

Peace through dialogue: A view of Sanatana Dharma (Vedic Hinduism)

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Introduction

It is well known that industrial development, technological advances, global communications, international economics, consumerism etc have not only made all the countries connected but also impacted human life and living. In spite of all the scientific and technological developments and their advantages, we also see that there has been an increase in the conflicts resulting in unrest between people, societies, countries etc. Thus there is a greater need for peace and understanding in dealing with problems arising out of conflicts and miscommunications. Each society and religious faith has tried to contribute solutions. It is seen from the literature of Sanatana Dharma also known as Vedic Hinduism that peace based on recognizing and understanding of unity in diversity has received primary importance from ancient times to our times. Peace cannot be assumed to exist in the temporary absence of war or conflicts. This brief article presents how the peace through dialogue can be achieved at all levels namely between people, organizations, societies or countries.

Unity in Diversity

Vedas and Vedic literature emphasize that as large number of branches in a tree come out of the same roots similarly there is One Source for all manifestations representing diversity. Although conflict seems to appear due to diversity, peace results due to recognition of unity. The well-known mantra "Ekam Sat Vipraha Bahudha Vadanti" means, "The realized ones describe the same reality in several ways". In BhagavadGita, through a beautiful simile in chapter 7 (verse 7), Lord Krishna says "Dhananjaya! There is nothing whatsoever higher than Me. As rows of gems are strung on a thread, all these things and beings are strung Me". In this simile, we see that the thread is the unifying element in the necklace although there are diverse types of gems. Thus we need to understand that the principle of unity in diversity is the implicit law of nature, universe and life. This basic principle is referred as Dharma that holds all of us together in the universe. This forms the basis of peace. It is for this reason that the Vedas have so many Shanti (peace-related) mantras. In the words of His Holiness Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer of Karnataka, India, " The India (Bharata) is the land in which a massive effort was carried out to discover Dharma. Hence, Bharata is the land and abode of Dharma". Thus we see that dharma is the unifying principle of the universe and peace based on dharma will be ever lasting.

Peace through dialogue

The co-existence of diverse people demands communication and dialogue. Also it is important that harmony and peace should result. Thus the nature of dialogue becomes extremely important in yielding peace. It is known that wherever the dialogue is absent or improperly carried out in which case conflict has resulted. Again referring to the BhagavadGita, three types of dialogues between two persons are described. The first one is termed as egotistic. In the egotistic type, both persons are boasting about themselves without much caring for each other's knowledge. The second type is referred as intimidating in which both persons are trying to intimidate each other without recognizing each other's knowledge. The third type is referred as

harmonious in which case both persons are respectful of each other's knowledge and are willing to learn from each other. In addition the persons engaged in harmonious dialogue are eager and willing to learn from a third knowledgeable source, in the case when both persons realize that both of them do not know about the subject. In the third type of dialogue as we can see the very basis of harmony, mutual respect and understanding has resulted in not only peaceful dialogue but also peaceful experience and increased knowledge for both persons involved in the dialogue. It is for this reason that Lord Krishna says in the tenth chapter of divine manifestations, that He (Krishna as peace) exists in such harmonious dialogues.

These three models of dialogues can be applied at all levels. The essential characteristics of such a harmonious dialogue is that each party should truly respect each other and also be humble enough to learn from each other and also from a third knowledgeable and trustworthy source. However such a harmonious dialogue requires initiative from both the parties to achieve peace through dialogue. It is important to realize that violence; conflicts, war, terrorism, etc will not end conflicts and also will not result in peace. At the same time, it is only peaceful efforts such as meaningful, insightful and harmonious dialogue not only resolve conflicts but also bring about peace. Peace through dialogue is more relevant in today's world as several countries are capable of nuclear strengths, which means that any conflict can only lead to non-peaceful catastrophic results. We can also see in the historical and cultural literature of any society that whenever and wherever the harmonious dialogues are not carried out, conflicts and destruction has resulted.

Concluding Remarks

It is known that all efforts need to begin with individuals and expand to groups and so on. As individuals when we practice to achieve peace through dialogue in our interactions with others, then that peace effort expands. Also if the leaders at various levels such as communities, organizations, states, societies, countries etc understand the nature of various types of dialogues and implement them then peace will result. At an individual level one can practice peaceful dialogue approach as advised by Lord Krishna in chapter 17 (verse 15) in which He says, " Without hurting, insulting others one should speak truth in a pleasing way and also one should study and practice scriptures (such as Vedas)" it is understood that peace through dialogue, refers to peaceful attitude, peaceful behavior, peaceful interactions, etc. The Vedic seers (Rishis) advise us to pray to divinities that "Let us listen to noble (peaceful) speech and sounds through our ears; let us see noble (peaceful) sights and visions; let us spend our life peacefully and harmoniously with strong limbs for making ourselves and divinities happy; May all the divinities bless us"

The Vedic Hindu scriptures again and again emphasize and warn that the human life is unique and special because it is only the human beings who can bring about peace not only among ourselves but also in the world around us. Of course, if we ignore our role in bringing peace and harmony then the alternate way is conflict, war and misery. Let us put our effort and become instruments for everlasting peace at various levels such as individual, family, community, organizations, society, state, country and world through dialogue. Let us pray the Almighty for success in our endeavors.

OM Peace, Peace, Peace