direct correlation between the number of TV viewing hours and violence in the individual. This fact is fairly well recognised. However another statistic that isn’t so well known is that there is also a direct correlation between the number of TV viewing hours and financial debt. The advertising and consumer culture of TV promotes spending money which often leads to debt. In this materialistic culture, peace has been forgotten because the inner self has been forgotten. Loss of awareness of that inner state of being and identification with the external material world leads to loss of inner peace and the equilibrium of non-violence. Into the emptiness of the spirit comes anger and violence. Just as darkness doesn’t have a reality of its own existence but is

simply the absence of light, in the same way, when peace disappears, violence comes into its own. One doesn't need to fight the darkness, rather one just has to light a candle, and the greater the power of the candle, or the greater the number of candles, the greater the intensity of the light. So too, when we become aware of our spiritual identity and come to the awareness of the inner being, there is peace and this peace can grow. As people of peace gather together, just as we have done here, the power of peace multiplies.

In fact if we wish to transform the world, and create a world of peace this is truly the only way. It has never been a majority that has changed the world, it has always only been a handful. A small group of committed individuals have impacted history and made a difference. We come together as revolutionaries committed to positive change. The transformation of the minority reaching the point of critical mass will shift the majority and create a culture of peace.

Another aspect of violence has been the increase in discrimination of race, religion and culture. A UN event in Geneva in 1984 looked at the subject of discrimination in matters of belief; there were such opposing views that the seminar did not come to any conclusion at all. However representatives from the University of Minnesota decided to carry out research on the subject. They interviewed young people in several countries and found that where an individual had self respect, there was little discriminatory behaviour, and where there was lack of self respect there was greater discriminatory behaviour.

We see a situation where humanity is trapped in a vicious circle. There is a general lack of value for the self, leading to cycles of dependency and addictive behaviour patterns to compensate. If there is no knowledge of the inner being, there is discontentment within and a search for happiness in temporary supports, people, possessions, places, position or even alcohol and drugs. Emotional addictions of ego and anger are part of this cycle of vicious behaviour patterns leading to the conditions we see around us on every continent.

There also seems to be a general state of helplessness in which many feel disempowered. We often see that multinationals have even greater power than governments today and so we question whether the individual can have any power. The Charter of the UN begins with the declaration of 'we the people'. The return to true self awareness and self dignity reminds us of the real value of the self. Respect for the self leads to respect for human life and value for the dignity of each human being around me. Where there is violence there is usually fear born out of ignorance. When I don't know my neighbour, and I am afraid because he or she looks different, smells different, eats differently and behaves differently, I am likely to be discriminatory in my dealings. When I take the time to know and understand my neighbour there will be respect. To know others with clarity, I need to give time to know myself first for only then will I learn about others.

Peace is very much linked with love, understanding, respect and truth. In fact we find that all positive values are interconnected and these form the basis of civilisation. The breakdown in society today is a direct result of the loss of values. To return to peace we need to return to a culture of values. The family structure used to be the vehicle for the transmission of values, where values were not 'taught' but rather 'caught' through the relationships within the family. Storytelling, time spent together as a family meant that a child grew up with a code of conduct and ethics, and with heroes and heroines to guide him or her along life's journey. I lived in India until the age of eight, before moving to London, and my family there consisted of my parents, grandmother and great grandmother, who was a great storyteller. Today it is common for parents to leave the child to be minded by the TV set and we see the influence that this has. To create a culture of values needs the support of both formal and informal education – teachers and parents alike.

I have been sharing the philosophy of the Brahma Kumaris to indicate the spiritual guidelines with which we are working for inner peace and peace in the world. Let me now share some of the activities that the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University has co-ordinated to give you an idea of how this translates into the reality of today's world.

In 1986 the Brahma Kumaris co-ordinated the Million Minutes of Peace which reached 88 countries and became the largest non-fund raising project for the United Nations' International Year of Peace. We were

asking people for something more valuable than money – themselves – their time. We asked them to give a minute of their time for meditation, positive thoughts or prayers for peace. Over a billion minutes were collected within a month and presented to the UN Secretary General.

Following this the UN Peace Studies Unit requested us to do a follow up project and we initiated and coordinated ‘Global Co-operation for a Better World’. This took place in 129 countries across the globe, in which we asked people to share their vision of a better world. The project reached out across all levels of social strata – princes and prime ministers, aboriginal elders in central Australia, shoeshine boys in Brazil and leper colonies in the Philippines, to name just a few. There were many ideas generated yet the overwhelming response can be summed up in one word – values. People all over the world said that a better world was a world based on values such as peace, love, respect, joy and truth. In 1993 the book that documented the results of the project was published, ‘Visions for a Better World’.

In 1990 people of the world began to tell us that they were interested in values and since then the word ‘values’ has come into focus in business, politics, education, health care, in fact in all areas of life. Having seen the result of a world without values we are again recognising the need for values. At the point when there is motivation to practise values we recognise the need for spiritual power to enable us to do this. The present discussion around the world on values seems to be a bridge to spirituality and the journey within.

In 1995 a book entitled ‘Living Values – a Guidebook’ was published by the Brahma Kumaris to honour the 50th anniversary of the UN, celebrating the dignity and worth of the human being. The values that we carry within the self and follow in our lives determines the quality of our own dignity and self esteem. The book describes 12 universal values which are the bedrock of human life and civilization. This book became the basis for the ‘Living Values: an Educational Programme’ which is now running in over 70 countries. Books for this have been published contain activities to promote the development of values for children and young people of different age ranges – 3-7yrs, 7-14yrs and 15-22yrs.

Our latest international project was to honour the International Year for the Culture of Peace designated by the UN for the year 2000. UNESCO which was given the mandate to implement this programme created Manifesto 2000 and requested people’s signatures as a sign of their personal commitment to non-violence and peace. During 2000, UNESCO collected 75 million signatures world-wide; of these 35 million were collected by the Brahma Kumaris, with a large proportion from India.

The motivation and commitment of the organisation for these projects has come from the experience of personal inner peace and the desire to share this gift with all others. Each one of us has an impact on at least one hundred others that we are in contact with. There is a saying in India that 1 + 1 do not make 2 but rather 11, and 1 +1+1 make 111. The energy multiplies as we come together.

The project of Global Cooperation also underlines another important factor. The old paradigm for the world is that conflict and competition are the modes necessary for survival and progress. Poignantly we see in the world the critical conditions that have been created through this. It is now clear that the old paradigm is no longer functional and a new paradigm is necessary – that of co-operation. Co-operation requires letting go of ego and external differences and coming together recognising the specialities of each and every one. In doing so we value each other so that our energies work together in constructing a better world of peace.

BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Statement for the

Assembly on eliminating the international debt burden for economically developing countries The role and contribution of spirituality to a better world

2004 Parliament of the World's Religions

7th to 13th July 2004; Barcelona, Spain

“Neither a borrower nor a lender be; For loan oft loseth both itself and friend. And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry” was Shakespeare’s injunction of centuries past, recommending a practice that many a debtor and creditor of today might in hindsight wish to have followed. For in the international arena today the legacy of past loans includes indeed frayed relationships, battered public purses and misspent millions – as well as the dilemma of finding a way forward in respect of the various afflictions caused by the cancerous burgeoning debt bubble.

Even in today’s predominantly secular world, as in years gone by, many see in their religious practice a higher calling that does not sit so easily with mundane money-lending as it does with putting financial assets to use in other ways, whether direct investment or charity. But given the reality that these debts do now exist, to what extent can spirituality be of help?

While money may be described as a totally human invention or social construct belonging to the world of things, in many ways we, as its creators, have become the slaves of our own creation, allowing it to colour or dominate our view of life and its purpose and fuel materialistic ways of thinking that pull us away from the realm of the spirit. Nevertheless, financial services of some sort have a role that they can usefully play – and often have done – in the lives of most individuals and communities, including religious and spiritual ones. Wealth or money in itself is not the problem so much as the values frequently associated with or attached to it. And it is a values-based perspective, and spiritual understanding, that can help provide some insight as to how to relieve the burden of poverty and debt afflicting so many. For in truth, the poverty and deficit that deny and challenge our well-being have their roots in a poverty and deficit of spirituality and values; little lasting progress will be made on eliminating financial poverty unless we also work to eliminate this poverty of heart and soul.

One of the promises of religion is the redemption of forgiveness and this act must form part of the vanguard of spirituality’s compassionate and reasoned contribution to the debt crisis. A number of the Damoclean debts that hang over or overwhelm poorer countries neither can nor should ever be repaid and must be forgiven for the benefit of those in need; some are “odious debts” tainted by corruption and never benefiting the populace – sums borrowed in the name of the country but not applied for the needs of the people so much as the desires of those in power. At the other end of the spectrum are fair debts properly incurred as legal (and moral) obligations of the borrower. Their treatment must be guided by justice, honesty and responsibility in the context of a global framework of laws, policies and practice (even if imperfect) rather than populist and morally hazardous thinking that does not take proper and unbiased account of others and their interests in our interdependent world. However, if such debts are to be repaid, constructive engagement can nevertheless help secure the wherewithal – including education, health care, market access, property rights, infrastructure, conflict resolution, appropriate governance and reforms – necessary to generate income with which they can be repaid.

In between these two categories lies the uncharted and unregulated territory of debts that must be restructured – a systemic deficiency that can only be filled through dialogue and cooperation equitably undertaken between all parties with mutual respect, honesty, openness and good faith. The domino consequences of defaulting debts only stress the need for market-acceptable but people-friendly and flexible measures for the prevention, containment and management of debt crises. In the wake of major defaults over

the last ten years or so, progress has been made to enunciate principles for this purpose which could usefully now be embedded in the spirit of the above values to help ensure that discussions between creditors and debtors maintain a human face, debtors receive appropriate protection and the basic needs, and opinions, of ordinary citizens are taken into consideration. Transparency, accountability and the involvement of all will help ensure that justice is done and seen to be done while the Millennium Development Goals provide a broad context within which to consider the debt burden and a reminder of the purposes for which the benefits of eliminated or restructured debt must be applied.

Behind unserviced debts there usually lies a complex of issues that the temporary support of borrowed money can never really fix. Neither borrowers nor lenders should deceive themselves by thinking that the deeper roots of poverty will be eradicated just by concessional lending or that donations of money alone will enable people to provide for themselves, their families and future so that they can develop and prosper on a sustainable basis. Too often one loan leads to another and only creates more burden, while handouts – even in those cases when they do actually reach the intended beneficiary – can foster a culture of dependency that forgets the sacredness and dignity of the human spirit and the potential and abilities of each individual.

This is not to say that loans cannot be of help in generating income, building self-reliance and banishing poverty. Micro-finance provides a clear example of how responsibility, commitment, mutual solidarity, trust and the targeted and wise use of even a small amount of money can make a tremendous difference to people's lives. So it would be worth seeing how more recourse could be had to personal, small-scale loans, instead of – or packaged with – large national borrowings.

Likewise, and although it must be remembered that development is essentially a self-generating process rather than something one person does or gives to another, appropriate aid can help provide a foundation on which those in need may build their own lives. Thus richer countries could help eliminate the debt burden through increasing their overseas development aid closer to the targeted 0.7% of GDP and applying such aid in particular for all-round education.

Stepping back from the financial prism through which so much of life today is viewed, it can be seen that monetary exchanges are but one aspect of many forms of relationship. Giving, taking, sharing, exchanging, borrowing and repaying can and do take place in many ways at many levels and spirituality reminds us that receiving is predicated on giving, that having created we must also sustain and re-generate or make good responsible use of that which is entrusted to us – or else see it go to waste. Having met our responsibilities, and living within our means, any surplus we have can be distributed to others in need; excessive accumulation is self-defeating and conducive only to shortage. Likewise, habits of irresponsibility, waste or abuse lead to paucity rather than abundance and putting re-distributed wealth at the disposal of such habits may well just sustain them rather than meeting the requirements for eliminating poverty, creating and sustaining wealth.

While support and help must be given in a spirit of sharing and brotherhood, altruism works better when reasoned, and a fresh understanding and set of abilities in the right conditions are likely to be of more lasting help than the manna of money alone. Such a spirit itself requires a deeper awareness of our relationship with the world around us, the understanding that we are not owners who possess physical assets so much as trustees of our share of the bounty of mother Nature and that we are related to each other as common members of one interdependent human family, a part of a greater whole. With this in mind, is it not appropriate for all of us to ask ourselves what we might owe and what responsibilities we might have in relation to ourselves, each other, nature, and God, the Bestower for one and all?