Is There Ever An Excuse for Violence?
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Is There Ever An Excuse for Violence?

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HINDUISM TODAY is in the business of informing and empowering Hindus and their leaders worldwide. That's all we've done for fifteen years, which makes it all the more painful to admit that Hindus in India made a terrible blunder on December 6th at Ayodhya. Pushed and provoked, we have acted in haste and in hate, unlawfully removing every brick of an abandoned, 464-year-old mosque. What happened was wrong. Why it happened is wrongly understood by the global community.

Hindus have some very real grievances against history's invaders, especially the Muslims whose cruelty and demeaning domination over India's peoples is one of humanity's darkest hours. Who can ask Hindus to forget the destruction of their land, culture and sacred traditions? Before reaffirming that Ayodhya's violence should never have happened, let's look at ten reasons why many Hindu leaders, not us, say it should have:

1. The world must know that this mosque was a monument to past humiliations, built on the very site of a holy Hindu temple demolished by Afghan Emperor Babar's troops, a fact supported by inscriptions found after the December 6th demolition. In modern times the mosque had been abandoned. In fact, in 1949 Hindu stone deities were installed inside, and six years ago the Indian courts opened it to Hindu worship. Muslims have not worshiped there for over 50 years.

2. Hindus made every reasonable effort to resolve the issue, but even the proposal to relocate the mosque was denied. The stalemate continued for years and left no feasible alternative. Not one Muslim was killed in the demolition, whereas millions of Hindus have been killed in holy wars which Afghan kings

initiated against us.

3. People who lament the loss of an uninhabited mosque should remember that over 3,000 active Indian Hindu temples have been converted to mosques, and over 60,000 Hindu temples destroyed by Muslim invaders. This continues today in Kashmir and elsewhere. After December 6th, 260 Hindu temples were set afire in Pakistan, more in Bangladesh. Why does CNN remain silent when Muslims do such things?

4. Of all these thousands of ruined holy sites, Hindus are only asking for the return of four temples at Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura and Somnath. That's a reasonable request.

5. How can Muslims thunder about religious intolerance in Ayodhya when they don't even give non-Muslims the right to vote in Pakistan? To test the Muslim commitment to religious rights, just try building a Christian church in Mecca.

6. Muslims, a 12% minority in India, enjoy more civil protections than the Hindu majority. A Muslim can have two wives and is exempted from paying alimony if divorced, rights denied others. Hindu places of worship are controlled by government appointed trustees, whereas Muslims and other minorities run and control their own places of worship. Minority religious schools get state funding; Hindu schools do not.

7. Muslims invaded India and ruled it for nearly 600 years until the British came. Eventually they wrangled 27% of India's land for themselves, Pakistan, then later seized Bangladesh. They're getting everything, while Hindus get nothing. In a failed attempt to be secular, India is abandoning its essential and historic identity - indeed, its very territory.

8. To understand the intensity of our feelings, the world needs to know that Ayodhya is a holy city for Hindus, like Mecca for Muslims or Jerusalem for Christians and Jews.

9. Rising Muslim fundamentalism in the world especially impacts India - with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, spurred on by petro dollars, dominating its northern borders. Wherever they become dominant, theocracy results, other faiths suffer and religious rights are rigidly restricted. Hindus are not seeking a theocracy. That is against our way. But we will not be denied equal rights under Indian law.

10. Who says religion means you have to suffer injustice? Our past peaceableness and tolerance, claimed to be our highest virtue, is in fact our downfall and undoing. If we are to be men, Hindu leaders say, we must assert ourselves, resist those who treat us as an enemy. In the Mahabharata Krishna declared war when reasonable negotiations failed. Ours is a dharmic cause, not unlike the battles in those days.

Those points are the hard words and feelings of many prominent Hindus today. While we certainly empathize, we must assert that, beyond protecting one's life and nation, there is no excuse for aggressive violence which good people can accept. Even when grievously injured, the Hindu way, the human way, is not to strike out at those who have hurt us. When we do that, we lose everything of value. Like a man who slays his child's killer, we become what we most hate in the world.

The world today does not forgive violence, whatever the provocation. In a bumbling attempt to right real wrongs, Hindu leaders have wronged others. They have put the entire world on alert, sent a message out beyond India's borders, a strident challenge that India is capable - dare we say eager? - of inflicting the same human suffering on others that it suffered for centuries at the hands of invading conquerors.

India is important to the world because it is Hindu, because it is the land of a great and wise spiritual tradition of unequaled breadth and depth. That path is India's most precious gift to humanity, and thus everything we do and say and write about must focus on strengthening Hinduism, strengthening Hindu identity and confidence, strengthening Hindus in all lands.

This last volley of violence cannot strengthen India or Hinduism, any more than the IRA has strengthened Catholicism or Ireland. There is never an excuse for violence. Hinduism is greater than that, and must remain greater. Let Ayodhya be the end of anarchy and revenge, the beginning of reconciliation. The end of

cynicism and self-pity and the beginning of a planned future. Isn't that the spiritual message of Rama, whose birthplace this was? Isn't dharma the Hindu response to even inhumane treatment? Mahatma Gandhi's last word was not a hateful curse for his assassin, but a loving call to "Ram," his God.

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