HIS EXCELLENCY - The Ambassador of Harmony
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Since his appointment as High Commissioner to Britain barely one year ago Dr. L.M. Singhvi has proved to be a most popular and gifted ambassador - winning countless friends for India, global dharma, and Vedic values and culture. Along with the nurturing of Indo-British relationships, task enough for any man, Dr. Singhvi is the unofficial but very welcome ambassador for - and to - one and a half million Britishers of Indian origin. His warm, eloquent expositions and noble bearing have made him, in their eyes, the envoy of their own great heritage.

HINDUISM TODAY: Your Excellency, what is diplomacy?

Dr. Laxmi Mall Singhvi: It is an enterprise in human relationships, in making them more intimate, more real, more lasting.

HT: How can we bridge the gap between leaders and the people?

Singhvi: In the writings of India's seers, saints, or hand-headed political scientists of all ages, you will find the concept of the consent of the governed running like a common thread. India is one of the earliest civilizations which allowed for getting rid of the ruler if he did not earn the trust of the people. This is in contrast to the Western world's concept of divine right of kings. The accountability of the king was fundamental to the legitimacy of his rule, and during the coronation ceremony, he had to take an oath to work for the welfare of the people and earn their confidence.

HT: And the environmental issues...?

Singhvi: The seers of the Rig Veda had a beautiful concept: "the planet Earth." It has caused us great distress when we have regarded nature and life without the reverence we owe them, without filial affection. There is beautiful custom prevalent in many parts of rural India. Before you build a house, you perform a bhumi puja where you ask forgiveness for having to take this patch of Earth, and you reaffirm your part of the covenant with the Earth - to respect her resources. This is based on the four-fold philosophy of universality, of interdependence, reciprocity and respect for the Earth's resources which we find in the Vedas and all later traditions of India. This philosophy taught to think not in terms of frontiers and mine-and-thine, but of the whole Earth as one family, to never overexploit the resources of the Earth, hoard or waste. I said to His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, recently that the ancient Indian civilization went so far as to say that waste constitutes a breach of ahimsa or nonviolence. When I see the amount of waste in the West, I ask myself, how can you be good environmentalists and yet be such wreckless consumerists? We must remember that we have an obligation to the future generations as well. Al this is not some kind of starry-eyed message. These insights, these pearls of wisdom, are the essence and substance of the foundation upon which you want to build a new world.

HT: How can we promote tolerance?

Singhvi: Every system must have some core of fundamentalism. The fundamentalism of the Indian heritage is the fundamentalism of tolerance - of not rejecting others, of accommodating different sects together. India can be [a model] for the world culture which is developing. It is a contribution which the world is expecting from India, and she should not shy away from making.

HT: Can the concept of dharma ever prove effective on a global scale?

Singhvi: We had an older concept, called rita, or harmony permeating the entire solar system, keeping it in balance. When rita applied to our world and social context, it was called dharma, that which maintains and upholds the harmony among members of a family, a community or among nations. In the ancient Shanti Mantras, harmony is a concept of peace, of justice, of doing the right thing. And harmony needs to be nurtured and applied today in every area of life and all interpersonal relationships - be it on the family, professional or global levels. We need a world order of harmony, or low - based on an ever-developing sense of doing what is right. And a sense of serving others! Long ago our ancestors said that

you receive only by giving. Now we have not always lived up to these ideals, but they are there. And if we fail to live up to them, it is our fault and not that of the ideals.

HT: Can wealth be pursued ethically?

Singhvi: One of the purushartas, the four fundamental duties of life, is to sustain yourself and others, while you live and let live, to pursue a way of life which makes for your happiness and that of others. In that context, pursuit of wealth is highly desirable, something that our ancient scriptures and the modern [world] mandate upon us. The four-fold division of - that you must study and acquire skills first, that you must live a householder's life, then grow in detachment, and finally get totally aloof from life - was mostly intended to make sure that our pursuit of wealth, or education, or this or that, is reconciled and synthesized with the total, holistic pursuit of happiness. Pursuit of wealth is a part of the pilgrimage of life on Earth.

HT: What accounts for the relatively high material success of Indians in Britain?

Singhvi: First: a happier family situation. The sense of belonging, of wanting to do something for the family as a whole has made them good achievers. You see, if an individual relates to others, his sense of achievement is augmented, he makes others participants, partners and shareholders in his drive for success. The contribution of Indian women needs to be appreciated also; they have, by and large, been the ones responsible for holding the family together.

HT: How to improve business ethics?

Singhvi: All businessmen should take a hard look at how they operate. For instance, you cannot have a havala business [circumventing foreign exchange regulations] as a legitimate business. You have got to develop a business that helps the people. Aberrations, perversions, distortions must be done away with. There is a whole world of [ethically sound] opportunities before us, and these are the ones we should exploit. I find that Western exponents are themselves digging and delving deep into the Indian heritage for making business and management

more efficient, more humane and more harmonious. Reputation like liberty needs eternal vigilance, constant effort, to preserve. We have to strive very hard to preserve ethical, humane values - putting ourselves in another's shoes, not doing to them what we would not have them do to us, learning to use what we have gained properly, sharing it and plowing it back properly, as Kautilya urged. These principles may appear to be elementary, but they are elemental in their force and efficacy. And they are the way we draw strength from the tradition.

Singhvi In Person

His Excellency was born in Jodhpur on November 9th, 1931, studied law in India and the United States, and is today one of the world's most honored men of law. He is a scholar of the Dharma Shastras, Hinduism's ancient codes of laws and ethics, and regularly invoked their principles in interpreting constitutional law during his years as Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India. He sat in India's Parliament from 1962 to 1967. He is active in, or has founded, countless societies, including UN agencies, for the promotion of law, ethics, human rights, ecology, etc., and is reputed as a distinguished thinker, author, linguist, poet, lecturer, man of peace, and vegetarian. These virtues, together with an outpouring love of mankind and a conviction that the timeless principles he understands so well are the best gift he can make to his fellow humans, are making Dr. Singhvi most appreciated with people of all faiths and backgrounds - including his good friends, Britain's royal family.

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