




Interfaith Speakers and their Take Home Messages



“Vaishnav Jan To Tene Kahiye”
An Interfaith Bhajan

“Mahatma Gandhi: An Interfaith Prophet”

 **PARLIAMENT**
OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

 **WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK**
The Official UN Observance in the 1st Week of February

Welcome and Prayers:



Sridhar Shanmugam is the founding Board member of Sri Navagraha Devasthanam of North America.

Welcome, all the blessed Atman (Souls) and I would like to begin with a prayer from our scripture Vedas;

Matha cha Parvathy Devi,
Pitha Devo Maheswara,
Bandhava Shiva Bakthamscha,
Swadeso Bhuvana thrayam

My mother is the goddess,
My father is the Lord
My dear ones are the ones who offer respect to the supreme.
And my home is the whole world and cosmos.

Interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, faith or spiritual beliefs, at both the individual and institutional levels, that the dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs to increase acceptance of each other.

Today's seminar is a brainchild of Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar. He has in a very unique and sophisticated way incorporated the same Bhajan into a dialogue for the same reason - message for universal togetherness & understanding.

Message from “ Parliament of The world’s Religions”



Dr. Bhadra Shah is currently serving as Vice Chair of Board of trustees “ Parliament of The world’s Religions” and member of several important committees, recipient of Hind Ratan Award in 2001 and Shalin Manav Ratna award from “Anupam Mission” in 2004.

1. POWR is working for a more JUST, PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD for ALL since 1893
2. WIHW - It was proposed in 2010 by HM King Abdullah II and HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan to build a foundation for more peaceful and friendly communities.
3. John Templeton foundation is directing us to increase interfaith dialogues to make the world more peaceful and sustainable.
4. Thanks to Well-wishers – Dr. Bhalodkar, all speakers and organizers
5. All present here are interested in making the world more just, sustainable and Peaceful.
6. Together with Grace of Almighty, We can achieve what we want for us and for our Brothers and Sisters.
7. Please become members or Sustaining member to support the activities of **“Parliament of The world’s Religions”**.

Jewish Perspective:



Rabbi Randy Ellen Sheinberg has been the rabbinic leader of Temple Tikvah since its inception. She is a fellow of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), and an active participant in local interfaith networks.

A bhajan, written in the 15th century by the saint poet Narsinh Mehta in the Gujarati language. The poem speaks about the life, ideals and mentality of a Vaishnava Jana (a follower of Lord Vishnu). It was Mahatma Gandhi's favorite bhajan.

He is true Vaishnava, who knows and feels another's woes as his own, always ready to serve others, who are unhappy.

In my tradition we are reading the **book of exodus now. Exodus is formative in the creation of the Jewish/Israelite nation.** Slaves, oppressed in Egypt. Then set free and form a system of law.

In fact, the commandment to care for the stranger is mentioned more times than *any* other commandment in the Torah — more even than the command to love God (*v'ahavta*). According to the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer the Great noted that "the Torah warns 36 times, and some say 46 times, not to oppress the stranger" (Babylonian Talmud, *Bava M'tzia* 59b). The decree is articulated in a number of ways:

"You shall not wrong nor oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:20).

"The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens... for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).

"For the Eternal your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, providing food and clothing — you too must love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

Throughout we are told: do not oppress the stranger...why? Ki ger hayitem b'eret mitzrayim.
You were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Repeated more than any other commandment in the Torah. 36 times at least (and another 10 ancillary). ki ger hayitem b'eret mitzraiym.

First thing to say is that that's **not a foregone conclusion**. You might think that a people who were once powerless would, having gotten and gained power, now say remember to hold on to yur opower and don't let anyone else oppress you. Stay strong. But that's not what we are commanded.

Remember your own suffering...and let it influence how you see others.

Move to empathy.

In doing so, we act like god: we imitate god.

The great Spanish Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides, d.1270), gives a different reason:

In my opinion,... You know that every stranger is disheartened and sighs and cries out, with eyes directed toward God. And God will have mercy on [the stranger] just as God had mercy on you, as it is written, "The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God" (Exodus 2:23).

That is to say, it was not because of their merit [that God helped the Israelites], but only because God had mercy on them from the bondage. (Nachmanides on Exodus 22:20)

He God felt their pain.

Refer to ark and this week's torah portion. This is a god of grace and understanding and listening, and responding.

Later version in our book strengthens it: *veahavta et hager ki ger hayitem b'erez mitzraiym*. **Now it isn't only about not oppressing, a negative commandment, *ela* a positive one...to LOVE the stranger.**

Look at the people next to you. How do you love them? You can feel kindness, generosity, respect. These are all important things. But love takes it to another level.

Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassoy in a story from Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*: You say that you love me, but you do not know what I need. **"If you really loved me, you would know."**

Love is knowing what the other person needs. Love is opening yourself up to him/her struggles, to feeling the suffering, to taking it on for yourself.

Take it further....

The words of the Shema: Adonai echad.... We are all one. Not a light, simple thing, but

Daniel Ladinsky. (born 1948) is an American poet and interpreter of mystical poetry, born and raised in [St. Louis, Missouri](#). He has written four works based on poetry of 14th-century Persian Sufi poet [Hafiz](#)

I Have Come into this World to See This:

**I have come into this world to see this:
the sword drop from men's hands
I have come into this world to see this:
the sword drop from men's hands
even at the height of
their arc of
rage
Because we have finally realized
there is just one flesh
we can wound.**

Hindu Perspective:



Dr. Narendra Bhalodkar, is a cardiologist and Director Emeritus of Coronary Care Unit at Bronx Lebanon Hospital Center. Associate Professor of Clinical Medicine at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. He is a spiritual seeker and a spiritual speaker.

The virtues listed in the Bhajan "Vaishnava Jana To" are also praised in the 12th chapter of Bhagawat Gita called "भक्तियोग" or Yoga of Devotion

Bhgawat Gita is the essence of all the Hindu scriptures, Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Smrutis and Puranas

Lord Krishna says, "Such a devotee is dear to me, who has following virtues."

They are:

- Equanimity
- Compassion
- Not envious but a Kind Friend, to all living beings,
- Does not claim Proprietorship
- Free from False Ego
- Does not Agitate Anyone
- Not Agitated by Anyone
- Free from Anger, Fear and Anxiety
- Same to Foe and Friend
- Same in Honor and Dishonor, in Pleasure and Pain,
- Free from Attachments
- And lastly,
- Free from Selfish Desires.

Narsinh Mehta refers to a word " Para" three times in different contexts:

- Para Dukh, Pain of others
- Para Stri, Women of others
- Para Dhan, Wealth of others

And explains how a Vaishnav acts in these three different circumstances.

“Para” means “others”

While he is a true Vaishnav who considers pain of others as his own.

However, a Vaishnav **can not** and **must not**, consider Women and Wealth of others as his own.

According to Narsinh Mehta, Vaishnav believes and respects other women as his own mother,

This concept of respecting other women, as your own mother was not only relevant 500 years ago,
But, it is even more relevant today in the, **#ME Too** movement

Vedantic principle directs us not to see a woman with
“ देहभाव “, that is seeing her as a physical body only.

But, directs us to see every woman with “ देवभाव ”, and that is seeing God and divinity in her.

One should also see her with “समभाव” Equality and “सदभाव” Goodwill.

How are we going to change the whole world thinking and practicing this way?

It is said, “ Charity begins at home,”

Mahatma Gandhi said, “ Be the change that you wish to see in the world. “

We should also impart similar values to our children from early childhood.

Christian Perspective:



Rev. JoAnn: Interspiritual Minister founded Gathering of Light Interspiritual Fellowship, currently the Co-Chair of Suffolk County's Interfaith Anti-Bias Task Force.

CHRISTIANITY /GANDHI AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The points I will be addressing are

- 1. Vaishnav Jan to Tene Re Kahiye has a universal message.
- 2. Sainly qualities are encouraged and preached in Christian texts
- 3. Gandhiji challenged the faiths of his time to live their highest ideals
- 4. With the inspiration of leaders like Gandhiji, powerful loving chants, and each religions core beliefs, we can become the joy-filled, God trusting people we are born to be.

The attributes found in VAISHNAV JAN TO TENE RE KAHIE are;

- 1. Empathy – to feel the pain of others
- 2. Humility – to be free from self-conceit
- 3. To respect others – not to criticize anyone or anybody's actions
- 4. Stability and purity of mind – to keep our words, thoughts and actions steadfast and pristine
- 5. Truth and morality – to remain honest; not to covet other man's

wealth or woman

- 6. Detachment – to stay unsoiled and internally distant from the world around us
- 7. To stay away from the evils of Greed, Deceit, Lust and Anger

The attributes found in the Beatitudes are:

- 1. Poor in Spirit – to know your brokenness and need for God
- 2. Those who Mourn- Show your empathy
- 3. The Meek- Humble, patient, kind
- 4. Thirst for Righteousness – Do what is right & fair
- 5. Be Merciful- Forgive
- 6. Pure in Heart- Truthful
- 7. Peacemakers
- 8. Willing to sacrifice for what is righteousness.

As you can see from the attributes as they are presented here side by side there is a marked similarity.

Jain Perspective:



Dr. Panna Shah, a Primary Care Physician, key coordinator of SHANTI FUND for 25 years, member of the Advisory Board at the Interfaith Institute of the Islamic Center of Long Island, United Nations for a Jain, Indian Organization, ANUVIBHA.

Jain symbol – Hand signifies friendly assurance and ethical responsibilities. Circle in the palm describes the life cycle. Ahimsa in the middle is the central tenet of Jainism.

The main **Jain premises** are

1. Ahimsa (nonviolence)- This is a fundamental principal of Jain Ethics
2. Anekantvad - View of Multiplicity. Absolute truth is the sum total of all different viewpoints that makes the universe.
3. Aparigraha - non-attachment or simplicity
4. Parasparograho Jivanam-Interdependence. All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence. It means that all aspect of nature belong together. Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, truthfulness, accommodation and assistance.

Jain Ascetics take five greater vows:

- 1.Ahimsa (nonviolence) - Nonviolence in thought, word and action or deeds.
2. Satya (truth)
3. Asteya (non-stealing)-
4. Brahmacharya - celibacy or chastity
- 5.Aparigraha (non-attachment)-

Islam Perspective:



Dr. Faroque Ahmad Khan is Chairman Board of Interfaith Institute of the Islamic Center of Long Island, founders of Islamic Center of Long Island in Westbury, Nassau.

Highlighted from his Islam faith perspective the role of two attributes—mercy and justice.

An examination of the Quranic text and subsequent applications of its precepts reveals an emphasis on both legal and distributive justice. Legal justice has seven key elements: fairness in trial, fairness in judgment, proportionate judgment, proportionate punishment, importance of intention, individual judgment and punishment, equality and **mercy**. Distributive justice constitutes general exhortations towards helping the poor and needy, with emphasis on the orphans.

Ref Hathout Maher et al-In Pursuit of Justice Chap 1 pages 1-27-ISBN-0-9774404-051295-MPAC Publication.

Quran has 114 chapters of varying lengths—113 have the opening statement:

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, **the Merciful (1)**
We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds.

Surah 21:107

Then he was among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to mercy.

Surah 90:17

When those come to you who believe in our verses, say: Peace be upon you. Your Lord has decreed mercy upon Himself.

Surah 6:54

Buddhist Perspective:



Reverend Ami Bhalodkar-Haque is an ordained Interfaith Minister and a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

- Similarities between ideals of a Vaishnav and those of a Bodhisattva
- Metta or loving-kindness/friendliness – unconditional sense of connection to and goodwill towards all beings without exception including ourselves
- Karuna or compassion – our caring and nonjudgmental response to suffering, including our own
- Mudita or sympathetic joy – others’ happiness is inseparable from our own and our desire for all beings to be happy including our own
- Upekkha or equanimity/even mindedness – characterized by openness and non-reactivity. It is the spacious and still quality of mind regardless of what we are experiencing and feeling
- In the words of Shanti-deva, an 8th century Indian bodhisattva, “And now, as long as space endures, and as long

as there are beings to be found, may I continue, likewise to remain, to drive away the sorrows of the world.”

Universal Universalist Perspective:



**By the Rev. Ned Wight, Interim Senior Minister,
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock
Manhasset, NY. Past Executive Director of the congregation’s
Veatch Program**

The bhajan inspires us to ask ourselves, “What must I do to live a good life?”

As a Unitarian Universalist reflecting on this evocative bhajan, several things stand out.

The first is that what we do matters, not only to ourselves, but also to our families and our communities--now and in the future.

We are interdependent.

This bhajan calls us to serve others--to feel and do what we can to relieve the pain and suffering of others, to respect others

This bhajan calls us to live lives of personal integrity--to practice humility, forbearance, purity of thought, word and deed . . . to renounce cravings and impositions that would disrespect others—and disrespect ourselves as well.

This bhajan calls us to stand up for truth--to pursue it, to champion it, to defend it.

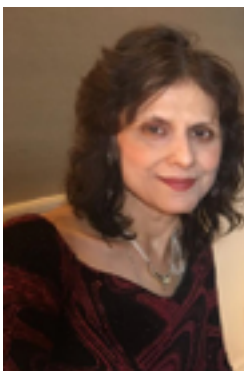
This bhajan calls us to embody our own measure of holiness. We are called to be agents of God's transforming love.

Ultimately, this what each of us is called to do as a person of faith: to serve others, to live lives of personal integrity, to stand up for truth, to embody holiness as we understand it, and to leave the world better than we found it.

I hope that sharing wisdom from our diverse spiritual traditions in the spirit of open inquiry, mutual respect and love, such as we are doing this afternoon, will inspire, strengthen and sustain each one of us on our individual spiritual journeys and bring us closer together in solidarity on our collective journey toward creating the kind of world to which Gandhi and other great prophets and holy people dedicated their lives.

So may it be. Shalom. Blessed be. Inshah'allah. Om! Shanti. Amen.

Science of Spirituality Perspective:



Renee Mehrra is a Founder of a nonprofit organization POWER to deepen New Immigrants awareness about their rights as New Americans, appointed to the NYC Commission on Human Rights by Mayor Bloomberg in 2010, President of Reenbow Media LLC, advertising, broadcasting and public relations.

The essence of all religions teaches us to cultivate the values of truthfulness, integrity, peace and unity.

I would like to talk at the level of humanity and the core philosophy of our ancient seers that truth is one sages call it by different names, the world is an entire family and ethical living with compassion for all creation.

These fundamental truths were relevant then and more than ever are relevant in today's world of discord and strife.

I am more than ever reminded today of Saint Kirpal Singhji's powerful soul stirring message of " Be Good - Do Good - Be One."

Only when we put our life's highest goals of ethical living, vegetarian diet, non-violence, and unity into action, we can make our planet an abode of peace, joy and bliss.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with a quote from my spiritual guide and mentor Saint Rajinder Singhji,

"Love is contagious, Be a carrier."

Thank you.