

**Peace and Prosperity – Sustainable Development Goals
Energy, production and consumption
The Hindu Perspective**

(Paper presented by Swami Atmapriyananda, Vice Chancellor, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, West Bengal, India, at the Vatican Conference on 'Sustainable Development Goals – the Role of religions' held during 7-9 March 2019)

May we begin with two well-known Universal Peace prayers (called *shanti mantra*) in Hinduism from the Vedas, considered at least five thousand years old if not more, which are highly relevant to my subject of discussion in this conference:

(1) Peace Chant from Shukla-Yajur-Veda

Original Sanskrit Mantra:

ॐ द्यौः शान्तिः अन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिः आपः शान्तिः
ओषधयः शान्तिः वनस्पतयः शान्तिः विश्वे देवाः शान्तिः ब्रह्म शान्तिः
सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि । ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

Om. Dyauh shantih, antariksham shantih, prithvi shantih, aapah shantih, oshadhayah shantih, vanaspatayah shantih, vishve devaah shantih, brahma shantih, sarvam shantih, shantireva shantih, saa maa shantiredhi. Om shantih, shantih, shantih.

English Translation of the above Mantra:

Om. May peace prevail in the heavens. May peace prevail in the interstellar space. May peace reign on the earth. May the waters be peaceful. May peace be on all the plants and herbs. May peace reign on all the trees and environment. May peace rest with all the divine beings. May the Supreme Being and the scripture be the Abode of Supreme Peace. May peace reign everywhere and in every being. May there be peace and more peace everywhere at all times. May that supreme peace come to me too [by the grace of the Supreme]. Om peace, peace, peace.

(2) Peace Chant from Rig-Veda

Original Sanskrit Mantra:

ॐ मधुवाता ऋतायते मधुक्षरन्ति सिन्धवः । माध्वीर्नः सन्त्वोषधीः ।
मधु नक्तमुतोषसि मधुमत् पार्थिवं रजः । मधुद्यौरस्तु नः पिता ।
मधुमान्नो वनस्पति र्मधुमां अस्तु सूर्यः । माध्वीर्गावो भवन्तु नः । ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

*Om. Madhuvaata ritayate madhuksharanti sindhavah. Maadhveernah-santvoshadheeh.
Madhunaktamutoshasi madhumat-parthivam rajah. Madhu dyaurastu nah pita.*

Madhumaanno vanaspatir-madhumaam astu sooryah. Madhveergaavo bhavantu nah. Om shantih, shantih, shantih.

English Translation of the above Mantra:

To me who am devoted to the Supreme Truth, may the wind be a source of joy. May the rivers bestow bliss. May the herbs and plants be bliss-giving for us. May there be joy and bliss day and night. May every particle of the earth be bliss-giving. May the Heavens, like a [compassionate] father, shower bliss upon us. May the gods ruling the forests grant unto us fruits sweet as nectar. May the sun shower joy on us. May the cows fill us with bliss. Om Peace, Peace, Peace.

These two are two typical *shanti-mantras* (Peace Chants) from the Vedas, the most ancient of the religious scriptures of the world, which speak volumes of how the ancient Hindu sages (called *rishis* or seers) were deeply reverential to all the elements of Nature and the environment and how their prayers for Universal Peace ('that passeth understanding' in the words of Jesus Christ) welled up spontaneously from the recesses of their hearts, as it were in musical cadences.

Why is the word *shanti* (Peace) repeated thrice as a colophon at the end of each of the *shanti-mantras*? The deep significance of this thrice repetition of *shanti*

The repetition of the word *shanti* (Peace) thrice as a standard colophon at the end of each of the *shanti-mantras* is not fortuitous. It has a deep significance. *Shanti* or Peace is inextricably interwoven with *sukha* or *ananda* meaning joy or happiness. There can be no joy when there is no peace. Where there is no joy, there is bound to be sorrow. Now, how many varieties of sorrow can be there? Once again, the ancient Hindu *rishis* (seers) classified sorrow into three categories called (i) *adhyatmika dukkha* (sorrow arising from the body and the mind), (ii) *adhibhoutika dukkha* (sorrow arising from the beings around – insects, animals, etc and even men and women!), (iii) *adhidaivika dukkha* (sorrow coming from natural calamities like earthquake, tsunami, floods, cyclone, etc). To eliminate or to mitigate these three kinds of sorrow leading to lack of peace, the chanting of *shanti* is repeated thrice in each of the *shanti-mantras*.

Peace and Prosperity go together – Upanishadic *mantras* of the Hindu *rishis*

May we now recall the inspiring Convocation Address of the *rishi* in the Taittiriya Upanishad, the Chancellor (*Acharya*) at the ceremony:

Satyam vada, dharmam chara, swadhyayaam ma pramadah. ... Satyanna pramaditavyam, dharmanna pramaditavyam, kushalanna pramaditavyam, bhutyai na pramaditavyam, swadhyaya-pravachanaabhyaanna pramaditavyam.

A simple English rendering of the above instructions will be the following:

“Speak the truth. Practise Dharma. Do not neglect [lifelong] study. ... Do not deviate from truth. Do not swerve from dharma. Do not neglect welfare. Do not neglect prosperity [that is, development]. Do not neglect [lifelong] study and teaching.”

Three significant words stand out in the above exhortation: *dharma*, *kushala* and *bhuti*. Dharma is wrongly translated as 'religion', but it is much more than that. The word Dharma comes from the *dhatu*, root, *dhri*, which means, 'to hold'. The modern word for this is 'to sustain'. Emphasis on 'sustainability' has now become so important in all spheres of human endeavor. Along with it are *kushala* meaning 'welfare' and *bhuti*, meaning 'prosperity, development'. It is remarkable how this comes so close to the United Nations Organization's 'Millennium Development Goals (MDG)' and 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)' which are the agenda set for the future of humanity in its march towards global prosperity, development and welfare. So the graduating students of old are reminded that their duty is to always strive towards contributing to global welfare, prosperity, development for all beings on this earth through the education they have received in the Vedic University called the *gurukula*. If these degrees that they receive do not inspire the students to engage constantly in enhancing the quality of life of the men and women, animals and plants, in reverentially caring for the oceans and rivers, in fact the entire environment they live in, then they are not worth the paper on which they are printed. Recall Swami Vivekananda's powerful and poignant exhortation in this context:

"So long as millions live in poverty and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who, having been educated at the expense of the poor masses pays not the least head to them."

Living a life in tune with the Infinite, guided by the three cardinal values of truth, purity and selflessness, is the true aim of education which Swami Vivekananda defined as "the manifestation of the Perfection already in man". The exhortation by the Acharya in the ancient Hindu convocation ceremony to the graduating students was that they should develop into men and women of impeccable character who cannot be lured by lust and lucre and who will dare to meet with death if necessary in the pursuit of the Infinite Supreme Truth, Beauty and Goodness—*satyam*, *sundaram*, *shivam*. Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest teachers of Hinduism in the modern age, taught that a perfect character is one that harmoniously combines the faculties of heart, head and hand—*bhakti* (love), *jnana* (knowledge) and *karma* (work), with *yoga* or concentration interpenetrating all these three.

Energy, production and consumption, flows as a corollary to the reverential attitude that a Hindu mind is taught to develop towards the environment. The five great elements (*pancha-mahabhutas* as they are called in Sanskrit)—the earth, water, fire, air, space—*prithvi*, *ap*, *tejas*, *marut*, *akasha*—are the fundamental constituents of all of creation. They have their subtler counterparts—the five subtle elements called in Sanskrit as *pancha-sukshmbhutas*—which constitute all experiences through the five senses as sound, touch, form, taste, smell—*sabda*, *sparsa*, *rupa*, *rasa*, *gandha* in Sanskrit. *Prakriti* or Nature is all these and therefore needs to be worshipped with reverence and awe. When an attitude of reverential awe, gratefulness to and love of Nature is cultivated naturally through decades of educational endeavour in the close proximity of the spiritual perception, the Acharya or Guru, in those *gurukulas* which were Abodes of Peace and Prosperity without the ostentation characteristic of the

modern notion of welfare, the problems of energy consumption and conservation get naturally and smoothly resolved. All this may sound too theoretical and philosophical to some in this audience, but we would do well to remember that these have been practiced, actualized, realized and documented for millennia upon millennia in India by the ancient Hindu sages and seers (*rishis*). For the Hindu, the problem of energy crisis, consumption and conservation, in fact any environmental problem is not as much solved as it is *dissolved* in a vaster and nobler mindset, a *weltanschauung* that teaches that all that exists is Divine, all this is Brahman or the Supreme Truth—*sarvam khalvidam brahma*, the great Truth taught in the Chhandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda. This is based on the scientific principle discovered in modern times by Albert Einstein who stated it as follows: “The solution to a problem cannot be found at the same level in which the problem was initially created”, showing that an elevated consciousness, a sense of great wonder and awe at the extraordinary phenomenon called Nature, both outer and inner, is at the source of all solutions to problems and in fact is “the mainspring of all scientific research” (Einstein). We end by quoting Einstein, who was not only one of the greatest of scientists ever born, but is considered one of the finest human beings, declared as the ‘Man of the Millennium’ of the last millennium:

“My religion consists of a humble adoration of an Illimitable Intelligence that our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive form.”

“The greatest and the most sublime emotion one can feel is the sensation of the mystical. It is truly the source of all science. He who is a stranger to this emotion is as good as dead. To know what is Impenetrable really exists, manifesting Itself as the Highest Wisdom and the most Radiant Beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in the most primitive form—this feeling, this emotion is at the centre of all science. *This cosmic religious or mystical consciousness (awareness) is truly the mainspring of all scientific research.*”
