

[Yoga: Alive and Well in Europe](#)

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## Yoga: Alive and Well in Europe

At 50, Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda Delights Devotees and Dignitaries with His Dynamic Demeanor

"In 1972 I came to the West for the first time," recalls Paramahans Swami Maheshwarananda. "After some years of observing the Western way of life and trying to understand the Western way of thinking, I realized that the world was in urgent need of help." Swamiji moved to Vienna, Austria, in 1973 and has taught his system of Yoga in Daily Lifethere ever since. He explains, "The help that the world needs today can only be provided through an education based on the Vedic principles of natural living and spirituality." His mission to impart this ancient wisdom has won him the love and respect of millions of people worldwide. At Swamiji's 50th birthday, celebrated from August 6-12, the people of Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and the former Yugoslavia showed their overwhelming support of Swami's efforts through a series of festive conferences held in his honor. These events were largely sponsored by the local governments themselves, and several leading politicians either attended or officially sent their accolades. Also participating were many of Swami's overseas devotees from Australia, New Zealand and the USA.

The conferences stressed the theme of tolerance, in keeping with the UN's International Year of Tolerance. According to

Swami, the people of Slovakia and the surrounding, centrally located countries (south of Germany and Poland and north of Greece) have a natural love of different cultures, especially India, with whom Slovakia has very good relations. To demonstrate their cosmopolitanism, they are eager to publicize events such as this, in the hopes that it will inspire tolerance in other countries, leading to more friendship and peace in a region suffering heavily with the Bosnian conflict. This is one reason the government and people here were so eager to honor Swamiji, and it explains the extensive media coverage the conferences won, in newspapers, radio and on Slovakian television's headline news program. But the primary reason is the people's love of Swami and his teachings, specifically his system of Yoga in Daily Life[see sidebar, below], which claims over 200,000 practitioners in this area.

Swamiji boldly proclaimed, "The floodway is open!" He said the enthusiastic governmental participation and the wide media coverage will make it easier to bring the "message of spirituality, peace, harmony and tolerance to more and more people." Here follows details of the meetings and messages from the speakers.

## Meeting Presidents and Ministers

The International Conference on Tolerance in Bratislava, the capitol of Slovakia, was held in the Congress Centre of Istropolis on August 10. Days earlier, Swami had been received by Mr. Michal Kovac, the President of the Republic of Slovakia, who warmly greeted Swamiji on this 50th birthday and extended his best wishes. The Slovak Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Ministry of Culture were patrons of this event.

The Bratislava meeting opened with a letter of congratulations from the President. Then followed a deeply moving performance of classical bharata natyam by Miss Rani Candratara of Vienna, who presented "Mahaganapati Puja." After this invocation to Lord Ganesha, who could be called the God of Tolerance, the many distinguished personalities from the field of politics, sports, culture and education elaborated upon the importance of tolerance and its realization through practice, each adding insights from their arena of expertise.

Mr. Jan Mitosinka, president of the Association of Slovak Top Sportsmen, gave a report on the need for and nurture of tolerance in sports. Dr. Jaroslav Zapletal introduced his model of "Living Economy," based upon the methods of a "gentle economy" that takes the universal order into consideration, thus maintaining harmony with nature.

The Vedic scholar Prof. Kapoor Chand Kulish, a close friend of Swami and editor of the prominent newspaper of Rajasthan, the Rajasthan Patrika, spoke about "Tolerance in the Teachings of the Vedas." Mr. Kulish, an enthusiastic supporter of Yoga in Daily Life, congratulated Swami and said how happy he was to see the seeds sown almost three decades ago now bearing a rich crop--the message of yoga and Vedic culture, which is now spreading all over the world. He pointed out how highly tolerance is placed in Vedic principles and how hallowed it is within all Vedic scriptures. "Being tolerant" he said, "will never make you feel defeated. It will preserve your dignity in times of

hardship. India is a model of tolerance. Nothing has been able to upset her spiritual balance. Yoga is the greatest medium of achieving tolerance. If you are distressed or depressed, please, practice yoga. You will become harmonized."

Kulishji's well-received remarks were followed by another performance of classical Indian dance and a lovely stage production by four gracious young girls from the Yoga in Daily Life School in Olomouc, Czech Republic. The performance, called "Celebration of Love and Light," was an artistic variation of the exercise series called Khatu Pranam from Yoga in Daily Life. Khatu Pranam contains and expands upon the elements of the classical yogic exercise Surya Namaskar.

## Critical Issues

The conferences were not held to merely detail the high ideal of universal tolerance. Some of the speakers represented oppressed communities, bringing with them a sense of the reality, even urgency, of the need for tolerance. Mrs. E. Lackova, the representative of the Roma community of Slovakia, described in dramatic colors the situation of the Gypsy inhabitants of several countries and called for equal rights and emancipation. Professor Pavel Traubner, head of the Slovakian Jewish community, pointed out that there are still occasions of antisemitism and said how damaging this is to society. He advised all to fight against all negativity.

Then two guests of honor, Sri Ashokji Singhal, General Secretary of the VHP, India, and Sri Swami Brahmadevji

Upadhyaya from the Netherlands, were requested to speak. Sri Singhal keenly observed that suppressing others bears frustration which in return causes violence. We should see the ultimate oneness behind the various forms of external appearance--race, color, religion, caste, age or sex. To educate the young so that they can recognize the one consciousness in each individual is the guarantee of harmony in the world, he affirmed.

Brahmadevji Upadhyaya addressed Swamiji as his divine brother. He explained that religion means to realize oneness in variability. If you accept your own religion, but not the others, that is not religious at all. If we recognize all beings as parts of ourself, we will automatically develop tolerance. If there is no love, there is no harmony. Where there is no harmony, there is no tolerance. So love is indispensable for mankind. Lack of love leads to fundamentalism, and fundamentalism destroys the society, he cautioned.

## A Festival of Festivals

In addition to the Bratislava event, a festival, "Colorful India," was held on August 6 in Piestany, Slovakia. On August 9, "Reflections on the Sense of Life" was held in Bratislava and on August 12 the "International Conference on Tolerance" was held in Vep, Hungary. At each meeting Swami gave talks [see sidebar, left] and led the participants in chanting Aumand in profound meditations for world peace. He stressed that if one wants harmony and understanding in their lives, they should start in their own homes.

In the Republic of Hungary, the President, Dr. Arpad Goncz, sent a special letter of greeting in which he expressed his high esteem for Swami's work. Swami was also greeted by Jozsef Simon, member of Parliament; Bertalan Harangozo, vice president of the General Assembly, Vas county; Gyorgy Szabo, Minister of Welfare and Gabor Fodor, Minister of Culture and Education, Hungary. Hungarian folk dancers and singers delighted the attendants with traditional performances. Of course, the lead dancer, Lazlo Csatari, and singer, Miss Klara Katona, both practice Yoga in Daily Life.

## In the Tradition of Masters

Swami Maheshwarananda was born August 15, 1945, in Rupawas, a small village in Rajasthan. He is a disciple of His Holiness Paramhans Swami Madhavanandaji, who is the closest disciple and successor of Bhagwan Sri Deep Narayan Mahaprabhuji of Bari Khatu. Maheshwarananda and his guru, Sri Madhavanandaji, both manage thriving, traditional ashrams in Rajasthan, where Maheshwarananda is also creating the new and magnificent Om Vishwa Deep Gurukul Ashram Education and Research Centre. Explaining his role in this world, Maheshwarananda has stated, "My life has one purpose only: to teach people to understand themselves, to understand and love others, to realize what they have been born for and what the essence and purpose of existence is." He makes it sound easy!

Hinduism Today spoke to Swamiji just before he left for Rajasthan. We asked him what he looks forward to in his next fifty-years. "My deepest wish is that every political, religious

and social leader can become tolerant of all religions, cultures, nations and races. It is my experience that the spirituality of India is the only way to achieve this. Many other ways have failed, but the immortal, divine and ancient message of India will never fail. The media must promote this consciousness of tolerance. Now, people are misinformed, and the media tends to lead them further astray. We must work together to give every human the freedom to believe and choose as they want.

"While teaching the people here, I realized the value of what I had obtained at home and how lucky I was to have been born in that divine atmosphere of India. My aim became clear; to help humanity, in a concrete way, through the ancient wisdom of India, the Divine Light of Bhagwan Sri Deep Narayan Mahaprabhuji and the re-establishment of the values contained within Vedic culture. This knowledge is universal and is meant for all people. Everyone has the right to benefit from it. "

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Sidebar: Yoga In Daily Life:

Yoga in Daily Life is a system of teaching based on the ancient yoga scriptures in accordance with modern scientific knowledge. The program leads from simple body, breathing and concentration exercises to the advanced asanas, pranayama and meditation techniques. These words of Swami Maheshwarananda were excerpted from his talks at the conferences and from a newspaper interview with Vas Nep, "The People of Vas," August 15, 1995.

People today tend to an unhealthy way of life. They have become alienated to the rhythm of nature. Fundamental values have changed. Perhaps the most far-reaching change is that of the traditional role of the family as primary educator and smallest stable group in society. Marriages dissolve in a short time owing to egoism, intolerance and lack of mutual self-discipline. By following the principles of yoga, these serious problems can be solved.

Yoga is the cosmic balancing principle. It harmonizes the physical and mental functions and unites the visible and invisible forces and elements in the universe. Yoga goes far beyond physical and breathing exercises. It is light and bliss. Yoga was not created by holy men. It creates them. Yoga teaches people to give, serve, pray, meditate, protect their society and achieve the highest goal, God realization. It has nothing to do with challenge and competition, abstract theories or philosophizing. It is utterly practical. Yoga in Daily Life is based on five principles: physical, mental, social health, spiritual health and Self realization.

The first step to tolerance in the world should be a pure sattvic vegetarian nourishment, which serves our own spiritual development as well as the protection of the whole of creation. By this, many ecologic and economic problems of the world could be solved. We live on a living planet and do not want Mother Earth to die. Human beings should be the protector, not the destructor. Not only destructive acts destroy, but destructive thoughts as well.

Yoga develops the capacity for tolerance, which should start

first in our own families. The practitioner of yoga naturally overcomes egoism, gives love and radiates peace and harmony. With this, we have already contributed to the equilibrium of the world and the re-establishment of peace and harmony. My experiences are extremely positive. Yoga in Daily Life is being taught all over the country and practiced by thousands. There are excellent yoga societies and instructors who are teaching at schools and universities. Within a few days, the 150,000 textbooks we had printed of Yoga in Daily Life were sold out. For me, Slovakia and the Czech Republic are great examples of tolerance, as they were parted in such a calm and peaceful manner [from former Czechoslovakia], without bloodshed. This can be an example for the whole world.