



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Turning Pieces to Peace

### MY WAY OR NO WAY

**I**T WAS 2002, AND THE SWELTERING HEAT OF BANGKOK IN JUNE WAS FURTHER HEIGHTENED BY THE TENSION IN THE LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM. THE FULLY FUNCTIONAL AIR-CONDITIONING POURING THROUGH THE VENTS DID LITTLE TO MITIGATE RISING

temperatures, and the secretary general presiding over the conference wiped his brow. Two years after the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations in New York, a follow-up summit was held at the UN in Bangkok. This summit was focused primarily on the preparation of a unanimous declaration through roundtable discussions. However, the dialogue had reached a stalemate. A renowned religious leader and legal expert did not agree with certain aspects of the declaration. He responded to every effort to move the discussion forward with a caustic remark or a critical retort. Although his arguments were sound, his manner left no room for

negotiation or compromise. His message was clear: “My way or no way.”

The secretary general of the summit called for a break and privately asked Pujya Swamiji how to solve this issue. One obstinate participant was obstructing the preparation of a unanimous declaration and threatening to derail the entire conference. Pujya Swamiji assuaged him. “Don’t worry,” he said. “I’ll take care of it.” He invited the cleric to sit with him and sent one of the helpers to bring tea. “I am so impressed by the clarity of your thought and understanding,” Pujya Swamiji said. “Tomorrow, I would like you to take my session in the main assembly hall.” Receiving time to speak in front of the entire gathering in the main

assembly hall was a unique honor, one granted only to a very small handful of the most respected leaders of each tradition. However, Pujya Swamiji was not interested in the honor or glory. He was interested only in achieving unanimity so the declaration could be signed

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*“If we want to be torchbearers of peace, we must first become rivers of love, dousing all flames of discord in the waters of our own compassion and serenity.”*

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and presented to the world. Sacrificing a speaking opportunity was a small price to pay.

The leader was shocked but immediately warmed to the idea. “Sure, I would be honored to speak tomorrow to the main assembly. Thank you for the opportunity.”

Soon the tea came, and along with it Pujya Swamiji ordered some cookies for his new friend. Feeding him tea and cookies, Pujya Swamiji proceeded to find points of similarity between them, and he spent the tea break engaging the other leader on these points of similarity and mutual agreement. When it came time for the session to begin, Pujya Swamiji pulled an extra chair to the front row, where he was sitting, for the cleric. Originally, this leader had been seated toward the back, and the simple act of giving him a seat

of prominence and importance softened him immediately. As the discussion commenced, every time the man started to criticize or condemn another speaker or to thwart progress in the declaration, Pujya Swamiji gently reached down below the table and lovingly squeezed his knee. Pujya Swamiji’s gentle touch and the implicit signal to be calm and quiet restrained him from hindering the progress, and the declaration was nearly signed.

Only a few points of disagreement still remained, and so the secretary general called a meeting in his hotel room later that night. Pujya Swamiji again called this other leader to sit next to him in the meeting and continually stroked his arm and squeezed his hand whenever tension arose. “Let’s do one thing,” Pujya Swamiji suggested. “Rather than talk about the issues with which you don’t agree, let’s go through all the ones upon which we *do* agree. Then we can come back to the troublesome points later on.” As Pujya Swamiji read out point after unanimous point, the animosity in the room dissipated. Each time a point of contention arose, he said, “No problem. Put this aside for now.” At the end, there were only a small handful of discordant points, which were easily solved in the conciliatory, amiable environment. The following day, a unanimous declaration was passed.



*Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations, New York, 2000.*



TOP ROW (left to right) Chief rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger. \* Dr. Djibril Diallo, head of the UN office for Sport, Development, and Peace. \* Cardinal Gracias, the archbishop of Mumbai and Cardinal Quintana, the Vatican's ambassador to India. \* Pujya Swami Agniveshji. SECOND ROW (left to right) Pujya Shankaracharyaji Swami Jayendra Saraswatiji. \* Pujya Dadi Janaki, head of the Brahmakumaris. \* Mustafa Ceric, grand mufti of Bosnia. \* Archbishop Desmond Tutu. THIRD ROW (left to right) Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thami, emir of Qatar. \* Maulanna Wahiduddin Khan Sahib. \* Pujya Asaram Bapu. \* Mother Teresa. BOTTOM ROW (left to right) Rabbi Moshe Garelik, founder of Rabbinical Center of Europe, from Brussels. \* Kumbha Mela 1998 at Rishikesh with Pujya Swami Gurusharananandji, Pujya Swami Avdhesanand Giriji, Maulanna Wahiduddin Khan Sahib, and other saints. \* Turn of the millennium in Varanasi, December 31, 1999, with H.H. the Dalai Lama and Pujya Dada J. P. Vaswani. \* At the Parliament of World Religions with Siri Singh Sahib, Yogi Bhajan, and Dr. Manjit Singh, then Chief Jathedar of the Golden Temple.

Whether through a soft, gentle hand on a muscle tense with agitation, a sacrifice of personal speaking time or front-row seat, or simply the willingness to let the ultimate goal of harmony trump any personal agenda, Pujya Swamiji has been successful in healing rifts between fractious religious groups, political leaders of international repute, and divorcing spouses.

He is a frequent speaker and delegate at the world's most prestigious international conferences and summits, including the United Nations, the Parliament of World Religions, the World Economic Forum, and the World Conference of Religions for Peace. He also has served as a mentor to various international youth organizations and youth representatives, including the United





*Pujya Swamiji speaking in a panel on tolerance at the World Economic Forum with the Chief Rabbi of Israel, the archbishop of Canterbury, and other renowned leaders.*

Nations Global Youth Peace Summit and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation Youth Fellows Training.

### THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

In 1990, as President Gorbachev prepared to dismantle the Soviet Union, Pujya Swamiji was one of the spiritual leaders he invited to spend a week in the Kremlin for the Global Forum on Environment and Development. Along with his inspiring words in the conference, Pujya Swamiji also presented President Gorbachev with a string of sacred *rudraksh* beads, to protect him and give him wisdom and inspiration. Further, as Pujya Swamiji's favorite language is the international language of love, he had learned how to say "I love you" in Russian. As he placed the *malas* over the heads of president and Mrs. Gorbachev, he looked each in the eye and said, "Ya tebya lyublyu."

After a moment of trying to fathom what exactly this Hindu monk was saying, they both spontaneously burst into huge smiles.

*Love is a force as powerful and fundamental as gravity. As gravity pulls us toward the Earth, love pulls us toward each other. If gravity didn't exist, we would all be floating, spinning, spiraling through the atmosphere, disjointed, disconnected, ungrounded, and unanchored. Gravity centers us, pulls us down, and plants us firmly on the Earth. Love does the same, but on an emotional and spiritual level. Those who do not love are disconnected and ungrounded. They exist physically and may even be successful on a logistic and mundane level, but emotionally and spiritually they are spinning and spiraling, unable to connect. Gravity not only pulls objects toward the Earth but also changes the very nature of those objects. An object being acted on by gravity is different—if one is an expert physicist and knows where to look—than an object not being acted on by gravity. In the same way, love not only pulls us closer to each other and closer to the very core of our own beings but also changes our very nature. A person in love is*

**OPPOSITE** Pujya Swamiji leads, organizes, and participates in a variety of national and international interfaith events, including the Parliament of World Religions, Tony Blair Faith Foundation Fellowship Training, Guru Sangamam, and private roundtable meetings between Muslims and Hindus in India.



TOP ROW (left to right) Hon'ble Pratibha Patil, president of India. \* M. Hamid Ansari, vice president of India. \* Governor general of Australia at the opening of the Shiv Mandir, which Pujya Swamiji founded near Sydney, Australia. \* Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then prime minister of India, at the ceremony for the Encyclopedia of Hinduism in New York. MIDDLE ROW (left to right) Former U.S. president Bill Clinton. \* Former prime minister of the U.K. Tony Blair. \* Pujya Swamiji brings Ganga water to fasting activist Anna Hazare. \* Pujya Swamiji is greeted at the home of Shri L.K. Advani. BOTTOM ROW (left to right) Chief minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi. \* In Jerusalem with Israeli president Shimon Peres. \* Former president of India APJ Abdul Kalam. \* Members of the British Parliament, Paul Boateng and Barry Gardiner.

*alchemically different than a person not in love. Of course, it does not matter if the object of one's love is a spouse, a child, a parent, or a tree. As long as the love is deep and pure—untainted by lust—the nature of the lover's being will change. Once one has experienced true*

*"If you cannot be huggy-huggy (full of love) here on Earth, do not expect that hugs will be waiting for you in heaven, learn to be huggy-huggy here on Earth first and then this Earth will become your heaven."*

*love, one becomes love, and then one carries this love, carries this flowing, melting, uniting quality wherever one goes.*

*We call so many things love today. We tell the lady who checks us out at the supermarket "I love you" when*

*she gives us a discount on carrots. We gush to the airline agent "I love you" when he manages to squeeze us onto an oversold flight. We casually and lightly tell friends and acquaintances "I love you" every time they do us a favor or whenever we hang up the phone. However, "Thank you, I appreciate it" or "Good-bye, it was nice to speak to you" and "I love you" are vastly different concepts and should not be interchanged frivolously.*

*We also call our lust love. Yet lust and love are nearly opposites. Where love is expansive, lust is contracting. Love is about merging and melting; lust is about fulfilling our own desires. Love is about the beloved; lust is about the self. With love, our vision—not just the vision of our eyes, but the vision of our heart and our spirit—becomes vast. With lust we develop tunnel vision.*

*So, how to develop true love? How to plant it and nurture it so it grows and blossoms within us?*