

VIII WUJA Congress – Medellin Columbia

Ms.Swati Gautam of India was one of the key note speakers at the VIII World Congress of Jesuit Alumni held at Medellin Columbia from 14th to 18th August 2013

The youtube link to her speech is given below.

<http://tinyurl.com/qgrvqsu>

The text of Ms.Swati Gautam's speech at the WUJA Congress is given below.

HOW TO PRACTICE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE MOST NEEDY IN OUR SOCIETIES

Good morning, Reverend Fr Nicholas, all other reverend fathers, members of the organizing committee here at Medellin and my fellow Jesuit alumni and alumnae from all parts of this beautiful earth.

I bring to you all salutations and greetings from India and thank you for giving me this opportunity to communicate with you; to express my innermost thoughts that have been shaped by the values of my ancient Indian culture and by sitting at the feet of some of the dedicated Jesuits of the Calcutta and Darjeeling provinces in India, in particular the ever humane Fr P.C.Mathew, Fr Santy Mathew, Fr Cherian Joseph and the iconic Fr Gerard Van Wallegham, all of whom gave me time to collect my thoughts and look within myself as I prepared for this day.

The first thought that came to me when I received the topic for this address – How to practice social responsibility for the benefit of the most needy in our societies – was clearly this: If, we know the *why* of practicing something, then the *how* of doing it becomes easier. Hence, I'd like to share with you why I think it is imperative to practice social responsibility towards the needy. Later, I shall try to examine the how of proceeding towards it.

WHY?

Practicing responsible and humane behaviour towards our fellow beings is not merely a part of our social responsibility; it is, on the other hand, an integral part of our own human growth. Everything that lives must grow. So must we. And if we don't grow and evolve, we stunt. Physical growth and physical degeneration are visible and are therefore perceived as most important. This change continues to happen all our lives and most of us focus on this aspect of growth. But we often forget to observe the more important growth that should happen 'within' us, in our soul, our heart and our spirit.

This growth within us is our mental, spiritual and humane growth and it is this that should define us in our adult life. However, because this evolution is invisible and 'unseen', its absence often gives us a miss. But, it is this quality that is the hallmark of a developed and balanced human being as against one who is merely an adult by dint of a blossoming physique.

It is in this context that I'd like to place our topic for today: until and unless all of us, as individuals that make up this social fabric, make a conscious attempt at trying to reach out to those who are around us, we will not be able to elevate ourselves to being balanced humans, mature in mind, compassionate in our hearts and at peace with ourselves.

Unlike the popular perception that those who partake of our help are the beneficiaries of it, and are therefore the 'needy' so to say, I'd like to clearly state that in reaching out to others the primary beneficiary is our own self. After all if the needy were not to need us and give us a chance of serving them, then where in heavens would we be able to fulfill our need of being in service to others?

Let me put it another way please. Gentlemen and ladies, every human needs to be needed. A solitary human who is of no use to anyone and who does not believe in 'giving' or is simply unable to 'give' to others, can at best be insane, or at worst, lifeless. But, over the past millennia, social norms have convinced us that the one who serves is bigger, better and greater than the one who is served. The giver is put on a pedestal and over time, deified and worshipped as

one who's doing the receiver, the so called needy, a favour. Fact is neither is greater than the other, the giver and the receiver are two sides of the same coin, created by the same Creator. Therefore, isn't it unwise to discriminate between humans?

I'd like to quote in Sanskrit from the Bhagwad Gita, an ancient spiritual text which is a 700-verse treatise on the human quest for self-realization:

*vidya-vinaya-sampanne
brahmane gavi hastini
shuni chaiva shva-pake cha
panditah sama-darsinah*

vidya--education; *vinaya*--gentleness; *sampanne*--fully equipped;*brahmane*--in the *brahmana*; *gavi*--in the cow; *hastini*--in the elephant;*suni*--in the dog; *ca*--and; *eva*--certainly; *sva-pake*--in the dog-eater (the outcaste); *ca*--respectively; *panditah*--those who are so wise; *sama-darsinah*--do see with equal vision.

A truly knowledgeable person does not distinguish between a learned wise man, a cow, an elephant and even an outcaste. 5.18

Ancient Hindu texts also speak of life's cycle as akin to that of the sun. What rises must set and then rise again and so on and so forth. Therefore, he who thinks is the giver today shall most certainly be a taker in times to come. More importantly, is not every giver a taker in another context? Aren't giving and taking intrinsically complimentary? Is there anyone in this world who can put his hand on his heart and say that he has only given and never taken in life? Even a hermit, a priest or a spiritual master who's renounced the world, cannot claim to have never taken from another; after all their first journey into this world had made them take sustenance from their mothers who carried them in their wombs.

So, gentlemen and ladies, I'm of the conviction that it is in our essential nature as that of God's best creations, that we experience fulfillment and peace through service to others. Because, as Shirley Chisholm, the first African American lady

to be elected to the United States Congress summed up: Service is the rent that you pay for room on this earth.

WHO ARE THE NEEDY?

I'd like to move on to sharing with you my thoughts on who I perceive are the needy. The easiest and the most misconceived perception is that the financially weak are the needy; the physically weak are the needy and in some astounding instances in the contemporary world, even the peace loving, non-resisting types are weak and needy. Everything else follows from these presumptions; especially the pattern of supremacy and hierarchy that leads a few men to assume superiority over others arises from these flawed, irrational and inhuman premises.

However, as we've discussed in the earlier part of this address, the needy can never be permanently fit into a slot of being 'needy forever'. To me, a need can range from the miniscule to the Herculean. It could be as simple as the need of an elderly family member to speak to another human. And it could scale up to the need of an entire population facing a natural calamity which all of us, across the world and cutting across all demographic parameters, have experienced in and around our lives. The needy are within us and around us. Nobody present here can say that they have never encountered a needy person, for if so, we would be living in heaven and not on earth! We all need each other in our daily lives and more specifically during the challenges that life spins on to us. Ignoring the cry of a hungry child on the excuse that the primary responsibility of the child lies with the mother alone is irrational; as irrational as believing that the ponds in my fields are meant to provide water only for my own consumption.

Human need can be broadly categorized as material and non material. After all, is not the need for love and caring as much a hallmark of the needy as is the need for financial assistance? Moreover, have we not discussed that the giver and the taker are both needy? With different needs to fulfill, once they approach each other, the magic of a human bond appears on the beautiful horizon of our Creator's world.

The common folly that we suffer from is that it is the poor who are needy; that by giving of our financial resources we are helping the economically

underprivileged; further, that this charity can absolve us of our non-virtuous dealings including the guilt of selfishness that we may sometimes try to suppress. We couldn't be more wrong. Whilst in absolutely no way am I attempting to even remotely take away from the wonderful generosity of those who pledge their hard earned resources to the poor, I'd also like to draw our attention to the possibility that the very same donors could well be overlooking the basic needs of people in their own vicinity. Charity, after all said the old adage, begins at home; but, in our fast paced world long-sightedness is swamping us, making us unable to clearly focus on subjects close us, whilst letting us very clearly view everything from afar! I'd like to clarify that all of us are and wish to be responsible for those loved ones whose lives we are involved with (such as our children and partners); however I'm speaking about extending the same kind of empathy towards those who are near us and yet may have nothing to offer to us: they too should constitute a layer in our circle of concern and responsibility.

To me personally, the greatest need is of those who need our time. For time is precious and a moment passed is a moment past; it is not reimbursable by any power whatsoever. The ones who need our time are those who need that special human touch of love, caring and warmth. Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher stands vindicated in today's contemporary context of our fast lives, for he'd believed that 'Time is a created thing. To say I don't have time is like saying I don't want to'.

Gentlemen and Ladies, it is when we give of our time that we give the most, the best possible and in the most genuine manner. As my resident saint of Calcutta, Mother Teresa often used to say, "At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in." In short, I needed you and you did not turn me away.

In giving of our time, we give of ourselves. And the needy could be a neighbour's child who needs guidance with his academics; the needy could be a co worker who's going through a crisis in life; the needy could be the little school across the road that can do with an extra hand over the weekend. Yes,

we'd have to cut down on our little pleasures of the weekend television viewing, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what leads to lasting peace and fulfillment: the TV watching or the reaching out to help. The vast majority of us, however, continue to look for big and large goals to serve, and hope secretly that fame shall walk two steps ahead of us before we can even start on the road to service instead of beginning to focus on taking baby steps to start with. As responsible humans we must pay back to our surroundings for the opportunities that we have received in life.

Faced with an injured human, we may think either of two ways: what would serving this injured person mean for our soul? Or, on the other hand, what would serving this injured human mean to him. To him, it could mean a difference between life and death and gentleman and ladies, it is this spirit of compassion that is needed in today's world.

At the turn of the last century in India, a young Sikh boy converted to Christianity and spent his life travelling and working in the mountain regions around the Himalayas in Northern India. His name was Sadhu Sundar Singh. Walking barefoot in Tibet while spreading the goodness and glory of Jesus, Sadhu once came upon a very injured man, both of whose legs were broken in a fall. Naturally, he was on the verge of death in the isolated cold terrain. Sadhu was with a fellow preacher and he decided to help the injured man. A snowstorm was on the horizon. Sadhu's companion felt that in trying to help the injured man, they would all perish because carrying the injured would slow them down. Sadhu Sundar Singh, however, persisted. Whilst his companion moved ahead all by himself, Sadhu reached the injured man, heaved him over his shoulder and with the Lord's name on his lips, started to trek towards the nearest village. The load was heavy, the burden twice as much to carry in a snow storm, but Sadhu persisted. Heaving with perspiration and palpitations, Sadhu drew upon every pore of his being so as to be able to reach his destination. Where there is a will, there is a way. Just as Sadhu reached the injured man to safety he received news that his companion had died in the snowstorm. In a flash he realized that the shared warmth of their bodies had saved him and his injured burden; also the strain of carrying the man on his shoulders had ensured that Sadhu's heart kept pumping, instead of constricting and collapsing. Selfless service had saved two lives.

Another important factor that our human mind is sometimes faced with is that of wondering whether the needy are worthy of being served. Some philosophers have felt that we must ensure that our service reaches those who deserve it as against it serving the undeserving. However, there is the flipside to this argument and I subscribe to the flip side. Who are we to judge a human as deserving or not? After all, if we judge people, will it not cloud our love for them? Fr Santy Mathew, of the Darjeeling province in India gave me a wonderful new way of looking at this dilemma. He said we must distinguish between knowing a person and knowing about a person. ‘Knowing’ a person enables us to care for them. ‘Knowing about’ them may lead us to judge them. ‘Knowing about’ is getting to know about a person’s action, but knowing is about the person and his self. Whilst our actions cannot be separated from ourselves, ‘action’ must also be viewed in its own context. Being judgmental whilst on the path of service can be very slippery: yes, as humans we should apply our minds and be alert to our surroundings but we should probably try and desist from investing our energy in judging people as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

To me personally, the best illustration that comes to mind is that of a fruit bearing tree. It not just provides shade and food to all those path weary travelers who rest under it, but it also provides fruit to those very people who may stone it.

The ability of being non judgmental is beautifully described in the Gita by Lord Krishna:

*suhrn-mitrary-udasina-
madhyastha-dvesya-bandhusu
sadhusv api ca papesu
sama-buddhir visisyate*

*su-hrt--*by nature a well-wisher; *mitra--*benefactor with affection; *ari--* enemy; *udasina--*neutral between belligerents; *madhya-stha--*mediator between the belligerents; *dvesya--*envious; *bandhusu--*among relatives or well-wishers; *sadhusu--* unto the pious; *api--*as well as; *ca--*and; *papesu--*unto the sinners; *sama-buddhih--* having equal intelligence; *visisyate--*is far advanced.

A person is said to be evolved, knowledgeable and balanced when he regards all—the honest well-wishers, friends , enemies, the envious, the pious, the sinner and those who are indifferent and impartial—with an equal mind. 6.9

HOW TO PRACTICE RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE NEEDY

My dear audience, I now wish to approach the most crucial and significant part of today's session. It is about the ways and means by which we can practice the art of being responsible towards those, whose lives and in whom we do not have a personal stake.

As I've said, being responsible is an art, and like all arts it is bettered with practice. So, as we put forward our first step towards opening ourselves to others, let our hearts and within be full of a positive and loving energy towards our fellow beings. There's no power as beautiful and as potent as that of caring and it is this power that we should seek to harness. Love opens us up but for that we need to be open to love.

Very often we admire and even idolize those who have dedicated their lives in the service of others. We wish we could do it too. We wonder how it is that these great men and women continue to give of themselves repeatedly and endlessly. But whilst we carry on admiring them, we remain fearful of emulating them since we feel that we do not and may not have, the nature given or congenital qualities, that these great people possess. But, we are wrong, so wrong indeed in thinking of ourselves as lesser than others. Fact is that God has blessed us ALL with the will and capacity to do whatever and however much we wish to.

The choice, Rev Frs, gentlemen and ladies, lies within US: we can choose which way our life shall move, which direction it will take and how must it shape up. But, to reach that stage we will have to prepare ourselves to be aware, informed, in control and balanced human beings.

Ancient Hindu scriptures clearly state, and I certainly believe, that divinity rests within us. The philosophy of non dualism, propounded by many saints, wise men and prophets, amongst whom was the learned Swami Vivekananda, convinces us

that we are part of the divine and the divine is part of us. The ancient Hindu texts of the Brahadaranyaka Upanishad and the Yajur Veda have a very beautiful, philosophical sentence: AHAM BRAHMASMI which, roughly and superficially translated means, 'I am the Divine, I art thou, or I am the Brahman'. Here the term Brahman means the 'Supreme Consciousness or the Divine Godhead'.

If so, where is the fear? Why can we not open up our hearts? Move outwards of our own self oriented circle of people and reach out to our brothers and sisters outside it? What is it that holds us back? Why are we not able to put the first step forward? Why is it that we continue to wait for a prophet to come and relieve this world of its miseries? Why can't our individual tiny steps make up one giant leap for humanity?

All those of us who falter, do so because we have tightly compressed ourselves into cocoons where mere pleasures of our individual lives keep blinding us to the wonderful happiness that we may have shared with this beautiful universe. Till as long as we are a prey to our physical senses, till as long as we are prisoners of our desires, till as long as we do not wish to understand the difference between need and desire, we shall continue to be in the dark. I have, in 43 years of my life, never come across a single human being who has not wanted to do 'good' AND feel nice about it. Even those who indulge in the most decadent, selfish and corrupt actions wish to, sometimes or the other, feel satisfied in the knowledge that they did good; every human after all gas a positive side to himself; this positivity should and must be given a chance to blossom.

So why is it that some of us aren't able to take that step forward towards doing that good deed, or even if we have, why is that we aren't able to sustain the momentum? The answer to that lies in our strength within; call it mental or spiritual. This strength gives us the ability to step away from selfish and self centered thoughts that are merely pleasure giving. By strengthening our inner being, we can empower ourselves and break free from the stupor created by fear and desire.

Once we are able to exert self control and stay away from those vices that appeal to our physical senses alone, a whole new world of peace, calm and

lasting happiness starts unfolding and unfurling every day of our lives. Empowered with the strength of a spirit in control of our mind, our new found vision ensures that we are able to see the good we wish to do. A positive energy, borne out of the need to be of help to others, and to share and reach out to others, is a kind of magnet. This energy attracts so much more positivity that the feeling of truly being 'men and women for others', as had been envisioned by Fr Pedro Arrupe seems do-able and possible.

Rev Frs, ladies and gentlemen, love is a funny thing. Once we have the courage to let love reside in our hearts, it achieves the impossible for us. I say this because it is love and love alone that leads us to sacrifice. And no service can bear fruit unless it is accompanied by sacrifice. Mahatma Gandhi, the torchbearer of non violence, had so beautifully enumerated the seven deadly sins which all humans must always beware of: wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; science without humanity; knowledge without character; politics without principle; commerce without morality and worship without sacrifice.

On the face of it, it seems that sacrifice is a virtue that only a few are born with. But no, once we fill our hearts with love, surrender to our faith, and wish to be of service, then sacrifice does not seem a faraway, scary thought. I am not advocating that I must go hungry in order to feed the starving people around me. For I were to do that then I too shall soon die, and with me shall die my universe, for as per the Hindu non dualistic philosophy, it is in me and through me that my universe exists. So, the practical and do able path comes through sharing; sharing my food, my resources, my wealth, myself with as many as I can. So that whilst I live, so must others too. After all, how much is it that a human needs to live on? Some bread, a cloth to cover a back and a roof to be under. And all of us have so much more than this, just so much more. Yes, saving is a virtue, but hoarding is a vice. Yet we do not hesitate to be only consumers and maybe even consumer hoarders of resources that nature hasn't allocated to us in the first place. Sharing some of it would not even tantamount to sacrifice, yet we hesitate to share. But once we taste the joys of sharing, we propel ourselves towards greater happiness in the path of sacrifice. Giving up a little of what would bring me personal pleasure and instead giving it away to others is in itself joyous and bountiful.

In this modern age, serving others is akin to worshipping in our daily lives. It is far better to serve sincerely even if that means giving up our daily ritualistic worship; than to keep praying at our altars whilst those around keep crying for us to awaken to them. Swami Vivekananda, the great Indian thinker who founded the global Ramakrishna Mission which exists to serve humanity without any distinction on grounds of religion, race and culture, was the first to mention the concept of 'Daridranarayan' a century back. 'Daridra' means the poor, the downtrodden and the underprivileged. 'Narayana' means the Lord of the Universe. In Vivekananda's philosophy, service to the poor was akin to serving God.

Swamiji's earnest prayer was, "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species.

By coining the phrase 'Daridranarayana', Swami Vivekananda's focused intention was on alleviating the miseries of the poor masses in India who were gradually being forced into famine and deprivation under the colonial rule. By introducing this concept, Swamiji, being the great motivator he was, tried to exhort the wealthy and rich to come into the service of the poor. By no stretch of imagination was Swamiji trying to think of God as poor. Far from it; Swamiji was a devout believer who had achieved greatness in his human life by complete and total surrender to the Divine; Swamiji's faith was unshakeable. Yet in order to fulfill his mission of serving the masses without distinction and differentiation, Swamiji rightly used religion to achieve his goal. The elite strata of the educated and wealthy Indian society of the late 19th and early 20th century flocked towards him: confident in the belief that by serving the poor they were serving God.

Dear all, Swamiji's concept rings true and ever so true in today's social context too. Contemporary society is becoming increasingly divided into the few who control natural resources and the masses who are deprived of their age old rights. Whilst merit must always be given it's supreme due, fact is also that in today's day and age the successful are not where they are due to their merit alone; bending universal laws to suit themselves, the few of this world are trying to appropriate that which belongs equally to all of us. In doing so they are

knowingly or unknowingly creating the grounds for extreme discontent and maybe even violence. Against this backdrop, the concept of being able to feel and serve the Divine through the lives of the poor and the marginalized is a wonderful non-violent method with which to apply a balm on those who our modern social- legal systems have wounded.

My being here would be incomplete without my shedding some light on the concept of social responsibility as it has existed in India through the millennia. Being a society where the village was a self sustaining, independent unit, it was natural that all inhabitants looked out towards each other. The rich would donate in the form of temples and educational systems and most other matters. Every village was akin to a family with clearly drawn out hierarchies. Social responsibility was a given because everybody's survival depended on the complimentary tasks they performed whilst living in a self sustaining unit. However, with the advent of the British colonizers this self sustaining unit of the village was gradually broken up so that the economy could open up to facilitate the colonizers. In such a state, the anonymity of an urban society gave way to the breakdown of the age old norms where collective responsibility was the way forward. Later, when Mahatma Gandhi took over the leadership of the masses, he revived the older Indian traditions by proposing the concept of 'trusteeship': he said, "supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community." The Mahatma was convinced that hoarding was a form of thieving and that nature produced enough to sustain all its children on Earth. Furthermore he also believed that since everything was from God and belonged to God, then whoever had an extra proportionate portion was bound to be a trustee of that portion for God's people.

All the great humans from India: Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and many others were united in their conviction that service must be selfless and without expectation of any return. This factor, gentlemen and ladies, is another pointer on the path to service. In Swami Vivekananda's words, "In the world take always the position of the giver. Give everything and look for

no return. Give love, give help, give service, give any little thing you can, but *keep out barter*. Make no conditions and none will be imposed. Let us give out of our own bounty, just as God gives to us.”

Yet another factor that’s gradually becoming a hallmark of today’s modern society and which we, as a Congress of Jesuit Alumni/ae have talked about in the past few days, is that of a certain mandatory-ness to performing our social responsibility; it seems as though the present socio-political-legal systems are oriented towards pushing us towards performing our social responsibility. It seems as if we wouldn’t perform our basic social responsibility otherwise.

But, gentlemen and ladies, I’d like to request you to take some time off to reflect on how and when did our modern society reached a stage where we have had to enact laws and lay down norms for people and organizations for performing their social responsibility. When in heavens did we give up the most basic duty that binds all of us with each other? And why is it that we’re letting go of it? The answer to this is not simple, yet it isn’t so complex that we cannot figure it out either. It is natural to let a new order replace the old. But, it isn’t wise to throw the baby with the bathwater is it? In our quest to create a modern world fully equipped with ever evolving technology, aren’t we overlooking the basic evolution of the very men who this world is supposed to serve? Blaming the God’s is one easy way out. Those who do so feel that since this is God’s world and He creates and sustains it the blame is for him to bear too. Sure this is God’s world, but having taken birth in it, have we taken any care of it? Zeus sums it up aptly in Homer’s *Odyssey* when he says:

“Ah how shameless – the way these mortals blame the gods. From us alone they say come all their miseries yes but they themselves with their own reckless ways compound their pains beyond their proper share.”

Gentlemen and ladies, Pope John Paul II once had so beautifully said that ‘there is a universal moral law written on the human heart’. Ancient Indian philosophy also believes that universal laws are clearly above all variable factors of ‘*Desh*’, that is geographical location, ‘*Kaal*’, that is the era or the time in consideration and ‘*Paatra*’, that is the individual who the norm or value is being applied to. Universality cuts across all these factors and as the Reverend Father had implied: every human must live with the responsibility of fulfilling his/her values.

However, is that the way of the world today? Have we made this earth a better place to live in or have we merely given the older oppressive forces of monarchy and feudalism a new guise of democracy? Are our democratic and other modern political institutions really based on the bedrock of fundamental moral justice and fair play? Or are they merely providing lip service by ensuring one vote for every adult?

Dear listeners, this session is not about examining political institutions. But this talk is certainly about reflecting onto the ways and means with which to create a level playing field for everybody. After all the policy maker and the politician who are creating and sustaining these systems which are resulting in an imbalance in society, must never forget that they are humans first and foremost and that they carry the ethical responsibility of adhering to the universal laws of right to life, truth, dignity and honesty. If all of us here today decide to light a little lamp in our hearts and pledge to ourselves that we shall try to practice the ideals of humanity and the wonderful Jesuit education that we have received, then it shall be very much possible to serve the needy around us. After all Mahatma Gandhi, too was of the firm belief that ‘the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.’

In doing such service ladies and gentlemen, I’d like to draw our attention to one last point, which is that of selfless service without hankering for glory and fame to follow in its wake. It is the trend in today’s world that even before we embark on a single act of goodness we try to beam it to the world. Yes ours is a media driven society and it is important to be able to communicate with the rest of the world but to let every act of philanthropy depend on the appreciation of others can be self defeating. Goodness does not need a crutch. In fact, goodness is a crutch for all else in this world; and to subject it to others’ approval is belittling it. Sharing our philanthropic ideas and work is a wonderful practice; it inspires others to walk on the path of service. But my concern is with those who look at service as a means of cultivating a public image. They do not realize that wealth and fame are like sea water; the more they drink, the thirstier they’ll be. By adulterating our service with the desire for fame, we show ourselves and our intentions in poor light. And for those who serve precisely because they need a route to fame, I’d like to remind them of Martin Luther King, Junior’s, words:

‘Not everybody can be famous, but everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service’.

Before I end, I’d like to share with you an Indian folk tale dating back to the 12th century. There once lived a parrot king with his flock of parrots in a dense beautiful jungle. Soon a hunter discovered them and laid a huge net so as to trap them. Above the net he scattered some grains to lure the parrots. Soon after some parrots came to feed on the grains and were caught in the net. In this manner the hunter managed to entrap quite a few birds every day. Naturally the parrot king was worried. He summoned all his parrots and asked them to repeat after him: ‘the hunter shall come and lay his trap but we shall not be greedy; the hunter shall come and lay his trap but we shall not be greedy…’ so on and so forth. The parrot king then explained to them that it was their own greed that was luring them into the trap, so they should beware of the trap. The parrots all repeated the chant, and nodded their heads. The next day the parrot king heard a loud commotion and flew over to it. More than half of his parrots were trapped in the hunter’s net. The funny thing was that they were all chanting: ‘the hunter shall come and lay his trap but we shall not be greedy; the hunter shall come and lay his trap but we shall not be greedy…’. The parrot king then explained to them that whilst they seemed to have the knowledge of what to do, they did not know how to act upon that knowledge. The parrots asked for his forgiveness and requested their king to save them. It was then that the parrot king said that he had just one solution: that every parrot weak or strong shall work together towards helping each other. At the count of 3, said the parrot king, all the parrots should spread their wings and soar away together, with the net attached to their feet. All the parrots flew away to a nearby hill where an army of rats – who were friends of the parrots – cut away the net.

In this simple fable, we can see it all. The futility of knowledge without action, the wonder of reaching out to each other weak or strong and lastly, the indispensable virtue of standing by one another.

Ladies and gentleman, the path of service may seem daunting to those who’ve never walked on it; it may disinterest those who find safety in their routine lives; it may bore those who are used to experiencing mere pleasure at all times … yet, it is the only path that can bring lasting peace and calm to our selves.

Charity and philanthropy are words that man made, but the act of reaching out a hand is older than all civilizations.

In the Bhagwad Gita, Lord Krishna says:

*datavyam iti yad danam
diyate 'nupakarine
dese kale ca patre ca
tad danam sattvikam smrtam*

datavyam--worth giving; *iti*--thus; *yad*--that which; *danam*--charity; *diyate*--given; *anupakarine*--to any person irrespective of doing good; *dese*--in place; *kale*--in time; *ca*--also; *patre*--suitable person; *ca*--and; *tad*--that; *danam*--charity; *sattvikam*--in the mode of goodness; *smrtam*--consider.

That gift, which is given out of duty, at the proper time and place, to a suitable person, and without expectation of return, is considered to be charity in the mode of goodness.

I would like to conclude my talk with a universal prayer in Sanskrit:

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।

Lead us from **Unreality** (of Transitory Existence) to the **Reality** (of self)

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।

Lead us from the **Darkness** (of Ignorance) to the **Light** (of Spiritual Knowledge)

मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।

Lead us from the **Fear of Death** to the Knowledge of **Immortality**.

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Peace, Peace, Peace

Thank you very much, mucho gracias, merci beaucoup, namaste.