

Opening Statement
Dr. Sudhir Vaidya
15th Annual Interreligious Prayer Service for Peace and Justice Celebrating World Interfaith Harmony

Welcome to the 15th Annual Interreligious Prayer Service For Peace and Justice Celebrating World Interfaith Harmony. It gives me immense pleasure and pride to welcome you all at the India Center of Westchester. The India Center has been a home for everybody with origins from India to come together and enjoy the richness of the culture we brought from our homeland, but also welcomes everybody from everywhere in the world, from any country any faith interested in enjoying Indian art culture and traditions. The India Center also promotes people of Indian origin to learn art, sciences, cultures, and cuisines from anywhere in the world to enrich ourselves and become better citizens of America and the new emerging globalized world we live in. We are so proud that we are moving to a bigger home soon to expand what we can through even more activities for our youth, adults, and elderly, but also offer community services to the needy by our members contributions and voluntary activities

The word India came from the word Hindu. The word Hindu was probably coined by Arabs, when they came to the Indian Subcontinent to describe the people of the Valley of river Sindh, which currently flows in the Country of Pakistan. Europeans changed the word Hindu to Indus eventually to India. Many world faith's have emerged from this subcontinent such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism so on and so forth. India has been the home for people of all faiths such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Bahais, so on and so forth.

Generally, if you do not belong to any other named faith, such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sikh, Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Sunni or Shia, you call yourself as a Hindu. The only word from the ancient scriptures from India, which are written in Sanskrit and pertain to religion, is a Sanskrit word "Dharma". Etymologically, the word is a combination of the root verb Dhru- which means Hold and Marma a noun, which means Vital Part. So, Dharma is the vital essence that hold this universe together. Manu the originator of the code of conduct for upholding dharma gave 5 prescriptions to uphold Dharma: Ahimsa, Satyam, Asteyam, Shoucham, and Indriyanigrahaah. Ahimsa means non-violence, Satyam means Truth, Asteyam, means not stealing, Shoucham means maintaining cleanliness in the conduct and environment, and the last but not the least is Indriyanigrahaha, which means controlling and regulating the mind, emotions, greed and all our actions. Manu also clearly stated that "Dharma Eva Hato Hanti, Dharmo Rakshati Raksitah" that means a society which destroys this universality and harmony of Dharma would destroy itself and society which protects and upholds this universality and harmony by Dharma, will protects itself.

Evil elements in all faiths have politicized and created nationalism, bigotry, hate and intolerance. Similarly, organized atheism and anti-faith movements also have cheated, harmed, and destroyed, people, communities, and nations. Both of these are Adharma's which are sure

to destroy everything. Today in the spirit of Dharma or religions, we all have come together to hold ourselves together, respect each other's beliefs and sustain this universe, for progress and welfare for ALL in this world. Our scripture also says that like all the rivers passing through different paths reach the same Ocean, all faiths through different paths lead to the same common good. I will end my welcome address with this Vedic chant for peace.

Sarvetra Sukhinaha Santu- Om Shantih Shantih Shantihi.

Which simply means: Let all be comfortable, let all be free of illness, let all feel safe and secure and let not no one be a party to any unhappiness. Om Peace Peace and Peace