

## **TWO SPECIFIC RESOLUTIONS TO BE TAKEN ON NEW YEAR**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ**

When the mother earth goes a full round of the sun god, then one year is completed and a new year is born. I feel that as my age increases the mother earth is going ever-greater speed around the sun god! Perhaps the circular route of mother earth has become a little short!

On the New Year day last year at wee hours I got out of my house, as my daily routine is, to go for a brisk walk for forty-five minutes. I said then “Happy New Year” to the flowers in the home garden just in front of my front door. I felt that the flowers then smiled at me and the flower plants greeted me warmly with “Happy New Year” by shaking themselves a bit in the breeze.

But actually even before I said “Happy New Year” the branches and leaves of the trees on the edge of the home garden greeted me with “Happy New Year” dancing themselves in a soft wind! Not only that but seeing me out so early in the open on the New Year day the birds which spend the night on the branches of the trees said to me “Good Morning” amidst chirping their morning prayer hymns!

With the greetings and the experiences of love between the environment and me, my whole last year went very well. I was able to write beautiful essays on birds, on environment, and the trees and plants in the botanical garden near my house.

But in this coming first day of the New Year I have a special plan for the whole year. So this year on the first day, in stead of getting out of the front door as my routine is, I will get out of the house by the back door. In my neighbourhood an old uncle daily gets out of his house and does physical exercises very early in the morning on his court yard. By getting out of my back door I want to begin the coming New Year with the ‘darshan’ of the old uncle.

Beginning with the old uncle in this New Year I want to give more importance to people in my thoughts and actions. As I see today the whole world wants two things: peace and happiness. They are possible, I believe, only by giving importance to people and respecting them.

During this New Year keeping people at the centre of my daily living I want to work and get peace and enjoy happiness. Yet we know and experience that we live in an atmosphere which lacks peace. Instead of peace and happiness we are surrounded by clannish, communal, irreligious, violent and terror-stricken atmosphere of evil and even pogrom. So in us or in our surroundings there are no peace and happiness.

But without being disappointed or overcome by this sad situation we shall take specific steps to establish peace and enjoy happiness. Certainly it is very difficult to get peace and enjoy happiness in our concrete situation, but it is not impossible.

We know that there is no peace in our surroundings but the darkness of strife and

violence. In this situation as an English saying goes, there is a choice between two things: either curse the darkness or light a lamp. It is better to light a candle in stead of cursing the darkness.

In this context a poem on Candle by a well known Gujarati poet, Mr. Yoseph Macwan is worth recalling. I shall give here a free rendering of the poem:

“Among the crowds of people,  
Who sell their souls  
I have kept  
My candle lighted  
    I have not allowed it  
    To be blown out  
    In the crowds  
    I go ever forward  
    With the belief  
That someone  
    Will light his/her candle.”

In this difficult situation of restlessness how can we light a candle of peace? Here I remember one thing said by the well-known film actor and social worker Mr. Ragul Bose. He told a beautiful thing while speaking on “Youth and Freedom of Expression” in his Lajja Memorial Lecture on Spetemer 22, 2006 in the auditorium of H K College, Ahmedabad.

Mr. Bose said that we do not have freedom of expression at all. In democracy the politicians and other similar forces are always trying to curtail our freedom of expression and draw us in the ways they are able to make profit and serve their own self-serving purposes. The forces such as religion, culture and traditional believes rob us of our freedom of expression. Terrorism, communalism, natural and human-made tragedies put us often in dire situations. They take away our freedom of expression.

In this disturbed peace-less situation what can we do? Here I like the suggestion made by Mr. Bose to the youth. He said that you can take concrete steps to solve the situations which are very bad. If you really wish to do something, please make 3 phone calls. Through one or more phone calls you will find people like NGOs who are determined to face the situation and establish peace among people. You become active in collaboration with similar individuals and NGO institutions.

The New Year offers us a wonderful opportunity for introspection. We can examine ourselves and about people around us. We can discuss in our friends’ circle about things we do not like or about anything in the world. If we take Ragul Bose’s suggestion about the evil things around us, then we can take concrete steps. I have heard that there are the most number of NGOs active in Gujarat in comparison with the rest of India. So there are wonderful opportunities to young people to do something concrete about the things they feel bad about.

Here I will give you a concrete example. Fr. P. D. Mathew is a Supreme Court lawyer. He was in-charge of the legal section of Indian Social Institute (ISI), a very famous NGO known in India

and abroad. Under the aegis of ISI and in collaboration with other local NGOs, Fr. Mathew has conducted innumerable seminars and workshops all over India to create legal awareness among the general public.

Now he has come back to Gujarat and under the aegis of Behavioural Science Centre (BSC), a famous NGO in the state, he has started from January 2006 a monthly in Gujarati “Apana Adhikar” (meaning “our rights”) to educate people on legal matters. The legal magazine edited by him is an extremely useful periodical for the people who believe in human rights and equality of all men and women.

Fr. Mathew has also set up “Nyayadarshan” to produce and promote legal literature and train, to use a common expression, “bare-foot lawyers”. The people who participate in his legal workshops and seminars appreciate his services immensely.

With his wide contact among NGOs and the legal circle Fr. Mathew has realised that the common people do not know much about their basic human rights and legal rights. So the authorities like the police, politicians and the merchants exploit the poor and tribal people taking the advantage of their ignorance of the law. Taking this situation into consideration Fr. Mathew in collaboration with Behavioural Science Centre is lighting a candle through “Apana Adhikar” and “Nyayadarshan” to drive away the darkness of legal ignorance of the common people.

Today in Gujarat among the followers of different religions there exist wide spread ignorance, prejudices and misunderstanding. The self-seeking politicians and other people spread all sorts of rumours and even total lies and make the situations worse than they are and take advantage by leading inter-religious clashes and communal conflicts and promoting hatred. For instance with all sorts of tricks some people portray the Christians as people who forcefully and deceitfully convert others! This way they create hatred and ill-will towards the Christians! Consequently Christians are treated suspiciously. Similarly these self-seekers portray the Muslims as religious fanatics! They also try their best to picture all Muslims as terrorists!

In this situation Ragul Bose’s suggestion can help us to find salvation. Becoming aware of the false rumours and misunderstandings we can take concrete steps to find out the true information about the followers of other religions.

In this New Year let us not blindly believe popular but false things said about the followers of other religions. Instead let us personally seek and find out ourselves the truth about them. As a concrete step in this direction let us establish contact with the persons of other faiths. Let us build friendships with them. In this way we realise that there is no truth at all in the many false things we hear about them. The people of other faiths are persons like you and me. So in this New Year let us look for friends among the followers of different religions and seek their friendships. This way we will be liberated from our mental block of seeing people with fear and we will be able to experience peace without tension.

We can also make similar efforts to find happiness of life as through doing peace activities. We can take two concrete steps to find happiness in life. First, God has blessed each one of us with

innumerable blessings. So instead of counting the things which we do not possess we can count the blessings. Then, we realise that we are much more rich than we consider ourselves.

Second, another way to enjoy the happiness of life is to give up our selfishness and join people like us in the spirit of sharing; and live that spirit of give and take. We get often help from other people. But hardly we take steps to help other people. Let us create a new situation in this New Year. Let us take the lead to help others than seek help from others; and in the spirit of sharing let us enjoy the happiness of life.

Thus in this New Year let us take concrete steps in the pursuit of peace and happiness and experience the real peace and happiness of life. I resolve that taking these concrete steps I will make every effort to walk on the path of peace and happiness. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

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