United We Stand!
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IN MY OPINION

United We Stand!

Why Hindus and Buddhists should help each other

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The destruction of the Buddhist statues by the Taliban in Afghanistan came as a rude shock to all the Hindus and Buddhists of the world. Many non-Hindu and non-Buddhist nations condemned this incident. But the Taliban refused to pay heed to the international outrage and proceeded with its barbaric demolition of the priceless statues. The Taliban leaders were even offered money to halt the demolition or at least agree to sell the statues to some other country. But they refused. One of its ministers said that they would like to go down in history as a "breaker and not a seller of idols." To rub salt in the injury, they also announced their sacrifice of 100 cows to "atone" for a delay in ordering the destruction of these statues. No one could doubt to whom this was directed, since cows are sacred to Hindus.

Why should Hindus feel so strongly about the destruction of Buddhist statues? In reality, not much difference exists between Hinduism and Buddhism. Both believe in reincarnation, karma, vegetarianism, yoga, nonviolence, tolerance and respect for all religious traditions. Both believe in the sanctity of the sacred mantra "Aum." Hindus believe that Gautama Buddha is an avatar (incarnation) of Lord Vishnu and, therefore, worship him. Similarly, even though Thailand is a Buddhist nation, Thais worship the Hindu God Ganesha, who is extremely popular there and whose statues can be found all over the country. All Southeast Asians, most of whom are Buddhist, know and love the Ramayana, a popular Hindu scripture. The largest Hindu temple in the world, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, is equally venerated by Hindus and Buddhists. Actually, Buddhist statues in Hindu temples and Hindu statues in Buddhist temples are extremely common throughout the region. There is enormous goodwill for India among the Buddhists, because the most sacred places connected with Buddhism Sarnath, Bodhgaya and Kushinagar are located in India, while Buddha's birthplace, Lumbini, lies in Nepal.

Unfortunately, this feeling of oneness between the Hindus and Buddhists has not transformed into something that could be beneficial to the interests of these two communities worldwide. Take, for instance, the Taliban demolition of the statues. This move was an

action of religious fanaticism and hatred. It hurt the religious sentiments of over one billion Hindus and 300 million Buddhists worldwide. The condemnations from other Buddhist nations were mild compared with the magnitude of the incident. India was the harshest in its attack on this vandalism. But what was lacking was a forum through which the joint voices of all these nations could be heard. If the Taliban had done a similar thing to a Christian place of worship, the Vatican would have moved more swiftly. They would have demanded a complete halt to even humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan by the UN and used much harsher means to deal with the situation in general.

The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) is an assembly of which almost all Muslim nations are members on a governmental level, and which represents the interests of Muslims worldwide. It is a very powerful organization. But there is no such worldwide association standing up for the rights of Hindus and Buddhists. It is naive to think that non-Hindus will worry about issues which concern Hindus. There may be some genuine sympathy, but that would be about it. There is an immediate need for a Hindu/Buddhist organization to promote and propagate the values of both the Hindu and Buddhist faiths; to encourage more cultural visits and ties between the peoples of the member nations; and to protect the interests of Hindus and Buddhists

worldwide. There is a saying: "United we stand, divided we fall." This applies to us.

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