

*“We must find the courage to leave
our temples and enter the temples
of human experience, temples that
are filled with suffering”*

—Maha Ghosananda

*“Our reverence for life has to
include every living organism and
extend further to cover the entire
universe”*

—H.H. Swami Dayananda Saraswati

A Program of the Global Peace Initiative of Women

“GIVING GLOBAL VOICE TO EASTERN WISDOM”

**A Hindu-Buddhist Partnership
For a More Compassionate World**
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
February 8-12, 2009

The Call to Gather

The Eastern religious traditions have a particular worldview that could be of great world service now. Essentially they do not view a separation between the inner and outer fields, the spiritual and material realities: they are reflections of one another. If one is out of kilter, so will be the other. So for example, if we find great imbalances in the external world, in the form say of the degradation of nature and the depletion of natural resources, excessive violence and inequity, etc., -- to address these successfully we would need to be aware of what these conditions are telling us of our inner world. So it means turning our gaze inward to find the outward solutions.

Since the beginning of formal interreligious activities in the later decades of the 20th century, the focus has been on bringing together the Abrahamic community – to help overcome historic tensions, build understanding and acceptances of their differences and to rediscover their common ground. This has been very valuable and continues today to be the major preoccupation of interfaith activities. But in this process, something very valuable is being lost – the perceptions and inclusion of the whole of the human family into the effort to cultivate the wisdom and understanding that can help us meet the enormous challenges we face. No one family of nations or religions can do this alone. It must be a collective and inclusive effort, bringing together the world’s collective wisdom.

This Summit is an effort to give global voice to those traditions from the East – in particular Buddhism and Hinduism, which have been overlooked or downplayed in the interreligious dialogues around the world. To move forward as a human community – the major spiritual wisdom traditions from around the world must come together in equal numbers, for balanced representation, men and women, contemplatives and activists – all of those working from a single sacred source.

We stand at a point when we must begin to finally put the past behind us – past religious rivalries and historic tensions -- so that we can create a future not bound by karmic repetition but willed into being by new vision and intention.

One of humankind's most pressing challenges is the need to come again into an intimate relationship with the Earth, where we know her as a living organism that senses and responds. In this regard, the Eastern wisdom has much to teach. In our response to violence, the Eastern lineages have much wisdom. With regard to all the major challenges, there is much from the East to be shared.

The goal of this gathering is to bring together Hindu and Buddhist religious leaders to explore what special contribution can be made to world understanding to advance our present world situation – now fraught with environmental, economic and political crises – all emanating from a deeper spiritual crisis. What is it that the Eastern wisdom can teach about this spiritual crisis -- and what common framework can be found among the eastern traditions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. Like the Abrahamic family, can we now come together in an eastern reunion so we can collectively offer the wisdom of these lineages for world benefit?

Summit

This Summit will bring together spiritual leaders from the various eastern traditions with a focus on the two largest eastern religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, to meet in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, a place that has special significance for both Hindus and Buddhists. Cambodia was once a Hindu

kingdom and there are still more ancient Hindu temples there than anyplace outside of India. Hindu sacred scriptures like the Ramayana are still read, taught and danced. Hindu culture is still very much alive in Cambodia. At the same time, Cambodia is a Buddhist country, one of the few remaining countries that has Buddhism as its state religion. The structures and spirit of Buddhism suffered greatly during the years of the Khmer Rouge and they are still struggling to revive. One of the goals of this Summit is to see how the Eastern family of religions can support the emerging Buddhist Sangha in Cambodia. The emergence of a newly educated and strengthened Sangha community committed to healing in Cambodia as well as sharing with the global community the wisdom and experience brought through the suffering of years of war and hardship.

Rarely if ever have the religions from the east come together in a collective voice. Now, with shifting world dynamics, it is essential that a new collective eastern voice emerge.

Challenges

The Eastern faiths are for the most part non-converting religions, and so they find themselves diminishing even in their own communities – giving rise to conditions that could become explosive. New agreements must be found with the proselytizing religions so that an environment of greater mutual respect and goodwill can prevail – respect for the integrity of each tradition and for the rights of the followers of every faith to be free from harassment.

Some of the Eastern faiths have long followed a vegetarian diet but have not encouraged it outside of their communities. A 2007 United Nations report on climate change shows that the killing of 100 billion animals a year for human consumption is one of the biggest contributors to climate change – more than the entire world transportation industry. The waste from the meat industry and the energy needed to maintain it – food for cattle, etc. -- are adversely affecting our environment. Can the Eastern religions come together and from a scientific rather than faith perspective call for a reduction in meat consumption, or a more

conscious consumption of meat – showing the link between the industrialization of the meat industry and damage to the environment.

Interdependence and interconnection are words commonly used today – especially regarding the environment. According to the eastern perspective, these words reveal an underlying reality of life. If these principles were deeply understood, we would no more do harm to the earth than to ourselves, because we are one, we would no more do harm to another than ourselves, because we are one. How can we deepen this understanding in the global consciousness?

The word compassion has also coming into common usage in the west but it is often used to mean sympathy or caring. What is the compassionate mind that Buddha speaks of and how does it function in the world? What are the degrees of compassion and its manifestations, and how can it guide us today to address world problems?

The Vedic tradition sees the Divine nature in everything and teaches people to work closely with the forces of nature, in a spirit of respect and reverence. The Buddha teaches us to release ourselves from the grasping mind that wants, desires, creates separation and destroys the natural balance that is.

There is a common framework that can yield important insight now as we seek to bring greater balance to the world by fostering a spiritual development to accompany the world's material development.

A New Partnership Between Science and Religion – Advancing the Science of Consciousness

For millennia, yoga has been considered the science of the soul. For many yoga and Buddhist practitioners, especially in the west, it is the science of the practice, not the faith that has drawn them to the path. Western science is finally catching up and has begun to develop methods for the study of consciousness. The Eastern traditions, with their history of inquiry, are perfect partners for this exploration.

Can we declare a new partnership between science and religion to work in collaboration in the quest to understand the nature of consciousness, of life and of that from which the universe was born?

The East in the West

The Eastern lineages have taken root in the west in part because of their experiential nature. The current generation is searching not so much for faith as for experiential knowledge. They are seeking to be shown, not told. Finding a balance between the East and West is essential now -- each offers vital perspectives, coming from a single source but differing in their language, tone and metaphor to suit different times and cultures. Now as we continue to struggle to become one world, one family, we must learn to accommodate our differences, to love them even, to incorporate from others when there is benefit to do so, and not to fear the loss of identity, because our essential identity is unchangeable.

The eastern traditions offer an inclusive worldview – they see the world’s religions as many streams emanating from a single source, flowing into a single ocean – emerging from and returning to the One. The greatest challenge facing our world community is the need to outgrow the exclusive worldview that has held so much of the world captured for so many centuries, and to evolve a more inclusive world view so that we can truly learn to love and benefit from one another.

As the material development from the West is flowing East so too must the spiritual development from the East flow West. That will help us achieve the balance and wisdom needed to address the central challenges of our time. This summit will explore the many ways in which we can foster and deepen this exchange.

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