

## Letter from His Excellency The Ambassador of India C.M. Bhandari

I feel honoured to have been asked by the Polish Mindfulness Association to write a Foreword for the publication of Abstracts of Papers, presented at their first conference on Practical Application of Buddhism on Western Psychology in Warsaw from November 25-27, 2008. I claim no expertise on the subject under discussion but coming from India as I do and also being a student in the practice of India's Vedic traditions, I do share great interest in the deliberations at this unique Conference. I am reminded of Mother Teresa when she had come to Oslo in December 1979 to receive her Noble Peace Prize and in her acceptance speech, had stunned her elite Norwegian audience by disclosing that they too had pockets of poverty. She referred to her visit to the Old Age Homes in Oslo and said how much those residents longed for the warmth of their loved ones who seldom visited them. When we think of Mindfulness, we do not think for our own good or comfort or happiness but that of the others. Only when we forget of the 'I', are we able to think of others. Buddhism too has put the 'I' in the second place and the Sangha or the Order in the first place. The simplest way of presenting the essence of Buddhism is to recite the prayer: Buddhāṃ Shārnāṃ Gacchāmi (I surrender to knowledge or Truth), Dhammāṃ Shārnāṃ Gacchāmi (I surrender to righteous path), and Saṅghāṃ Shārnāṃ Gacchāmi (I surrender to the Religious Order &ndash; the ordained code of conduct). The Sanskrit word Gacchāmi, meaning 'I go', emphasizes the point that I have to follow the teachings myself, apply them on myself and not merely propagate them to others. This is perhaps the most powerful message enshrined in the three-line teachings &ndash; 'I surrender' and not that I ask others to surrender and myself do exactly the opposite. This is how we surrender our Ego. We must know that Mind is not an independent entity but just a screen that reflects our Thoughts or the Ego. Therefore, surrendering Ego automatically implies that the practitioner becomes mindful. The word for religion in Sanskrit is 'Dharma', meaning the righteous path, the righteous act, the righteous conduct, etc. Every individual has to apply it on himself/herself and not seek to impose it on others. If we follow this gospel truth, there would never be religious differences. All religions provide for a code of conduct that helps its followers to become better human beings. The practices in observing the teachings may be different to suit the place, time and community engaged with it, but the objective remains the same, to become a better human being. I have derived immense benefit by imbibing best practices of every religion. I do not see religion as a dogma but as a tool for self-empowerment. Do modern management techniques not tell us to adopt 'Best Practices' globally? The present day understanding of the word religion is best described by R.C. Majumdar, an Indian historian of repute: 'Religion, in its essence, is based largely on intuition and emotion and not on a purely rational attitude of mind, and it is inspired and fed by faith and belief rather than reason and argument. While this offers no great difficulty in appreciating the essence of any particular religious belief, it is a standing obstacle to the historical interpretation of religion and its critical appraisal, which can only proceed on the basis of reason and reason alone' (The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, Page 31, Published by Ramakrishna Mission, Kolkata). I made this slight digression from the conference theme to highlight the point that all religions are working on the psyche of its followers in a bid to empower them to understand human behaviour and existence in this Universe. The ancient Indian texts on human society starting with Manu Smriti have told to cultivate Aachār (self-conduct), Byavahār (inter-personal relationships) and Praayaschit (repentance). Only if the modern society could just understand this simple principle of happy living in life, there would not be any breakdown in social order, which used to be the hallmark of community living until just half a century back in most lands and religious groups. The malady lies in our total dependence on Science and Technology and we want these external tools and agencies to take care even of our natural existence. There could not be a sadder state of affairs than this. We need to go back to basics and realize that happiness does not lie in happiness. Why has meditation become the Mantra for de-stressing? What is Mind? Where do Thoughts come to Mind? What is intellect? What is Memory? What is the Self? What is the Body made of? How can we ensure Body health? There are endless of such questions that are not easy to deal with clinically but the Yogic practices have the power to carry us through experiences that provide answers to all these questions. I must say that the Vedic science is so detailed and so complex that it is beyond most peoples' reach in daily practice and that is why simpler ways have been propounded from time to time by different Incarnations and Gautam the Buddha was one of them. He was born as a Prince but did not enjoy himself in raising the family or ruling his kingdom and instead, spent all his adult life in finding a simple path that would provide peace and happiness to his subjects or the Nirvana (release from cycle of birth and death). He may not have founded the Internet but he did provide the Inernet. I have already presented the essence of Buddhism in three sentences above but his eight-fold path is constituted of just the first two starting steps in the practice of the eight-fold path of Patanjali Yogsutras. The Yogsutras provide a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of the physical, subtle and conscious level existences of the human race. The physical existence feeds on food, water, breath, etc. The subtle level survives on life energy that flows in the body with the breath but is totally different from breath. The life energy, called Praana, which flows through the nerve system. The conscious level survives on Thoughts, which arise from the memory of the individual. That is why the field of psychiatry is mainly based on management of the Mind's wanderings generated by the flow of thoughts. Since meditation is primarily dealing with observing the flow of thoughts and also helping in their management, the twin practices of Praanaayaam and Dhyaan have become the most effective tools for Mindfulness.

I have great pleasure in wishing the Conference informed deliberations. C.M. Bhandari