



Fostering Universal Understanding

Excerpt of the inaugural address by His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar at the 'Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders' conference, United Nations (August 28, 2000)

Dear Ones,

Often, people who take responsibility do not pray, and those who pray do not take responsibility. It is interesting that this hall, which takes the responsibility for the entire world, has seen a lot of prayer today. And this is the need of the hour.

Every religion has three aspects; values, symbols and practices. There is diversity in practices and in symbols, whereas values are common to all the religions. The growth of fanaticism, fundamentalism and intolerance in the world is happening because people are stuck in only the practices, symbols or customs. They are forgetting human values. It is very heartening to see all the spiritual leaders from all the communities come together here to foster human values.

Spirit loves diversity. There is not just one type of fruit, one type of people, or one type of animal in this world. Spirit loves diversity so let's not confine the spirit to a uniform. Let's enjoy the diverse variety of creation by honouring them all, respecting and really loving them. We used to use the term "religious tolerance". I think that these words have become obsolete now. You tolerate only that which you don't love. Don't you think so? The time has come to love each other's religions as one's own. A religion is great not just because it is mine; it is great because of what it is. This understanding in all the priests and clergymen and those who lead people in spiritual and religious light, will put an end to the fanaticism and fundamentalism going on in this, our beautiful world.

It will be very nice if, together, we all adopt a resolution that we will educate our people to know a little bit from every religion in order to have a broader vision about life. No doubt, one must go deep in ones own religion; at the same time an understanding about every religion is essential today. We all need to work towards that. We pray and see the Divinity within us. Without prayer and meditation, which are the spiritual aspects of life, religion becomes just a dry skin. I often say, religion is the banana skin and spirituality is the banana. The misery in the world is because we throw away the banana and we are holding on to the dry skin. So we need to enhance that spiritual aspect of our life.

See love inside you and that is meditation; see God in the person next to you and that is service. Service and meditation go hand in hand. This is a wonderful occasion for all those leaders of society who are concerned about

terrorism and fundamentalism to look back to see where we have made a mistake. What is that which is lacking in the society? How we can enrich human values without which this earth cannot be sustained?

The previous century has been an era of uniforms and unions. Now let us move to an era of communion.

With these few words I pray and I take responsibility, both, at the same time.

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