

PANAECA FOR WORLD'S ILLS

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THE Buddha was, indeed, the "Embodiment of Maitri" and His Teaching essentially a Message of Viswa Maitri, Universal Amity.

Perhaps, more than ever, the desire for world peace is a universally cherished fact today. Statesmen, politicians, professors, scientists, economists, all talk and dilate on world peace. Yet the world would appear to be heading for a catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude. It is so because the deliberations still remain in the academic and quasi-legal plane devoid of the warmth of *Maitri*—goodwill and humanity.

If peace is to be a reality the affairs of men must be re-orientated. There must be a different standard, based on the ethics of *Maitri*, to guide all human affairs. Man must learn to feel for man and for all creatures. There must be a pragmatic application of the principle of *Maitri*, for *maitri* alone can bring peace and lasting peace.

The word *Maitri* is like a many-faced gem. It is a multi-significant term meaning loving kindness; friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, accommodativeness, inoffensiveness, non-violence, reverence for life etc. *Maitri* with such variegated shades of meaning, therefore, admits of a manifold application in different situations; it is universal. Essentially *maitri* is an altruistic culture of inoffensiveness and friendliness as distinguished from mere amiability based on self-interest. On the one hand one refuses to be unfriendly and offensive and renounces bitterness, resentment and antipathy of any kind; and on the other hand one deliberately becomes friendly, accommodative and benevolent seeking another's well-being and happiness, *parahita para-sukha Kāmana*. True *Maitri* is devoid of self-interest and

evokes within a warm-hearted feeling of fellowship, sympathy and love which with practice, grows boundless removing all barriers, social, religious, political, economic or otherwise. Indeed, true *Maitri* is anonymous, unselfish and all-embracing love.

This is a tremendous idea and may appear to be impractical and visionary in the present work-a-day life. But nothing great and worthy has ever been achieved without a great and worthy idea. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson "One single idea may have greater weight than the labour of all men, animals and engines for a century." Aristotle used to say "Man acquired a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way." If man accepts the idea of *maitri*, his nature will change and the divine quality in him will soon become manifest. Hence *Maitri* was called *Brahma Vihara*—Divine Abiding—by the Buddha.

The higher implications apart, today *Maitri* is a pragmatic necessity. In a world menaced by all kinds of destructive actions, talks and thinking, *maitri* is the only constructive means in deed, word and thought, which can bring concord, peace and mutual understanding. Indeed, *Maitri* is the supreme means, for it forms the fundamental tenet of all religions as well as the basis for all benevolent activities dealing with human well-being.

Maitri will become feasible in the modern context only on these two conditions:

(1) Inter-religious fellowship. If affinities are emphasised rather than the disagreements between different religious systems, then all religions can co-exist in perfect harmony and the adherents in perfect fellowship to the advantage of all. The ap-

proach of *Maitri* is to widen the area of agreement and thereby create mutual understanding and concord.

(2) Friendly approach as the practical solution of all temporal problems. Hostile, unsympathetic and aggressive attitudes will only be followed by similar attitudes adding to bitterness and misery. Friendly attitude will also be followed by friendliness and goodwill, and therefore is the most constructive and beneficent means in the secular sphere.

Scientific and technological developments have produced and are producing most astounding results which may be either beneficial or destructive depending upon how these are applied. Knowledge in itself is not enough unless the wisdom to use it correctly is also attained. Further, new achievements have rendered many old ideas and values invalid but without necessarily providing for better and enduring ones. This has created an ever-growing gulf between the old and the new. *Maitri* alone can bridge this gulf, for within a disposition of goodwill all changes are painless and new formations beneficial.

Every human endeavour should have some purpose and a worthy one. Whether it is ethics, religion and philosophy, or science and technology, or politics and economics, or arts and culture—all assume a meaning and purpose only when they are cast in the matrix of *Maitri*, goodwill. Without the quality of *Maitri* these become sterile, lifeless, meaningless and ultimately destructive. Let there be no mistake but that altruism is a necessity today and not a utopian ideal.

We seem to have entered a phase which is witnessing basic changes in every sphere of life. The world has

become shrunken by the marvels of modern communications. Shorn of geographical remoteness various differences, racial and historical, between nations are fast disappearing. Viewed objectively the present world appears to be a gigantic melting pot in which the various social and cultural forms are getting thoroughly churned. Inter-mixture and assimilation of forms and ways is perhaps an eternal process. But a fastly diminishing world of ours is progressively accelerating this process. Can we as Indians now say that we have not adopted a large number of foreign ways and modes in our daily life and our thinking also? This is so with every nation in the world today. Mutual impact must necessarily produce mutual change.

Further, with the tremendous developments in other fields of science and technology, this inter-communication is tending to process all human affairs, social, political and economic, more and more, towards larger integrations. We have definite blocks with mutually intolerant social, economic and political systems. But these integrations do not necessarily lead us to greater happiness unless there is a collateral change of heart. With the old, narrow mind lacking in accommodativeness, greater the external integration greater the danger of collapse and wholesale destruction. Our heads have advanced far too much without our hearts collaborating. Maitri alone can bring about a change of heart and give purpose to all development and strengthen all integrations. Without an enlarged heart if we are placed in an enlarged circumstance—as at present with these integrations and a classless society and a welfare state concept—we shall soon get lost into the limbo of a regimented, machine-like and unthinking life utterly devoid of personality and independent individual existence.

Science and technology based on Maitri will be a boon not only to material progress but also to spiritual

progress. The apparently irreconcilable differences between religion and science will soon disappear if the ethics of maitri, namely, goodwill and co-operation, becomes the basis for the solution of all human problems and conflicts.

Maitri is common to all religions. Therefore, the change of heart based on maitri should start from the religious sphere. Let the different religious institutions and leaders foster a genuine sense of friendliness and concord. Let not narrow sectarian considerations weigh down the higher purpose of religion any more. When the reservoir of love dries up in religion due to vested interests and bigotry, ethical and spiritual values perish and society becomes materialistic and evil; for narrowness begets narrowness. It is in the interest of religion that the religious leaders should propagate the idea of inter-religious harmony and accommodativeness. A fellowship of faiths is the best guarantee for religions against all anti-religious creeds and actions. (If the believers of religion fail to appreciate the danger that threatens religion today and do not work for a harmonious religious co-existence then they will soon consign even the last vestige of religion into the jaw of the demon of materialism. Already, at least, half the population of the world has, more or less, given up religion as a result of materialistic state policy. But man cannot exist without a religion for long. His spirit will pine and waste away. Therefore, if only for the survival of the human spirit the different religious systems should unite and co-exist in fellowship. By over-emphasising the sectarian and institutional not-so-essential rules and conventions we are facing the danger of losing the essentials of religion, namely, spiritual emancipation and inward peace.)

In the secular sphere too the "approach of maitri" is the only valid and practical solution for all problems. Whether it is an agricultural enterprise, an industry, a business centre, a governmental

organisation, a civic body, an educational institution or whether a community life, urban or rural, in every sphere the active application of maitri alone can bring about co-operation, mutual helpfulness and concord. The creed of "tit for tat" can never be workable and now, with the immense destructive possibilities at the disposal of man, it is positively dangerous. Friendly approach is the only valid and workable means now. Let us work for the society to understand and recognise this fact. "Survival of the fittest" is another pernicious order which must be substituted by "reverance for life". Let not maitri be mistaken as a mere sentiment. It is the power of the strong. If the leaders from different walks of life were to give maitri a fair trial nothing, no principle or convention, would be found to possess greater plasticity and workability in all spheres than maitri.

In everything man is the ultimate unit. And if man decides to substitute maitri for conflict and ill-will, society, the nation, the country and the world will turn into a veritable abode of peace. For only when man shall have peace within himself will that peace in the world become real and enduring.

"Go ye, O Bhikkhus, and wander forth for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the welfare, for the happiness of Devas and men. Proclaim, O Bhikkhus, the Doctrine glorious, preach ye a life of holiness, perfect and pure."—said the Buddha. From this lofty altruism emanated a burning and self-sacrificing ardour that inspired the Indians of yore to carry the "Massage of Maitri" across perilous mountains, deserts and oceans to the four corners of the then existing world. These missionaries of maitri gave a most glorious culture to mankind making man more human and made India the matrix of a perfect civilisation which to our time extends over a large part of the world. India has not lost this altruism. Let us relive the acts of our holy and noble predecessors, the Dharmadutas of yore, and promote the cause of maitri for the well being and happiness of all. That will be the most valuable contribution of modern India towards the preservation of the human race.