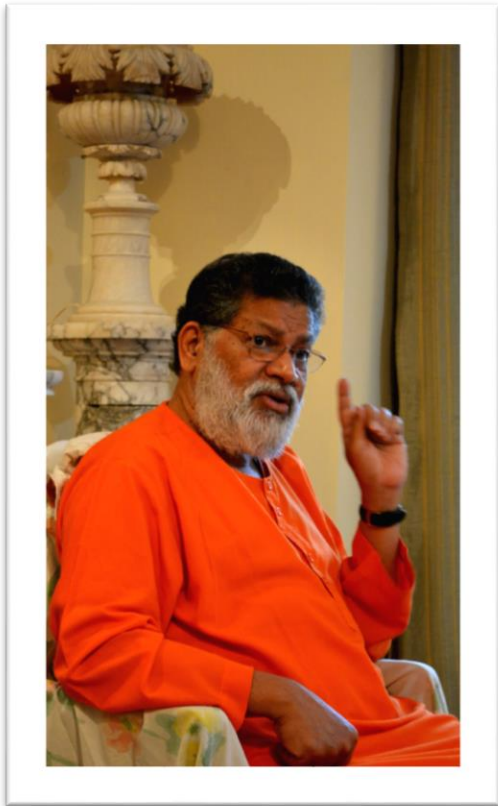


- The Bhagavad Gita: A Vision for the Emerging Multicultural Global Religion

SWAMI BODHANANDA

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Humankind cannot live without, religion, a set of beliefs, rituals and discipline that help us anchor and organize our life in an ever changing, chaotic world. The enlightenment ideals for rationality and pragmatism are not enough to address ethical and spiritual concerns of the average person. As the world becomes one village and a community of people with different cultural, religious, linguistic and economic backgrounds, the one-dimensional, monocultural and exclusivistic religions are not intellectually and experientially adequate to guide and inspire the global community in spiritual and ethical matters. Another challenge to religion is the emergence of science and technology and the humanistic worldview that has liberated thinking from the old paradigms and brought unprecedented prosperity to humanity. An average educated person wants to know and benefit from all wisdom traditions of the world and would like to design a faith and a value system which will help him to

live in peace and harmony with the rest of the world while pursuing his cherished goals in life.

The following are the areas that the future religion has to address:

- a. dialogue between major world religions in a spirit of tolerance for dissimilar cultures and coexistence of diverse faiths;
- b. ecological concerns and respect for environment and other life forms;
- c. integrating science, technology and the humanistic worldview;
- d. freedom of women and equality of gender;
- e. individual as the source of values and a mindset which looks upon the child as an independent unique person helping to unfold his/her potentials rather than imposing a value system;
- f. integrating secular, democratic and civil societies and the global market economy, and;
- g. defining the intangible and the non-quantifiable values like ethical principles and spiritual fulfillment, and welding them into the daily interactive life of the individual.

The Bhagavad Gita has valuable lessons, for the modern man and woman, towards all the above areas of concern. The Gita was taught in a battlefield to a sensitive, successful and highly competent leader who was caught up in the intractable web of ethical and spiritual issues and who had the need for actively fighting evil and injustice. The approach of the Gita is non-denomination, and it addresses humanity at large. The Gita does not demand blind faith from the devotees. At the end of the teaching what Bhagavan Krishna advises Arjuna is to think for himself and act as per his conscience.

My lecture will focus on the Gita's eternal teaching and its relevance to the contemporary issues that are of concern to the global society, and help the emergence of a multicultural global religion based on tolerance, mutual respect and diversity.

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.