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The Rainbow Was So Beautiful Because....

Before

Amma first graced the platform of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993. A hundred years before, the same platform in Chicago had catapulted Swami Vivekananda and Sanatana Dharma into international renown. A century later, Amma captured the limelight and hearts with Her luminous presence and illumining words.

"Every other speaker treated the subject of religion and spirituality as if they were two disparate entities. However, Amma's powerful words struck deep into the centre of religion and spirituality, effacing the contradictions, bridging the gap and effecting a harmonious blend of both, thus unfolding their very essence. It was one of the most significant and powerful speeches." So commented an observer at the 1993 Chicago Parliament.



Providence was not content to crown Amma with glory just once. It chose the 2004 Parliament to reveal to the world, yet again, Her divine wisdom. Coincidentally, Amma was in Chicago as part of Her Summer U.S. Tour when She left for Barcelona, the venue of this year's Parliament. It is easy to see Amma as the torchbearer carrying the message of love and compassion to the next plateau in inter-religious dialogue.

Amma had been eagerly sought-after as a speaker for the closing plenary of this year's Parliament, organized by the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR), the Universal Forum of Cultures—Barcelona 2004, and the UNESCO Centre of Catalonia.

Said the Parliament's Chair of Trustees, Rev. Dr. William E. Leshner, "Amma is a very important religious leader and we are very honoured to have Her here as the keynote speaker during our closing ceremony. Amma is very loving, She exudes love and affection for human life and She does it in such a way that people understand the message that She brings."

The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Felix Martin, saw in Amma the "foundations of the future world we are committed to make."

During: July 13th, 2004

More than 3,000 people—including official delegates as well as Amma's Spanish and other European devotees—crammed into the auditorium, which had a seating capacity of 600, to see and listen to Amma.

When She walked onto the stage, loud cheers arose from the packed auditorium. Sharing the dais with Amma at the Edifici Forum auditorium were Rev. Dr. Raimón Panikkar, a respected philosopher from Catalonia, and Mr. Federico Mayor, former Director-General of UNESCO.

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Amma's keynote address was based on the theme, "Pathways to Peace—the Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment." She began Her speech by pointing out that the greatest tragedy of life is not death; it occurs "when our talents and capabilities are under utilized and allowed to rust while we are living." These God-given talents and capabilities, Amma said, are to be shared with the world.

Amma also highlighted the fact that only spiritual power can secure peace and contentment. The source of all problems is within the human mind. Spirituality "puts the remote control of our mind back into our hands... spirituality is the means to restore our inner connection with the Divine." This, Amma said, was "education for life."

Amma reminded everyone of the need to respect diversity in spirituality as much as in life. "All locks cannot be opened with the same key, nor does everyone use the same type of clothing or food." Amma also pointed out that diversity gives rise to beauty, as in the case of the rainbow. Similarly, different religions should join hands, "giving primary importance to humanity and universal human values."

"Love and compassion are the very essence of all religions. Where, then, is the need for us to compete unnecessarily?" Warning against religious bigotry, Amma noted, "The problem arises when we say, 'Our religion is right; yours is wrong.' This is like saying, 'My mother is good; yours is a prostitute!'" She stressed that all religions and philosophies should be strung on the thread of love. "Indeed, love is the only religion that can help humanity to rise to great and glorious heights."

The lack of love and compassion is one of the two types of poverty humans face, Amma said. The other type of poverty is "caused by lack of food, clothing and shelter." She said that "if we have love and compassion in our hearts ... we will wholeheartedly serve those who suffer from lack of food, clothing and shelter."

Poverty, Amma said, is the greatest enemy of humanity. It is responsible for theft, murder, terrorism and prostitution. "Poverty not only affects the body, but also weakens the mind. Such minds are influenced in the name of religion and injected with the poison of terrorist ideals. Looking at it this way, Amma feels that 80% of the problems in society would be resolved if we were to eradicate poverty." She added, "If, in the future, there is a Third World War, let it not be a war between countries, but rather a war against our common enemy, poverty."

Amma also suggested a solution for alleviating sorrow and poverty. "We should commit ourselves to working overtime an extra half hour a day for the sake of those who are suffering—this is Amma's request."

Amma ended Her speech with the following prayer: "May the tree of our life be firmly rooted in the soil of love; let good deeds be the leaves on that tree; may words of kindness form its flowers; may peace be its fruits."

Amma's speech in Malayalam was translated simultaneously into English and Spanish.

After

Her speech was received by thunderous applause and a standing ovation. A boy from the Zoroastrian faith came up to Amma and offered Her two white lilies.

After the closing ceremony, Amma was led to tent that the Sikh community had fashioned after a *Gurudwara*. Here, Amma did what She always done: shower love and compassion on others. As Amma gave darshan to thousands of attendees—including officials, delegates and devotees from Spain and

other parts of Europe—Her disciples started singing bhajans.



“Amma is the greatest living saint on this planet. I’ve met many Masters, but in Amma, I see a combination of unconditional love, ferocious determination and an indomitable spirit. Her example is peerless,” said Andrew Cohen, teacher of Advaita and founder of *'What is Enlightenment?'* magazine.

While giving darshan, Amma was concerned that Her children would be hungry. She asked some of the devotee volunteers from Europe to prepare some food. When She finished darshan at 1:00 a.m., She went straight to where the food had been kept, and asked the volunteers to start serving it. She Herself handed out the *prasad* to Her children. Amma served fast, but kept an eye on the amount of food in each plate, as there was a limited quantity. In some cases, She asked that more food be put into some of the plates, and in others, She asked them to reduce the quantity a little. Always the Mother, Amma did not stop until everyone had received *prasad*, including the 40 who had accompanied Her from Chicago. Not a single morsel of food was wasted.

When Amma left the premises of the Forum Convention Centre, it was not to rest, but to prepare for Her flight to Washington, where She would continue with the Summer U.S. Tour. As always, Amma made an indelible mark in the hearts of those present. More than Her words, perhaps, Her sheer presence had driven home the thrust of Her speech: *“The rainbow was so beautiful because it forgot about itself and lived for the sake of others...”*



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