



Free Words

Speech of His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace



For the first time in history, more than 100 Imams and Rabbis, surrounded by 70 personalities from all over the world, met, from January 3 to 6, 2005, under the high patronage of His Majesty Albert II and His Majesty Mohammed VI in order to delegitimise all forms of violence committed in the name of God or of any religious principle.

Furthermore the representatives of Jewish and Muslim communities from 34 countries, in Africa, Asia, Europe, the

Middle East and America affirmed their determination to develop dialogues and co-operation between Islam and Judaism.

Here in its entirety the opening speech of HH Sri, Sri Ravi Shankar.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, is born in India in Bangalore.
He established the Art of Living Foundation in 1982 to promote self development and health-related educational programs, many of which feature the Sudarshan Kriya technique. To date, his programs have been enjoyed by more than a million people in more than 100 countries.

Excerpts: "There are few people who really believe in extremism in the world but their voices are loud, when those who love peace have a very low voice. I believe that conferences such as ours go to encourage those persons who defend the principles of peace to speak with a louder voice. I believe that this conference will bring more dynamism to the process of peace that struggles against extremism."

1st International congress of Imams and Rabbis
Opening Session
Brussels, 3 January 2005

Address by His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar
Director of the International Institute for Human Values

I will start by a short prayer: I pray that all men be happy on this earth and that they all walk with the spirit of peace between men and in nature.

His majesty Albert II, King of the Belgians,
His majesty Mohammed VI, King of Morocco,
Eminences, Excellencies,
Presidents,
My dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Mon Cher Alain Michel,

I believe that this project is a veritable project of God's. One has the impression of being together in a family reunion; we are part of a big family, the great family of believers. When something goes wrong in the family, we come together; everybody sits down and discusses the problem.

All that I would like to say to you has been said by the preceding speakers. Therefore I am not going to dwell too long on my ideas, and I will simply say a few small things. There are few people who really believe in extremism in the world but their voices are loud, when those who love peace have a very low voice. I believe that conferences such as ours go to encourage those persons who defend the principles of peace to speak with a louder voice. I believe that this conference will bring more dynamism to the process of peace that struggles against extremism. People should first of all interest themselves in the conflict. The sources of conflict are cold concepts, where there is no interest in hearts or to the important questions in life.

And as the great spiritual leaders of your communities have said, I am sure that we are all concerned to see how we can broaden the vision of our own children, how we can introduce tolerance amongst our people; because intolerance in the community becomes a problem for our own religion and for our own community. It is why should enlarge the educative horizon of our children. We should enlarge the spiritual experience of each and everyone by insisting on the fact that we belong to a same divinity and a same family.

As you have said, there are three monotheist religions, but I ask you to add two, Hinduism and the Sikh religion, religions that also believe in a unique God. There are therefore not three monotheist religions, but five great families of believers on this earth and who all believe in a unique divinity.

We should celebrate our difference and we should rejoice in our common fundamentals. Perhaps one of the fears that we religious leaders could have, could be the fear of losing our own identity. But I think that we could go beyond this fear with a much greater vision and by anchoring our roots more deeply.

To reach peace, it is necessary in part to have courage, and we pray to God in order that he gives us this courage that will permit us to unit our dispersed human family. Perhaps the tsunami has given us a lesson, has transmitted a message to us.

I would like to spend three days with you, but I must return to India tomorrow and to Sri Lanka to be with the victims of the tsunami. You know that thousands and thousands of people are seeking shelter. These are all human beings, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims. In Hindu temples we welcome Muslims. There are churches where Hindus, Muslims are received as refugees. It is the same in the mosques. The mosques have not said "you are not Muslim you cannot enter". The mosques have opened their doors to Christians, Hindus and others.

So you see that humanity reads a message today, and I take note of this message. We have already transported 400,000 tons of food, and thousands of our volunteers work in the refugee camps to aid the unfortunate. I am going to bring them your wishes and sympathy, as well as the message that the rabbis and imams of the world transmit to them. I will tell them that you suffer with them. Doctors and medicines are not sufficient. Today, spiritual and moral courage is needed. The government of India has said that we have enough medicine but the people are traumatized. It is only by religion and spirituality that we can extract them from this traumatism and their problems. Therefore in the hour of this traumatic experience, it is necessary for people to rediscover faith, love, and the well being of humanity in the world.

It is necessary to insist on this point; to broad our vision, to reaffirm our roots. I have touched on these different religious themes and assembled them together in a small book called 'Intemporal Wisdom' that takes up the ideas of the religions of the whole world. When children learn that there are good things in other religions, they start to respect them. And thus none lacks respect for neither other religions nor do they look down on the others. I think that a broader education, more open, will create a new generation of men who will sit together, pray together and will enrich their own cultures and their own differences.

I hope these words will be heard.

I would like to congratulate you once again for being together.

Thank you to all for having invited me to participate in this program, in this dialogue. It is a great honor for me to be with you.

Thank you.