

New Year Message for 2009

SWAMI BODHANANDA



A few days back I spent couple of hours in my Ashram on the outskirts of Bangalore. Before that I was in New Delhi for a month. Delhi was a foggy dust bowl, though leafy and beautiful. The airport in Delhi was crowded and crammed, in contrast Bangalore airport fresh and airy. The drive from the new sparkling airport to the verdant countryside was exhilarating. The swanky airport built with private-government partnership is the perfect symbol of the rising economic might of India. I felt proud.

In the Ashram I went round looking at the trees and plants. It is always a matter of great joy to watch growing plants. Afterwards as I was settling down in my chair, a group of school children from nearby villages came to see me. They sang and danced in great

abandon. Though coming from poor families, they were intelligent, healthy and were wreathed in smiles.

These three experiences - of the new airport, the chirpy children and the lush greenery buoyed up my spirits. I saw a new India on its march to prosperity, equal opportunity and freedom. Such images of a resurgent India inspire my thoughts as I contemplate on the New Year-2009.

Human affairs are not always a bouquet of roses. It is a mixed bag of blooms and thorns. The past year 2008 arrived under the dark clouds of the dastardly murder of Benazir Bhutto, the popular leader of Pakistan, and ended with a promise of hope and change with the historic election of Barack Obama as the president of the United States. But fate wouldn't allow hope to shine long. The terrorist carnage in Mumbai came as a dagger thrust into the heart of Indian democracy. Then there was the successful launch of the Chandrayan Mission by India. With that, notwithstanding the pervasive poverty and terrorist violence, India launched itself into the 21st century and its limitless possibilities.

As the old yields place to the new, the human spirit invokes fresh hope for itself. Regardless of the withered hopes of the past, the New Year brings new blossoms in the human consciousness. We live in hope. It is not important that all our hopes are fulfilled. What does matter is that we should never give up hope nor hesitate to dream big. Every New Year brings its own promises.

As a globally integrated community we live precariously on this tiny planet, which is cruising around the sun which itself is sailing amidst galaxies in a sea of empty space. To contemplate on such aloneness is scary.

The year 2008 brought upon us an unexpected economic downfall, perhaps the severest after the Great Depression of 1930s. Millions of jobs lost, inventories piled up, sales down, credit vanished - the world almost looked into the abyss. But with effective government intervention and people's ingenuity, I am sure that the global economy can be brought back to its original health and vitality. The melt down of Wall Street should not be hastily interpreted as a verdict against market economy, private business, competition or global trade. When we embark upon un-chartered territories such mishaps are to be expected. As a matter of fact, it is the universally accepted ideal of distributing prosperity to one and all that made otherwise conservative Banks, under political pressure and corporate and individual greed, to abandon caution and prudence in their lending practices, which triggered the present financial crisis. Emerging from this crisis the future will see a healthy partnership between government, private industry and NGOs in creating new ideas, policies and practices for optimal utilization of resources in the pursuit of the greatest common good.

Yet there are some concerns that we as human beings should keep alive in our mind as we enter into the year 2009. They are, health of the environment, global poverty, religiously inspired terrorism, and massive expenditure on armaments. I am sure that the New Year will see effective actions on all these four fronts so that we can secure the health of our planet for our children and grandchildren. And that is possible by bringing ethical and spiritual values into politics, business and into all other aspects of human interaction. The basis of ethics is respect for the other who is different and differ from our views, beliefs and values. The heart of spirituality is self-discipline and inspiration for good work. What is needed is global conversation between religions, cultures, communities, and countries, and between disciplines and the knowledge systems in a framework of non-violence.

Non-violence alone can save humanity in an age of nuclear weapons, scarce resources and increasing populations.

Let this be the message for the New Year - to exist is to coexist. Humans, nature and communities coexisting alone can ensure our survival as individuals and as a species.

Swami Bodhananda

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Bodhananda Ashram, Kozhikode, Kerala

Swami Bodhananda is Chairman, Sambodh Foundation, India; The Sambodh Society Inc. USA; and Bodhananda Research Foundation for Management & Leadership Studies. He is the Inspiration and Guiding Force for all Sambodh institutions.