

**National Seminar on  
COMMUNAL HARMONY THROUGH  
INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING**

Temple of Understanding, India Chapter, at the IIC  
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Learned speakers, distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen: I would like to begin by saying that the name given to this gathering is both appropriate and timely: The National Seminar on communal Harmony through Interfaith Understanding. The qualities of social harmony and spiritual understanding are elements obvious by their absence in the world today. Although over the past century, human civilization has made significant progress in the realms of science and technology and in more recent decades has apparatus, somehow socially the overall result has not been an increase in inter-faith harmony and understanding.

The reason for this, of course, is that peace on earth cannot be established solely by external means or intellectual pursuits. The deepest source of human peace is the development of the human heart, the character of the people who inhabit this earth. And it is here that the great religious leaders play a dominant role.

All the great spiritual traditions share many common goals. They all have as their focus, the reinforcing of basic human values, and they all aspire to create a more peaceful and harmonious society. Ever great spiritual strives in its own ways to inspire individual human beings towards a greater commitment to peace, love, communal harmony and inter-social understanding.

It is also true that occasionally our religious traditions do not seem to fully achieve these goals. Sometimes it seems that they even become part of the problem of conflict rather than part of the cure.

For our spiritual traditions to be of greatest benefit to mankind, for them to play a maximum effective role in fostering peace and harmony, we can all improve by learning from one another. Religious traditions are not end in themselves; rather, they are means to the end of improving the quality of human life. Their function is to convey the message of peace and harmony to their specific communities in an effective way. As the times change, the challenges that arise in the task of conveying this message take different forms. We can all benefit from one another's experiences as we walk the journey of life.

Interfaith work is very important in the modern world. It establishes a basic of communication and dialogue that increases mutual understanding and respect. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has so often stated, it is this atmosphere of understanding and respect that should serve as the foundation for interfaith dialogue as we come to the close of the Twentieth Century, and as we enter into the next era.

Buddhism places its emphasis upon the concept of interdependence, the idea that all things are interrelated. Certainly, in the modern world the interconnected nature of human society has become increasingly obvious and increasingly relevant. What one segment of society does affect the rest of society. By extension, the attitudes that the various religious traditions hold towards one another have far reaching effects.

Our religious traditions have an important role to play in the present age. The work of establishing an atmosphere of harmony and understanding is no longer a mere idealistic abstraction. It is something very urgent, something demanding of our immediate and intense attention. Without it, there is a danger to this very survival of mankind.

It is a work in which we are wise to cooperate with one another, and in which we should try to learn from one another's skills, successes and failures.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama often speaks of how in spite of any doctrinal differences, we are all one human family; and that we must learn how-to live-in happiness with one another on this tiny planet that we call "Earth". It is time for our religious traditions to look beyond our individual communities, and to take up the greater task of serving mankind as 1 whole.