

What Hinduism has to offer for world peace?

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"Sisters and Brothers of America" - these were the opening words of a speech by one of the most dynamic Hindu monks, Swami Vivekananda, at the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago on September 11th, 1893. That date, when he spoke on behalf of the oldest living religion of the world, calling for an end to fanaticism, exactly 108 years before the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. Swami Vivekananda closed by speaking of humanity's history of violence and his hopes for its end 1,2, "Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal."

Today, I would like to shine light on a few of the many contributions Hinduism has offered and continues to, towards world peace.

One of the integral principles of Hindu philosophy is "Vasuda Eva Kutumbakam" or "the whole world is but one family" 2,3. This is an ideal that every Hindu is urged to internalize in their path of spiritual progress. The teachings of the scriptures of Hinduism, the Vedas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras and Yoga Sutras (among others) are universal. That is why Hinduism is not bounded by any geographical, racial, national or ethnic boundary5.

Hinduism accepts that all paths are valid and lead to the truth. Hindus believe in the all-pervasiveness of the divine4. By seeing the divine in all beings, we see that there is no other, no opponent.

"Ahimsa" is a fundamental principle of Hinduism that goes deeper than "non-violence", prohibiting subtle abuse and even simple hurt. Two thousand years ago, a weaver saint of South India, Saint Thiruvalluvar said it simply "All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Therefore those who desire not to suffer, refrain from causing others pain"5.

This wisdom, often misconstrued for cowardice, is the cumulative knowledge of Karma (the law of cause and effect), dharma (right living or righteousness) and the all pervasiveness of the divine in all things5.

Mahatma Gandhi put this wisdom into practice to lead a nation of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Jews and Zoroastrians (the last two minority communities have long received refuge in India) to freedom by non-violent struggle. He inspired several non-violent movements all over the world including the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s 6 and the fight against Apartheid in South Africa. Even today the anti-corruption movement and other political reform in India is being achieved by non-violent means based on the principles of Ahimsa.

I would like to conclude with a "Shanthi" or "Peace" Mantra from the Upanishads:

"om saha nāvavatu

saha nau bhunaktu
saha vīryam karavāvahai
tejasvināvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai
om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ"

Or

"Let us all enjoy together,
May all of use work together,
And let our study become radiant,
Let there be no hatred between us.
Peace, Peace, Peace" 5

Thank You.

Post-Script:

In the East, the number 108 has been described as having great significance (see more about the [significance of the number 108](#)). For example, there are 108 beads on an eastern rosary "mala", a spiritually significant number. Incidentally, the "Global Mala" event where people practicing Yoga (yogis) are congregating around the 10th anniversary of the September 11th, 2001 are performing 108 sun salutations (Surya Namaskaras) for that same reason. It is interesting that this almost prescient "death-knell of all fanaticism" was 108 years to the date, and one can only hope with fervor that it is so.

References

1. Swami Vivekananda at World Congress of Religions - <http://swamij.com/swami-vivekananda-1893.htm>
2. Maha Upanishad Chapter 6, Verse 72:

‘ayam bandhurayam neti ganana laghuchetasam
udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam’

‘Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger.
For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family.’

3. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasudhaiva_Kutumbakam
4. Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Who is a Hindu?
http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Who_is_a_Hindu%3F. This article was originally published in the April/May/June 2009 edition of "Hinduism Today"
5. Concept of Peace in Hinduism, <http://www.spotlightofpeace.com/hinduism-and-peace/concept-of-peace-in-hinduism/>
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8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanti_Mantra