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A WISH FOR HARMONY*

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Spiritual brothers and sisters, it is a great joy and privilege for me to have the opportunity to participate in this dialogue and to open the John Main Seminar entitled "The Good Heart." I would like to express my deep appreciation to all those who have helped to organize this event.

I am grateful for the warm words of welcome from the Lady Mayor, and I am very encouraged by her reference to the harmony and understanding that exists among the various communities and religious traditions in this borough, which she described as multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious. I would like to express my thanks for that.

I met the late Father John Main many years ago in Canada and was impressed to meet a person in the Christian tradition who emphasized meditation as a part of spiritual practice. Today, at the beginning of this Seminar, I think it is very important for us to remember him.

I am also happy to see so many familiar faces and to have the opportunity to meet new and old friends here.

Despite many material advances on our planet, humanity faces many, many problems, some of which are actually of our own creation. And to a large extent it is our mental attitude—our outlook on life and the world—that is the key factor for the future—the future of humanity, the future of the world, and the future of the environment. Many things depend on our mental attitude, both in the personal and public spheres. Whether we are happy in our individual or family life is, in a large part, up to us. Of course, material conditions are an important factor for happiness and a good life, but one's mental attitude is of equal or greater importance.

As we approach the twenty-first century, religious traditions are as relevant as ever. Yet, as in the past, conflicts and crises arise in the name of different religious traditions. This is very, very unfortunate. We must make every effort to overcome this situation. In my own experience, I

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have found that the most effective method to overcome these conflicts is close contact and an exchange among those of various beliefs, not only on an intellectual level, but in deeper spiritual experiences. This is a powerful method to develop mutual understanding and respect. Through this interchange, a strong foundation of genuine harmony can be established.

So I am always extremely happy to participate in religious dialogue. And I am particularly happy to spend these few days talking with you and practicing my broken English! When I spend a few weeks on retreat in Dharamsala, my residence in India, I find that my broken English becomes even poorer, so these days of exchange will give me a much-needed opportunity to practice.

Since it is my belief that harmony among different religious traditions is extremely important, extremely necessary, I would like to suggest a few ideas on ways it can be promoted. First, I suggest we encourage meetings among scholars from different religious backgrounds to discuss differences and similarities in their traditions, in order to promote empathy and to improve our knowledge about one another. Secondly, I suggest that we encourage meetings between people from different religious traditions who have had some deeper spiritual experiences. They need not be scholars, but instead genuine practitioners who come together and share insights as a result of religious practice. According to my own experience, this is a powerful and effective means of enlightening each other in a more profound and direct way.

Some of you may have already heard me mention that on a visit to the great monastery at Montserrat in Spain, I met a Benedictine monk there. He came especially to see me—and his English was much poorer than mine, so I felt more courage to speak to him. After lunch, we spent some time alone, face to face, and I was informed that this monk had spent a few years in the mountains just behind the monastery. I asked him what kind of contemplation he had practiced during those years of solitude. His answer was simple: "Love, love, love." How wonderful! I suppose that sometimes he also slept. But during all those years he meditated simply on love. And he was not meditating on just the word. When I looked into his eyes, I saw evidence of profound spirituality and love—as I had during my meetings with Thomas Merton.

These two encounters have helped me develop a genuine reverence for the Christian tradition and its capacity to create people of such goodness. I believe the purpose of all the major religious traditions is

not to construct big temples on the outside, but to create temples of goodness and compassion *inside*, in our hearts. Every major religion has the potential to create this. The greater our awareness is regarding the value and effectiveness of other religious traditions, then the deeper will be our respect and reverence toward other religions. This is the proper way for us to promote genuine compassion and a spirit of harmony among the religions of the world.

In addition to encounters among scholars and experienced practitioners, it is also important, particularly in the eyes of the public, that leaders of the various religious traditions occasionally come together to meet and pray, as in the important meeting at Assisi in 1986. This is a third simple yet effective way to promote tolerance and understanding.

A fourth means of working toward harmony among the world's religions is for people of different religious traditions to go on pilgrimages together to visit one another's holy places. A few years ago, I started doing this practice myself in India. Since then, I have had the opportunity to travel as a pilgrim to Lourdes, the holy place in France, and to Jerusalem. In these places, I prayed with the followers of the various religions, sometimes in silent meditation. And in this prayer and meditation I felt a genuine spiritual experience. I hope this will set an example, serve as a sort of precedent, so that in the future it will be regarded as quite normal for people to join together in pilgrimages to holy sites and share the experience of their different religious backgrounds.

Finally, I would like to come back to the subject of meditation and to my Christian brothers and sisters who practice meditation in their daily lives. I believe this practice is extremely important. Traditionally in India, there is *samadhi* meditation, "stilling the mind," which is common to all the Indian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. And in many of these traditions, certain types of *vipasyana*, "analytical meditation," are common as well. We might ask why *samadhi*, "stilling the mind," is so important. Because *samadhi*, or focusing meditation, is the means to mobilize your mind, to channel your mental energy. *Samadhi* is considered to be an essential part of spiritual practice in *all* the major religious traditions of India because it provides the possibility to channel all one's mental energy and the ability to direct the mind to a particular object in a single-pointed way.

It is my belief that if prayer, meditation, and contemplation—which is more discursive and analytic—are combined in daily practice, the effect on the practitioner's mind and heart will be all the greater. One of the major aims and purposes of religious practice for the individual is an inner transformation from an undisciplined, untamed, unfocused state of mind toward one that is disciplined, tamed, and balanced. A person who has perfected the faculty of single-pointedness will definitely have a greater ability to attain this objective. When meditation becomes an important part of your spiritual life, you are able to bring about this inner transformation in a more effective way.

Once this transformation has been achieved, then in following your own spiritual tradition, you will discover that a kind of natural humility will arise in you, allowing you to communicate better with people from other religious traditions and cultural backgrounds. You are in a better position to appreciate the value and preciousness of other traditions because you have seen this value from within your own tradition. People often experience feelings of exclusivity in their religious beliefs—a feeling that one's own path is the only true path—which can create a sense of apprehension about connecting with others of different faiths. I believe the best way to counter that force is to experience the value of one's own path through a meditative life, which will enable one to see the value and preciousness of other traditions.

In order to develop a genuine spirit of harmony from a sound foundation of knowledge, I believe it is very important to know the fundamental differences between religious traditions. And it is possible to understand the fundamental differences, but at the same time recognize the value and potential of each religious tradition. In this way, a person may develop a balanced and harmonious perception. Some people believe that the most reasonable way to attain harmony and solve problems relating to religious intolerance is to establish one universal religion for everyone. However, I have always felt that we should have different religious traditions because human beings possess so many different mental dispositions: one religion simply cannot satisfy the needs of such a variety of people. If we try to unify the faiths of the world into one religion, we will also lose many of the qualities and richnesses of each particular tradition. Therefore, I feel it is better, in spite of the many quarrels in the name of religion, to maintain a variety of religious traditions. Unfortunately, while a diversity of religious traditions is more suited to serve the needs of the diverse

mental dispositions among humanity, this diversity naturally possesses the potential for conflict and disagreement as well. Consequently, people of every religious tradition must make an extra effort to try to transcend intolerance and misunderstanding and seek harmony.

These are a few points that I thought would be useful at the beginning of the Seminar. Now I am looking forward to the challenge of exploring texts and ideas that are not familiar to me. You've given me a heavy responsibility, and I will try my best to fulfill your wishes. I really feel it a great honor and privilege to be asked to comment on selected passages of the Holy Scripture—a scripture I must admit I am not very familiar with. I must also admit that this is the first time I have tried to do such a thing. Whether it will be a success or failure, I don't know! But in any case, I will try my best. Now I'll chant a few verses of auspiciousness and then we will meditate.

[The modesty, like his smile, was genuine. When the audience laughed, the laughter seemed partly out of surprise at the lack of self-importance in the man and also a gesture of friendly encouragement. It was the beginning of a rapport that, in the next few days, would lead to a climax of shared feeling and thought in an atmosphere of respect and love.

The lights in the hall were turned out, and in the soft light coming only through the windows, the audience collected itself as His Holiness closed his eyes and intoned an ancient Tibetan prayer:]

Replete with excellence like a mountain of gold,
The triple worlds' saviors, freed from the three taints,
Are the buddhas, their eyes like lotuses in bloom;
They are the world's first auspicious blessing.

The teachings they imparted are sublime and steadfast,
Famed in the triple worlds, honored by gods and humans alike.
That holy teaching grants peace to all sentient beings;
This is the world's second auspicious blessing.

The sacred community, rich with learning, is honored
By humans, gods, and demi-gods.
That supreme community is modest, yet the site of glory;
This is the world's third auspicious blessing.

The Teacher has come into our world;
The teaching shines like the sun's rays;
The teaching masters, like siblings, are in concord;
Let there thus be auspicious blessings for the teachings
to remain for long.

Song: "All shall be well. All shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well."

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