

Raise Your Voice on Behalf of Humanity

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech during the presentation of the 1997 Tagore Peace Award from India's Asiatic Society, at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi, India, Oct. 23.

Namaste! First, please allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude for this solemn and splendid ceremony. I will never, for all eternity, forget this sublime and powerfully moving event.

Just now, we enjoyed a song that set to music the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore. This melody, this song of profound gravity and subtlety, dignified and beautiful, seemed to come from the heavens beyond, from the very depths of the soul.

As I listened, I was taken with a vision of an extraordinary poet, a man of greatness, traveling across desolate fields for the sake of humankind. At times, he is lit by the light of the moon, at times bathed in sweat beneath a brilliant sun. I picture him walking, solitary and dignified, by the edge of the ocean, on a mountain peak...such were the images conjured in my heart by this moving song, for which I again express my sincere gratitude.

Respected Vice President Bhattacharji, respected Vice President Banerjee, respected General Secretary De, respected Council Member Chowdhury, esteemed professors and scholars of the Asiatic Society, respected Director Kumar of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an inexpressible honor to receive the first Tagore Peace Award of the Asiatic Society, the source of illumination for India's renaissance and a lofty spiritual palace of humanity.

I am particularly honored to be conferred an award bearing the name of this great poet of peace and son of the timeless land of Bengal, and from your society whose noble endeavors over the past two centuries have shared the cultural heritage of India, the great land of spirituality, with the entire world.

My heartfelt gratitude to all the members of this distinguished gathering who came today, despite the many demands on your time, in the open-minded spirit of friendship that Rabindranath Tagore so poetically describes in this passage: "The meeting of Man in this inner chamber [of the spirit] is the true meeting. For many days many signs have appeared that the call has come to the Bengalis to open the door to this meeting" (from Stephen N. Hey's *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India*)

Further, I share this great joy and honor with my beloved fellow members of Bharat Soka Gakkai and all our friends of the SGI in 128 countries worldwide, who join us in offering their wholehearted felicitations on the auspicious 50th anniversary of Indian independence.

My youth was passed in the company of the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, his magnificent songs in praise of life's ineffable mysteries. In the chaotic years following Japan's defeat in World War II, I sought out his works in used bookstores, reading, reciting, committing passage upon passage to memory. They were for me an inexhaustible source of spiritual nourishment.

Tagore was indeed a renaissance master who towers alongside the likes of Leonardo da Vinci and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He is Asia's pride, the world's treasure. The warm visage of his later years, in particular, radiates the sainted life-state of one who has surmounted innumerable obstacles and trials.

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It is impossible to ascertain the full measure of the message and meaning of this august visionary of peace. If one were, however, to attempt to distill just three principles from that great life, the first would no doubt be: Take action! Go out to meet people, forging bonds of friendship with them!

Throughout a period marred by two world wars, Tagore embarked on travels for peace that forged connections with people throughout world, demonstrating that the power of the spirit is greater even than the conflicts of the mundane realm.

Long ago, Gautama Buddha urged his disciples to travel to neighboring countries in all four directions in order to bring happiness to vast numbers of people. It was Rabindranath Tagore who put this ancient cosmopolitan spirit into practice in the midst of a war-torn 20th century.

The first time I traveled to Calcutta, home to Tagore and the Asiatic Society, was during my first visit to India in 1961, the centennial of Tagore's birth.

As he stated, when one awakens to the eternal life that is shared in common by all humankind, "then alien there is none, then no door is shut" (from Tagore's "Gitanjali"). In my travels around the world, the conviction that Tagore expressed so poetically is never far from my heart.

The second principle of peace Tagore teaches us might be expressed thus: Raise your voice on behalf of humanity!

As is well known, Tagore was one of the first to warn the world of the growing threat of Japanese militarism. Most regrettably, however, the intellectual and religious leaders of Japan, who should have been the first to respond to his call, were silenced by their cowardice. Silence was reprehensible enough; yet many acquiesced and lent their support to the ultra-nationalists.

This was the setting against which the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, put their lives on the line by raising their voices for peace.

"Man's history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man" (from Tagore's *Stray Birds*). I am particularly fond of these words from Tagore.

To ensure a lasting victory over barbarian violence, we must forge solidarity among the world's peoples — we must enable the voices that speak for humanity's interest to resound far and wide. As Tagore puts it in one of his most moving poems (from *The Herald of Spring: Poems From Mohua*):

*The glory of the sun
Shines in the valour of man.*

Finally, the third lesson for peaceful action taught us by Tagore is: Plant the seeds of peace in the hearts of the young!

Tagore's fatherly compassion also found expression in his endeavors as an educator, as the founder of a university. It was his custom, upon returning from his travels, to share with the students stories of the people of character and justice he had met, ordinary citizens who had inspired his affection. In this way, he sought to inculcate a sense of the unity of humankind in these young lives.

As one who has also founded an education system that includes high schools and a university, I fully appreciate the powerful sentiments that moved Tagore. The focus of all our efforts must be the education of youth.

Yesterday, I had the privilege of meeting with President Narayanan and sharing thoughts on the future of India, 60 percent of whose population can be considered youth. As a land

of great youth, India is a land of great hope. In the power and passion of India's courageous young people, who are imbued with a profound philosophy, I see a limitlessly brilliant future.

Rabindranath Tagore's 80 years of life were marked by ceaseless struggle, as he exerted his every last measure of mental and physical energy to educate and foster youth, to awaken the common people, to realize the creative fusion of the civilizations of East and West, and to realize harmony between human beings and nature. As he wrote in *Wings of Death*:

*All that I had to give,
I have given utterly.*

I believe that these words — unhesitating, unrestrained — are a song of ultimate triumph in life.

I am likewise determined, so long as I live, to work, together with our distinguished friends gathered here today as representatives of India's finest intellects, to create value in the form of culture, education and peace.

I will continue to burn with the flame of passionate commitment. For this is the only means by which I can respond to the great honor and responsibility of being recipient of the first Tagore Peace Award.

I offer my heartfelt prayers for the continued flourishing of the Asiatic Society, as you continue to illuminate humanity into the 21st century with the great light of spirituality.

In closing, I'll recite this passage from Tagore's poem "Gitanjali," which I understand was deeply loved by Jawaharlal Nehru, many of whose courageous endeavors in building a nation were conducted in this very place.

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action —
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my
country awake.*

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