



## HINDU VISION TO ACTION STATEMENT Revised June 2003

### **Preamble**

The basic fact of our times is that breakdown or destruction of *both* the natural and social fabric and structure, or of *either*, produces not only vast suffering but also random and organized violence.

None of us can escape this violence, or find a place "away" from the suffering and its consequences. We are, as so often is said, all interrelated. But we learn this now in a new way. We do not simply "feel" interrelated; we have found with new concreteness that we cannot escape this interrelation.

The world is increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious. Adherents of different religions now live together in urban centers and small rural towns. The world has become small, and has at the same time been enormously enriched. Thanks to the wonder of modern communications technology, we are blessed with a providential opportunity to learn about each another's traditions and cultures.

Tragically, however, large numbers of people continue to be strangers to the inner culture and religious life of countless others. Such ignorance promotes fear, distrust, and hatred. Indeed, the world faces a whole range of conflicts – religious, social, national, global and existential. Only, knowledge, education, and goodwill can eradicate such erosive negative and engender a deep mutuality among the world's religions.

In the patterns of destruction and suffering that we witness on all sides, religious ideologies play an exceedingly important role. Interreligious harmony has never been more indispensable. It is indeed a matter of life and death. The alternative to a creative interfaith pluralism is more and more violence.

One great hope lies in the Hindu affirmation of the divine within every dimension of existence and within each living being.

The Hindu greeting, *Namaste*, with which one recognizes the essential divinity of the other, offers a powerful symbol of conscious awareness of the divine in the world and in all beings. That awareness provides the essential foundation for justice and peace, as well as ecological sanity, in a sorely challenged world. There is a pervasive recognition among the Hindus that people experience and express spiritual reality variously. All of us, for instance, have to satisfy hunger; but we differ widely in tastes and enjoy different types

of food. The same holds in the matter of satisfying spiritual hunger. Realizing this, the Hindu tradition has never prescribed a uniform rite or ceremony. Actually it has inspired many to strike new paths in the spiritual realm. Hinduism encourages all peoples to celebrate each other's ways of God-realization.

Hindu sages have thought deeply on these matters and have given their profound insights to humanity. Desire to know, to love, to be happy and to avoid misery, desire to seek spiritual fulfillment are human concerns. People anywhere in the world may benefit from the answers to these existential questions. One does not have to change one's religious label to derive benefit from these insights. To students and seekers around the world, this gives a sense of relief and security. Freedom to benefit from whatever is true and beautiful and good, wherever it is found, is to be cherished, and is one of the most significant benefits of interreligious and intercultural harmony.

Hindus recognize and uphold one Supreme Being, who is available to humans in many forms and names. In the Hindu view, all the deities of the past, present and future are only forms or aspects of the Supreme Spirit. Brahman or God, the source and sustenance of all things material and spiritual. The innumerable divine names and forms arise and merge in the Supreme Brahman. Hence the oft quoted verse from the Rig Veda: "Reality is one, but sages call it by different names." Shankara, a classical Vedantist and ecumenical thinker of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, reconciled and validated six sectarian traditions. This ecumenical approach is also responsible for the Hindu view that the Divine forms presented in other religious traditions are also valid expressions of Truth. Theologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will have to wrestle with the theme of the validity of world's religions and the expansion of the scope of ecumenism to include all worlds' religions.

#### **Evidence that the World is "in agony":**

The violence of global terrorism is the starkest symptom of the problems that test our world. Violence is always rooted in ignorance and pain. Sadly, violence is all too often the fruit of injustice, and its proliferation on every side, in every society, is the clearest evidence of our collective agony, of injustice, inequity, discrimination, and persecution.

And our home, the Earth, can even be heard to groan in pain and to protest at her treatment at our human hands.

#### **Perceived systemic problem:**

When people, whether religious or not, forget their divine relation to one another and to the Earth...

When institutions, whatever their cultural or geographic base, are corrupted by pursuit of power...

When greed leaves no room for compassion...

When morality gives place to expedience...

And when the purveyors of wisdom are silent...

The world and its people suffer.

The world's great institutions are complicit in the problems that we must now face together. The failure of our institutions adequately to meet the challenges to the Earth—from deforestation and desertification to the poisoning of our rivers, oceans, and air—is already taking a terrible toll. Our studied inattention to the suffering of the world's poorest people has redoubled that suffering and led to desperate violence.

Unfortunately, it is not less true that the great religious communities have often been silent in the face of injustice, ecological depredation, and systemic violence.

Sadly, as in all religious traditions, there is a gap between the highest ideals of Hinduism and the actual behavior of its followers. Neglect of the poor, destruction of the natural world, and other forms of systemic violence exist in Hindu society as in others. They challenge all Hindus to aspire to the realization of their own ideals.

#### **What is the vision of what the world can be?:**

Hinduism affirms the oneness of all existence. It sees the world as a manifestation of the ultimate reality, God or Brahman. This vision of oneness is found in the *Veda*, Hinduism's root scripture, which teaches that the divine dwells in every entity with the same life-giving principle of consciousness. The natural world and every human being are sacred.

This vision of oneness, and of the divine dwelling in all beings, leads to empathy for the pain and suffering of others and the commitment to the service of all beings. Each being should be treated as one's own self.

Hindus hold that truth, love, compassion, and understanding are not exclusive to any one religious tradition. These are values common to all traditions. They should be brought to the fore in the interests of reconciliation and harmony between and among the world's religions and their followers.

If we are all part of the same divine whole, individual salvation has no meaning apart from the salvation of the whole.

Social and ecological responsibilities are fundamental dimensions of the Hindu structure of belief and practice. Compassion (*daya*) and liberality (*dan*), the two principles of Hindu *dharma* or righteous conduct, embody in practice the basic truth that “the other” is only superficially other. In truth, all are part of the same one God.

Hinduism possesses a treasury of contemplative disciplines that when put into practice can transform our limited and corrupt human nature into an illumined nature, overcoming evil, greed and ignorance. If Hindus everywhere apply the *yogas* that are the basis of their tradition, an ancient wellspring of transformation and hope can flow once again.

***What could or should the world be?***

The world could be a place where the lessons of generosity and compassion are learned from the example of countless people dedicated to the many paths of enlightenment, good works, non-attachment, service, and love of the divine.

The world could be seen for what it truly is: the ever-new and ever joyful expression of the indwelling divine.

***What is the good that can be expanded or encouraged?***

Human nature is divine; the human soul thirsts for liberation and inclines toward compassion. This is the source of our hope. To be human is to be in the process of the rediscovery of the core reality of divinity. Our human nature finds its expression in liberation from selfish attachment—the root of evil and suffering—and in compassionate service (*seva*) to all in need.

***What brings out our best nature?***

The path demands only that we act in accord with the human-divine nature that is recognized by so many of the world's spiritual traditions. Recognizing that all our great teachings share a common divine inspiration can be a great source for our growth together. Realizing that we are “in life together” can bring our true nature forward.

***Why is there reason for hope?***

Mahatma Gandhi's life and teachings provide a lesson and a promise that has meant a great deal to people of every race, religion, and culture. America's Martin Luther King drew inspiration from the non-violent resolution of Gandhiji. So too, Nelson Mandela, Africa's icon of liberation, saw in the Mahatma a symbol for the realization of the hopes of all peoples. All Hindus can and should understand Gandhi's principle of *satyagraha*, “grasping the truth.” It reminds us that the divine can never be extinguished in the human. This is the source of our hope and our resolve.

### **What should be done to reach the vision?**

The time has now come for world religions to make a new departure. Confronted as they are with fundamental problems of international terrorism and threats to human freedom, peace, and security, they have both the responsibility and opportunity to cooperate with one another in the promotion of human community and well-being. Loyalty to our respective traditions should not undermine our loyalty to the larger human family. Religious leaders must strive now to better themselves as instruments of world peace and human welfare.

It is the particular task of the worldwide Hindu community to spread the spiritual and cultural heritage of India based on the principles of equality, humanity, spirituality, and indwelling divinity.

#### ***Specific actions?***

- Hindus in India and the world over should speak out and act in ways that remind the world that Hinduism is a religion of peace and that India, as the mother of religions, must be a timeless abode of peace. Hindus must reach out to one another, to their Muslim and Christian brothers and sisters, and to all peoples to create a new *Satyagraha*, a new stand for truth and peace.
- The Hindu community internationally should acclaim and support the principles and calls to action embodied in the Parliament of Religions' 1999 document, *A Call to Our Guiding Institutions*.
- In this spirit, Hindus should develop initiatives of cooperation and engagement with other religious communities and with secular institutions, including each of the "guiding institutions" identified in *A Call To Our Guiding Institutions*: government, business, education, media, science, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society.
- Hindus must work together and with others to ensure that ecological planning be built ever more certainly into the whole process of industrialization. This is particularly important in developing nations, where entrenched patterns of waste and ecological mismanagement are not yet established.
- Hindus must join with Jains, appropriate NGOs, and others to resist the slaughter of animals for food, in laboratories, and by virtue of human destruction of their habitat.
- The Hindu community should embrace the campaign to end violence towards children in all its forms, parental, cultural, and socio-economic.

- Hindus and Christians must work together in India to put an end to sectarian misunderstanding and violence. In this spirit, we affirm
  - that the free and generous preaching of the Christian Gospel is welcome in India;
  - that the use of coercion and religious proselytism is unacceptable and that the exploitation of the issue of poverty in religious outreach and missionary work is particularly misguided;
  - that the giving of aid to those in need is a primary commandment of all our religious and spiritual traditions, but that this act of justice should never be tied to compulsory, coerced, or induced conversion; and
  - We commit ourselves to a continuing dialogue in the spirit of interreligious harmony, mutual respect, and the cooperative common effort to build a better world.
- The global Hindu community should take the lead, beginning in India, in ending our shared complacency in the face of the terrible suffering that comes from poverty.
- Hindus should work with other religious communities to raise consciousness and engage in positive action to meet the challenge of AIDS.
- Hindus should join together and join with others to provide charitable services — in the areas of food, education, training, and health care to all who are in need, providing food to the hungry, medicine to the sick, and peace to the troubled.
- People of all religions must create a network of engagement for a sustainable future to protect the sacred natural resources, and cultivate widespread consciousness of environmental sanctity.
- Finally, it is the shared task of all who believe in the fellowship of the world's religions to work together to heighten global cultural awareness and inter-ethnic sensitivity.