

Peace is in our Hands

(Speech at Bharat Soka Gakkai function, "Peace is in our Hands" and presenting "Manifesto 2000" at Nehru Memorial Library Auditorium, New Delhi on Wednesday 30th August, 2000)

It gives me immense pleasure to participate in this unique programme. In Chennai, I am associated with an organisation called Gandhi Peace Foundation which has taken up youth for Peace Programme. This foundation goes to schools and organises groups which pledge themselves to Peace and Non-violence. They hold discussions, question and answer sessions and try to adopt their lives to the Gandhian virtues of Truth, Non-violence and Peace. Thus a new awareness of peace and non - violence is overtaking the country.

Primordial man was no better than the beast. He hunted for his food, killed animals and men and ate, drank and slept. He was violent and selfish, and had no finer instincts like kindness, compassion and generosity. Such a being has been transformed into social being by religion. Every Religion prohibits killing, cruelty, robbing, cheating, falsehood etc., as sinful path to Hell and encourages truth, non-violence, charity, kindness, compassion, alleviation of others` suffering etc., as a virtuous path to Heaven. No Religion has said that you can kill, rob and cheat.

Today, even after millennia of progress, the primitive instincts persist in Man. War continues to be a legitimate instrument of settling differences between nations. Terrorism continues to be the tool for securing one`s aims and objectives. Science has been harnessed to production of weapons of mass destruction like atomic weapons, space missiles etc. The stockpile of atomic weapons among the nuclear powers will annihilate the world 18 times over. Though there has been no third world war, but there have been over thousand limited bilateral wars during this period. No social, economic and cultural progress is possible without peace. These wars have created hundreds of thousands of refugees driven from their hearth and homes, leading to a miserable life.

Up to the present day, the world has seen only a culture of war. Our history books teach us only about the wars and dynasties. Compare European history or Indian history as taught in our schools. The hundred years` war between France and England forms a major part of the history of these two countries.

It is in this context that Gandhiji becomes relevant not only to India but globally. He believed in the ancient Rig Vedic dictum that the world is one family, ` Vasudeiva Kutumbakam`. He believed that the Brotherhood of Man can be achieved by every one scrupulously, following Truth and Non-violence. The moral and spiritual approach of Gandhiji to all issues, political, social, economic, distinguished him from the rest of the humanity.

The most fascinating study of the twentieth century, is not space research, atomic science, supersonic flights, marvels of medical science such as transplant and implant of organs and production of test tube babies but the voluntary transfer of power from the colonial masters to the millions of subject peoples and the elimination of colonialism through the Gandhian path of Peace and non-violence. While others made changes in materials, Gandhiji changed the Man himself. *Satya* and *Ahimsa* were not the invention or discovery by Mahatma Gandhi. The concept remained in the world millennia before Christ. But Gandhiji adapted them for social and political changes. He proved that moral law is higher and more powerful than the material law and that Man can overcome unjust material law by observing the moral code. When Gandhiji started his Dandi March to break the Salt laws, skeptics scoffed at the idea and asked, "Can the

mighty British Empire be shaken by a fistful of salt". Yet the symbolic act of mass disobedience without retaliation of the brutal suppression resorted to by the government, shook the foundations of the British Empire. Other countries struggling for freedom and leaders struggling against social discriminations and inequality adopted the Gandhian way. Buddha preached the same philosophy namely that evil must be overcome by good, anger by kindness, greed by generosity and falsehood by truth. Socrates rejected the offer to escape from jail and said "escape from prison would amount to treason against the spirit of citizenship". Gandhiji said that "those only can take up Civil Disobedience who are prepared to suffer the penalty." Most countries, which achieved freedom during the last century, acknowledged that the inspiration for non-violent struggle came from Gandhiji. Martin Luther King adopted the Gandhian way when a Black was thrown out of a bus to accommodate a White at Montgomery. The boycott of busses had splendid response and King was put behind the bars. After 380 days of disciplined boycott, the Supreme Court ruled against the discrimination in buses. On receiving the Nobel Prize for 'Peace', Martin Luther King said, "this award which I receive on behalf of the movement is a profound recognition that non-violence is the answer to the crucial political questions of our times."

If humanity has to survive, we must induct the culture of peace and harmony. The United Nations has broken new grounds by creating world-wide awareness through its 'Manifesto – 2000'. It is proposed to collect from all over the globe a hundred million signatures, pledging themselves to promote the culture of peace and present it to the Millennium Session of the United Nations in September. The Bharat Soka Gakkai has collected one hundred thousand signatures which has just been presented to the Director of UNESCO, Delhi.

I have had the privilege of meeting the President of Soka Gakkai International DAISAKU IKEDA. He has been carrying on a relentless campaign for non-violence and peace for several decades. Efforts of such dedicated souls seldom go waste.

Let us all pray that peace and harmony may be achieved in the world during our own life time.

I have every confidence that the movement for Peace will gather momentum and that Peace and Harmony will be achieved on the Earth.