

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY DR. (MRS.) VIMLA S LALBHAI AT AN
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT NEW DELHI ON FEBRUARY 7, 2015**

Respected Dear Dr. Karan Singhji, Respected Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stand in front of you, in the midst of (thought) leaders of spirituality and faith of the highest calibre, there is a feeling of deep humility within me and also to feel nervous as how I will add value to this August gathering.

To begin with I most sincerely thank Respected Alyson and Respected Laxmiben who have responded to this little booklet, which was prepared with the help of Respected Munishri Kirtivijayji and Respected Vivekji. Also My Pranams to these Respected Saints.

Alison, you want me to speak a few words as to how I was inspired to put this booklet together.

There were mainly three reasons.

Reason 1

Daily we read in News Papers, countless number of violent incidents and (aggressive news reports)

Not only that, watch Televisions or access to internet – wait for 3 seconds or more as you enter Delhi Metro - wait for a millisecond more as the red light turns yellow or green!!! On the roads the intolerance, impatience and at times subsequent violent reasonless reaction is all too familiar to all of us.

The world-over, every nation's habitat faces daily violence, wars, kidnapping, extortion, terrorism, besides sexual harassment, rape etc.

The list is endless and (sobering). And the causes faith, religion, greed for power, money, jealousy, emotional disturbances etc. – poverty – Lack of proper education and insecurity in life.

Reason 2

“Yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream”

Khalil Gibran

The wonderful quote of Khalil Gibran, the famous Lebanese Poet, takes me back to 1946 – 48 when I came in contact with Apostle of Non-Violence right here In Delhi. – Pujya Mahatma Gandhi.

I attended his evening prayers for 16 – 17 months first in Harijan Colony and then in Birla House.

Ten days before his assassination, a bomb exploded during prayer time, fortunately just outside Birla House. We were all scared and got up and finally sat down, but Gandhiji was cool, calm and unperturbed, finished his prayers as usual.

I can still vividly remember standing near the mortal remains of Gandhiji. I saw for myself 3 bullet wounds on his chest.

Finally at Rajghat, my friend and I attended his funeral.

We all know about Gandhiji's life changing moment in train while going to South Africa. Gandhiji from Porbandar, a young frail Barrister was just an ordinary man like any one of us, who by setting impossible Standard for himself and then finding spiritual strength to match those standards, became an extra-ordinary man – Champion of Non-Violence. Very humbly, I submit that no one in the history of the world had such a gigantic, such a stupendous dream as Gandhi.

He did not want weapons but decided not to bear injustice in his unique way, Satyagraha and Non-Violence. He was one person against an Empire.

Lord Mountbatten said what we could not do with a band of Brigadiers, this single frail man saved Calcutta from mob in August 1946.

Also I remember two persons who followed Gandhiji's ideals : - Martin Luther King. His well known thunderous speech "I have a dream". He said the person won't be known by the colour of his skin but would be known by the content of his character.

Besides Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela also followed Gandhiji in letter and spirit. Transformational leadership exhibited by Madiba (as Nelson Mandela was fondly called) following the principle of Non-Violence in getting the apartheid regime voluntarily hand-over powers to the black majority with minimal bloodshed is the ultimate validation for the spirit and ethos of Non-Violence. – He renounced power.

More than 45 years ago, I took my children to Hiroshima where Atom Bomb exploded. We saw ruins of buildings and very few people were seen walking on road. The sad expression on their faces was so obvious. Radiation due to explosion of atom bomb affected the health of the few people – Japan had created a Museum at Hiroshima showing charred bodies and burnt clothes. Eternal Lamp was kept burning in the memory of the innocent people who died.

Tell me even the country who won the war what have they achieved except unpleasantness between nations.

Reason 3

I am a Jain and its main principles Ahimsa or Non-Violence and Anekantvad (besides No possession, Honesty and Celibacy) have always attracted me. Anekantvad helps to create harmony. e.g. Different interpretation of the same subject by different people may be right e.g. Elephant.

All these three reasons prompted me to look into other Religions and whether these religions also advocate Non-Violence for achieving Harmony, Peace to human beings.

I was very happy to see this beautiful concept of Non-Violence, Compassion and Love in various popular religions in India. I am sorry, I have missed writing about Judaism.

My subject of today is Concept of Non-Violence – An Inter-faith Perspective.

I will, with the permission of the organizers of this wonderful conference of inter-faith ideas, slightly modify the topic given to me into some personal reflections on Non-Violence in the world of today, organically distilled out of almost 9 decades of my life, admittedly privileged.

Let me take your minds further back in the sands of time – about 2500 years back, Lord Mahavir a Jain Saint did meditation and tapasya for 12 ½ years and then realised or discovered for himself True Knowledge to lead good peaceful life. One of the (main) requirement for leading good peaceful life was Ahimsa i.e. Non-Violence at all levels (Tan, Man, Dhan and Indriya)

World's great religious and spiritual leaders in formal and informal if interpreted truly contextually without bias highlight Non-Violence at every turns.

Non-Violence is the supreme religion – says Hinduism. (In this world also there were Plateau, Socrates and Confucius. In China Budha were all great leaders. I bow down to them).

After more than 2500 years, the Key of Non-Violence again found by Gandhi. It can be said with a few degree of assurance that had Gandhiji been alive today. I wonder,

- (a) The world would have been a safer, less Violent place
- (b) His sheer moral authority would have made the world

1. More Compassionate
2. More Just
3. More understanding

Which is exactly Temple of understanding stands for?

Another important reason for publishing this booklet : -

My association with Charitable and non-profitable organisations through social work enables me to interact with a wide cross section of people, specially students and children.

These interactions when reflected upon, brought home to me the incredible violence the mind and soul is bombarded with; especially at an impressionable age, This insidious violence, leads them at an early age towards unsettled mindsets and troubled psychological states. Also now the families are getting smaller and nuclear. 1 or 2 children, Both husband and wife working. Hardly have sufficient time for their children.

This troubled me greatly; I searched for answers, often painstakingly with frustration. I searched within myself and revisited my journey through spirituality and Jainism, and realised that this faith brought me peace and solace during my most difficult moments.

Dharma beej – i.e. Seeds of Religion:

A book by the name of Dharmabeej, seeds of Religion is very dear to me, also helped me to cultivate Non-Violent Attitude in me. In short, to promote non-violent attitude in us, we have to cultivate following Four Habits.

- (a) **Friendliness** with equals
- (b) **Joy** when you see people around you, happier, prosperous, charitable, kind, wealthy, healthier than you, and hope that one day you will be like them; rather than getting jealous about them. Work towards that.
- (c) **Compassion** when you see people poorer, happy, handicapped, help and pray for their uplift and well-being.
- (d) **Indifference** towards people those who are not sympathetic and not listening to good advice; do not hate them, Love them and pray for them, that one day, wisdom will dawn on them.

These four qualities will certainly prevent us from having evil or violent thoughts occurring in our mind.

Also, I came across a book by the name of “Third Wave” by Chinese Author, Lin Yu Tang.

Yes, let me tell you, some centuries ago there was a WAVE, 1st wave, when there were Kings and Slaves. Then came the 2nd wave where there was Rich and Poor. 3rd wave – Neither Rich are respected nor poor ill treated – this is the wave of Knowledge. Only learned people are respected. Now according to me, there is a 4th wave, where knowledge with humility and action will be respected.

How do we make such thoughts and ideas easy for the young

reader? There germinated the idea of compiling a booklet highlighting in a simple, picturesque easy to follow manner, the essence of the world's leading religions within the context of peace and harmony.

Thus, this booklet is a labour of love, a deeply felt attempt to make faith more relevant and practical.

I am certainly amazed at the remarkable response from diverse people especially children to this simple compilation from the holy texts of seven religions. And here I am, talking about it to all of you!!! Unbelievable!!!

Deep learning, as the Harvard scholar Jal Mehta, Professor in Harvard University, USA, highlighted recently, is a journey from the known to the unknown. The more one learns and understands, the more one becomes aware of the Oceans of ignorance we are in.

Faith in any form, is the periodic culmination of our spiritual journey towards inner peace and understanding, as we grow older, more experienced and content, the tone and tenor of our faith changes, subtly. i.e. gradually

For learning to happen, deeper understanding to happen, 21st Century skills to be developed. Our children desperately need a blended positive understanding of religion and spirituality. The non-violent, peaceful, faithful mind is the best advertisement for peace, happiness, and healthy fruitful developments of human beings.

Thus, in our educational institutions, we must endeavour to revisit our roots and use distilled faith and spirituality as part of enculturation.

When that happens, the words of Ms. Roosevelt's introductory letter for **Temple Of Understanding** will realise itself and I quote:

“For our world surely needs the inspirations and leadership of spiritual UN”

Most importantly I feel strongly, love is the essence of non-violence. Here I quote Adam Grant, who in his widely read book talks about Givers and Takers and Matchers.

Givers Values

Happiness

Responsibility

Social Service

Compassion

Takers Values

Wealth

Power

Pleasure

Winning

Thus, let us be givers and not takers. (Givers share and care for others. Takers take for themselves). Subbarao, an Indian Scientist, who discovered Aureomycin, said that science prolongs the life, but spirituality deepens it.

Many a times, it occurs to me that we created U.N. – But are we really united? Let us ask ourselves.

U.N has declared 2nd October as the Non-Violence Day – A Great Tribute to Gandhi.

We, human beings, are most evolved species in this world with same heart, brain, Senses, Same blood runs in all of us. But unfortunately we do not behave as one.

(In the end, I quote Martin Luther King “Every man must decide whether he will walk in the Light of Creative Altruism or in the Darkness of Destructive Selfishness”).

Finally, it is imperative that we revisit the core values of Non-violence in the right spirit, for a better tomorrow. Let us invest the same idea in our children through Education at Home and at Schools and Society. Parents and Gurus, leaders have to set an example by practice and not by preaching. Excuse me for any of my mistakes or shortcomings.

Also, Why not have an Ahimsa/Non-Violence, spiritual University or coin a New Religion – Religion of Humanity? Besides University;

(i) develop band of Volunteers who work with underprivileged.

(ii) after 18 years of age, as students go for army training, they should be asked to work in the villages

Thank you for a patient hearing.

God Bless All.

