

Tibetan festival of compassion

(Presidential address on the occasion of Tibetan Festival of Compassion, held between 12th – 18th December 2002 at India Habitat Centre Lodi Estate New Delhi)

The Dalai Lama is a great spiritual leader of the world. He has been spending his entire time for spread of peace, non-violence and harmony. He is not concerned merely with human beings but all life Man, Beast, Birds and Worms. Every year he focuses attention of the people on these aspects lest we forget Man's duty towards all beings. This year he has chosen compassion as an instrument to harmony and peace. His address "**compassion an antidote to terrorism**" will be watched by every thinking person in the whole world.

The ancient upanishads said
*Yastu Sarvani Bhutani
atman eva anupasyati
Sarva bhuteshu cha atmanam
Thato na vijugupsate.*

He who sees himself in all beings and sees all beings as himself thereafter he hates no one.

The same message is given by Buddhism and spread by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We await his discourse on the 18th instant:

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole world is in turmoil today. Violence, hatred, bitter animosities, armed conflicts within and between nations, mar peace and harmony of the entire globe. Crimes such as robbery, decoit, arson, loot and murder are ever growing and spreading widely. Poverty and hunger do not show any signs of abating; on the contrary the gap between the rich and poor within countries and between countries is widening. Organized terrorism where innocent people in market places, public transports and congregations are massacred is becoming a global menace.

Religious and ethnic conflicts also take a heavy toll of human lives. Instead of preaching peace and harmony, fundamentalists of some religions fan the fire of hatred and bitterness and lead their followers into the path of senseless violence. In my opinion, the answer to the chaotic conditions in the world should be found in moral and spiritual reformation and not through counter violence. State terrorism is no answer to public terrorism. Let us go back into the past. The primordial man was no better than the beast. He hunted for his food, killing animals including his own species and ate them. He drank and slept like any other animal. While the strongest animal elephant has remained an elephant and the most beautiful bird Peacock has remained the same, Man has advanced in science and technology, in art and culture, in social behavior and in noble qualities like kindness, compassion, service and sacrifice. This great change has been brought about by religion – whichever it is. Each religion inculcated in Man virtues that would enable a harmonious existence with his fellow beings. Religions also state that if Man violated codes of good conduct and behavior, he would be committing a sin and go Hell.

Every religion forbids murder, cheating, falsehood, robbery, injury to others and all antisocial activities as sins. They also preach that the sinless go to heaven and the sinners go to hell. There is no religion in the world that approves of misdeeds. Thus, all religions had reformed the lives of primitive man and made him a civilized being. The history of civilization is nothing but the transformation of a bestial man into a social being, living in harmony with his fellowmen. Laws, more laws and many more laws are powerless to control the inhuman

behavior. The world community must wake up to the situation and find a solution to the growing chaos all around.

The most ancient religion Hinduism describes the qualities that make a devotee dear to the Lord. In the *Bhagavadgita*, the Lord says,

“One who hates none,
is friendly and compassionate to all beings,
free from ego, I and mine,
balanced in pain and pleasure,
forgiving, contented, steady in meditation,
self-controlled, with firm conviction,
with mind and intellect fixed on me (God)
such a devotee is dear to me.”

Rig-Veda says, Vasudeiva Kutumbakam. “The whole world is one family”.

Chronologically, the next religion is Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster is the founder of Parsee religion. It believes in one God and regards the world as a struggle between Good (Ahura Mazda) and Evil (Ahriman).

He preached that all human beings are the offspring's of a single God and that one can be near to God only by good (True) actions. The central point of Zoroastrian philosophy is active goodness.

At the top of the philosophy of Jainism stands Non-violence. Lord Mahavira himself said :

“He should not kill, or cause others to kill and not consent to the killing of any other”.

Around this vital principle, four orders rotate:

1. Truth : That is separation from every form of non – truth
2. Non – theft : Not taking anything without owner's consent
3. Celibacy : Conjugal abstinence
4. Non – attachment: Giving up property and possessions.

Mahavira also stressed the principles of equality of all beings.

Jainism and Buddhism gave the pride of place to *Ahimsa* – Non Violence.

The Buddha propounded the eight-fold path to salvation:

1. Right Belief,
2. Right Thought,
3. Right Speech,
4. Right Action,
5. Right Means of Livelihood,
6. Right Exertion,
7. Right Remembrance and Self-Discipline &
8. Right Concentration of Thought.

In short, he asked people to follow the path of Dharma.

He said,

Hatred ceaseth not by hatred,

Hatred ceaseth by love.

Not by wrath should a person conquer wrath.

Next in point of time comes Christianity. In the Ten Commandments as well as in the Sermon on the Mount, emphasis has been laid on right conduct and right behavior. Jesus said :

Ye have heard that it hath been said,

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.
But I say unto you
Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,
Turn to him the other also,
If a man take away thy coat,
Let him have thy cloak also.

Gandhiji once said that it was the New Testament, especially the Sermon on the Mount, which helped him to fashion his *Satyagraha*.

Jesus also said:

Thou shalt love God.
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
Love your enemies.
Bless them who curse you.
Do good to them who hate you.

Islam is full of exhortations

1. to do good to others,
2. to show compassion,
3. to spend money on the orphans, the needy,
4. to conquer anger,
5. to observe humility,
6. to show gratitude and not to covet

That is why the poet Iqbal sang that religion does not teach bitterness or hatred among Religions.
“Mazhab nahi sikhata aapas me bair rakhna”

Former President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain, a protagonist of religious harmony said: “If the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, Buddha’s philosophy of Compassion, the Hindu concept of Ahimsa and the passion of Islam for obedience to the will of God can combine then we would have succeeded in generating the most potent influence for world peace”. The word compassion means showing consideration to other persons and other life. It means and includes charity, clemency, commiseration, condolence, fellow feeling, human kindness, mercy, sympathy and tenderness. In short the term compassion covers every conceivable virtue. If one is compassionate, there will be no animosity, bitterness, hatred, violence and terrorism.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has wisely captioned his proposed address – Compassion is an antidote to Terrorism. The festival of compassion is timely and urgent. I have earlier detailed how each and every religion exhorts its followers to observe every aspect of compassion.

I trust this week long festival will help us put our hearts together to promote compassion towards Men Beasts Birds and all living beings so help us God.