

Community of Sant'Egidio  
**The Courage to Hope**  
Religions and Cultures in Dialogue  
International Meeting for Peace

29th September to 2nd October 2013

**Panel No 20**

**“The Dialogue between Religions: A Road to Peace”**

Good Afternoon, my name is Jaysukh Mehta – I work with Institute of Jainology in London and today I am representing the Jain community.

The traditional greeting for Jains is ‘Jai Jinendra’ meaning victory to the one who has conquered his inner enemies like anger, greed, deceit etc. You will note that there is no mention of any individual name, sect or religion in this greeting and I think everyone without exception would want to be a victor like that.

This greeting is so apt for today’s subject of discussion – “The Dialogue between Religions: A Road to Peace”.

Religion can be the basis of conflict, and it can also be the road to peace.

Religion is often stated to be the cause of war and conflict, but most often, it is not religion that is the cause, it is more the excuse for it. It is the divisions made through religion and ethnicity that fuels the conflict, rather than the message religion carries. The purpose of conflict is to gain power and wealth. Religious divisions are exploited in the process.

We live in a world of diverse cultures and religious practices co-existing in close proximity and within the same communities. If we are to harness the potential for peace in religion, we must remove the divisive distinctions between peoples of different religions and ethnicities and create a brotherhood of man with a common purpose of peace.

This is not to say that we need one religion to achieve this. Rather we need to understand each other better, to understand our own religion better and to see how through our religion we can help others and be helped by others.

Such an understanding will make our diverse communities stronger, happier and more peaceful. This can be achieved through religious dialogue.

So what is religious dialogue?

To be clear, dialogue is not debate, and the purpose is not conversion. It is much more than the word describes.

Pope Francis described it very effectively in one of his books before his Papacy:

*“Dialogue is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It assumes that there is room in the heart for the person’s point of view, opinion, and proposal. To dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. In order to dialogue it is necessary to know how to lower the defenses, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.”*

This is also comprehensively described in Jainism through the concept and practice of “*Anekantvad*”. *Anekantvad* or multifaceted view point states that human beings are not able to visualise the whole Truth, only the Omniscient can – humans only see the partial truth visible from their stand point. Thus to approach the whole Truth – every viewpoint must be considered and respected.

Dialogue needs to take place at many levels. From the religious leaders and teachers showing by example, down to the community and individual level. It must transcend notions of simple tolerance to achieve deeper mutual trust, respect and friendship.

It is when communities involved in disputes can move beyond their religious differences to settle differences fairly that dialogue has been effective.

Dialogue needs to be not just in words, but in actions too. Simply having a conceptual understanding of another faith is not enough. Dialogue needs to be supported by action, such as sharing in charity, community support, education of children, prayers for peace and the wellbeing of each other.

Dialogue encourages us to learn from other religions in an open-hearted way. This not only expands our knowledge of another faith, but deepens our understanding of our own. The mutual trust built up through true dialogue encourages us to be bold in our religious beliefs and convictions without fear of confrontation and without the need to put those of other beliefs down in order to make us stronger.

When at an individual level we gain a true understanding of our faith, we conquer our inner enemies and achieve an inner peace, a love for all people and a desire that all people of the world should be happy. We can then extend this love through dialogue and action to those around us irrespective of religion or ethnicity.

Societies engaged in dialogue recognise our inter-dependence with all others and our joint responsibility as part of this universe to contribute individually and collectively towards the wellbeing of all, to live in harmony, peace, and amity. I will quote a verse from the Jain Canon that says: *Parasparopgraho jivanam* meaning 'souls render service to one another'. The wellbeing of the whole universe is based on this premise of interdependency.

So far a macro view of how the religions could get together to create an environment of peace has been considered. However, input and co operation are very essential from the other two pillars of the society. The businesses, international organisations, and corporations have a responsibility to help us attain our goal and finally it is the politicians who have to deliver the final outcome.

A true dialogue allows us to lay the foundations of mutual trust and friendship between people of the world, it strengthens our understanding of common values and helps us to celebrate and respect our differences. When the realisation of a single humanity with all its diversity and inter-dependent destiny is shared by societies and nations, we will truly be on the road to peace.

Finally, we need courage as demonstrated by Sant Egidio to hold peace meetings such as these to allow peoples of different countries to express and discuss their views freely. This gives us the hope to see our wonderful world being shared in harmony, happiness and dignity for all.

Thank you & Jai Jinendra