

ADDRESS TO THE MILLENIUM UN PEACE SUMMIT
BY HER HOLINESS SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI ~ AMMA
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“Salutations to all gathered here, who are verily the embodiments of love and the Supreme Self.

We have stepped into the new millennium with great hopes and expectations of change. But though the numbers denoting the year are different, essentially nothing else has changed. The real change must happen within us. For only when conflict and negativity are removed from within can we play a truly constructive role in establishing peace. With the goal of peace in mind, the invaluable efforts of the United Nations to bring nations together, thereby creating peace and harmony, merit heart felt praise.

The very words ‘nation’ and ‘religion’ imply division and diversity. This diversity may seem to create obstacles in fostering peace, happiness and prosperity in the world. Yet, in reality it is this diversity that brings richness and beauty to the world and to human life - just as a bouquet made of flowers of a variety of colours is more beautiful than a bouquet of flowers that are exactly the same.

There is one Truth that shines through all of creation. Rivers and mountains, plants and animals, the sun, the moon and the stars, you and I – all expressions of this one Reality. It is by assimilation the truth in our lives, and thus gaining a deeper understanding, that we can discover the inherent beauty in this diversity. When we work together as a global family, not merely belonging to a particular race, religion or nation, peace and happiness will once again prevail on this earth, which is drenched with the tears of division and conflict.

As I travel the world, people come to me and share their sorrows. Some have told me that a husband, wife or child had been killed in a religious clash. Sometimes it was a fight between Hindus and Muslims, other times between Hindus and Christians or between Christians and Muslims. It’s so painful to hear. The reasons for the fighting are that people are not going into the depth of their religion. Our ties to a religion, society, or country should not make us forget our basic human values.

No one is an isolated island; we are all links in the great chain of life. Just as the right hand reaches out to aid the left hand when it is injured, the ability to feel the sufferings of all beings as our own, and an intense yearning to comfort them, should awaken within us.

We are living in an era in which science and modern communication have turned the world into one small community, reducing the barriers of time and space. The latest developments in the field of telecommunications keep us informed

instantaneously of events occurring in any part of the world. Events in one part of the globe affect the entire planet to a greater or lesser extent.

Although the world has become closer through technology, we have not drawn closer in our hearts. For example, members of a family, though physically close, are often like isolated islands.

Today, we are capable of destroying the earth in an instant. But we also have the innate capacity to create heaven on earth. The future of humanity depends on the choice we MAKE. Societies and nations are comprised of individuals. If we look back through history, we can see that all conflicts originate within the individual. Where lies the origin of conflict? It is the lack of awareness of our true nature, the one living power in all of us of which we are part. The role of spirituality, true religion, is to awaken this awareness and to help us develop such qualities as love, empathy, tolerance patience and humility. Religion is the science of the mind.

Today we are able to aircondition the external world, but we have yet to learn to aircondition the mind. We are trying to clone human beings, but we do not attempt to create within ourselves a perfect, loving and peaceful human being. An important role of religion is this purifying process.

Today we are aware of the need to protect the environment and this, of course, is essential. Yet we are seldom concerned with the pollution that negative thoughts and actions create in the atmosphere and in the consciousness of humanity. The inner pollution of the mind is in many ways more lethal than chemical pollution, for it has the power to destroy humanity at any time. We therefore need to purify our mental environment.

Though the founders of all religions realized and practiced the noblest ideals, in their lives, many follower shave failed to live up to them. Instead of focusing on the essence of religious principle of love and compassion, we focus on the external rituals and traditions, which vary from religion to religion. This is how religions, which were originally meant to foster a sense of peace and unity among us, became instrumental in spreading war and conflict. This does not negate the importance of religious principles and traditions. They are necessary for our spiritual development. But we must remember, these traditions are the means to the goal and not the goal itself. Suppose a person has to cross a river by a boat. Upon reaching the other shore, he has to leave the boat and move onward. If he insists on clinging to the boat, his progress will be hampered. Similarly, we have to give more importance to the goal of religion and not be overly attached to the means. We should remember that religion is meant for humanity, and not humanity for religion.

To solve the complex and controversial issues such as religious freedom, conversion, and fanaticism, the religious leaders must come together in dialogue with open hearts in order to arrive at mutually acceptable, practical solutions.

However, for such discussions to be fruitful, we must first learn to plant the seeds of love, peace and patience within ourselves. To achieve lasting peace, we must first strive to rid ourselves of hatred and hostility. The key to world peace is within every individual residing on this planet. Just as each member of a household shares the responsibility of safeguarding the home, each one of us shares the responsibility of world peace.

The leaders of three religions – A, B and C – decided to convene a meeting to bring about peace. God was so pleased with their efforts that he sent an angel to them during the meeting. The angel asked the leaders what they wished. The leader of religion A said, "Religion B is responsible for all the problems. So please wipe them off the face of the earth!" The leader for religion B said, "Religion A is the cause of all our troubles. You have to reduce them to ashes!" By now the angel was disappointed. The angel turned expectantly to the leader of religion C. With an expression of grave humility, C's leader said, "I wish nothing for myself. It will be enough if you merely grant the prayers of my two colleagues!"

Peace is not just the absence of war and conflict; it goes well beyond that. Peace must be fostered within the individual, within the family and within society. Simply transferring the world's nuclear weapons to a museum will not itself bring about world peace. The nuclear weapons of the mind must first be eliminated.

All the great religions have infinite wisdom and beauty to share. Instead of trying to increase the number of followers, religions should create an environment in which one may wisely accept the noble ideals of any religion.

Tomorrow's world will be shaped by today's children. In their tender minds, it is easy to cultivate universal human values. If you walk through a field of soft, green grass a few times, you will quickly make a path. Whereas, it takes countless trips to forge a trail on a rocky hillside. The teaching of universal spiritual principles and human values should be a standard part of the general education, not only the responsibility of the family. This should not be delayed any further, for if there is delay, the future generations will be lost to the world.

We cannot lose sight of the essential needs of people, for until these needs are met, it is impossible for anyone to aspire to higher states of awareness and understanding. If, in any part of the world, people are dying of hunger or suffering in poverty, it is a matter of shame for all nations. Based on the religious ideal of universal brotherhood, all nations that are in a position to help should share their material wealth and resources. There is enough for the survival of all living beings on the earth, yet not enough to satisfy the greed of a few.

Lending a helping hand to a neglected soul, feeding the hungry, a compassionate smile towards the sad and dejected – this is the real language of religion. We should invoke God's compassion in our own hearts and hands.

Living only for oneself is not life, but death. Some may say that the world will remain the same no matter how hard we try to change it. Striving for world peace is as useless as trying to straighten a dog's curly tail. However much one may try to straighten it, the tail will immediately curl back. Yet through constant effort, we will build our muscles even if the tail doesn't become straight.

In the same way, regardless of whether we fail or succeed in bringing about world peace we ourselves will change for the better. Even if there is not visible change, the change in us will eventually effect change in the world. Furthermore, whatever harmony exists in the world today is a result of such efforts. We must learn from the past, or we will repeat our mistakes. Those who have harmed others in the past should now engage in positive actions to uplift the victims of their past oppression.

These principles apply to governments as well as individuals. Each nation should foster an atmosphere of forgiveness, openness, friendship, trust, help and support to heal old wounds. In order to heal the wounds, broken relationships should be stitched with the thread of love.

For this, more than intellectual knowledge, we should have awareness about our oneness. Let us focus on what we can give to others not on what we can get for ourselves. Only then can we bring about a total transformation in our global family.

Thus, by living the ideals of religion, we transcend our narrow-mindedness, and our lives will become offering to the world.

The following are some of the globally recognized problems areas in which the UN should strengthen their efforts:

- 1) In God's creation, men and women are equal. But over the centuries, the sad condition of women has not significantly improves. Women, who give birth to humankind, should be assured an equal role in society.
- 2) Millions of people are suffering from AIDS, which continues to spread like wildfire. This disease must be brought under control.
- 3) Let the UN lead the transformation from a world of conflict to one of peace by training a group of youth in community service. These young emissaries, serving selflessly throughout the world, will inspire people to cultivate universal spiritual and human values. What cannot be achieved through bloodshed can be achieved through love.
- 4) Terrorism and violence against human beings in the name of any religion should be condemned at the international level and the appropriate strong action should be taken. Love is the only medicine that can heal the wounds of the world. Just as the body needs food to grow, the soul needs love to

unfold. Love is more nourishing than breast milk is for a baby. Love is the very foundation, beauty and fulfillment of life. Where love exists, there cannot be conflict of any kind; peace alone will reign.

May the light of love and peace shine within our hearts
Let us all become messengers of universal peace, illuminating the hearts of everyone, dispelling the darkness of hatred and conflict that has overshadowed today's world.

Let us all awaken to a new tomorrow filled with universal and brotherhood.
Is this not the goal and dream of the United Nations?

May the Supreme Power bestow grace upon us that we may release this noble prayer:

Om Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavanthu
Om Shantih Shantih Shantihi.”