



VISHVODAYA

THROUGH

VISHVADANA



A. T. Ariyaratne

**May it please,
Your Majesties, the King of Belgium,
and Queen Fabiola,
Your Royal Highnesses Prince Albert,
Princess Paola,
Hon. The Prime Minister,
Hon. Ministers and Members of Parliament,
Chairman and Board of Directors
of the King Baudouin Foundation,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is with a deep sense of humility and renewed faith in the goodness of humanity that I stand before you in this august assembly to accept the King Baudouin International Development Prize.

I consider this to be an occasion where honour and recognition are being bestowed by the Foundation upon all those humble or prudent individuals and groups who have accepted the Sarvodaya Thought and pursued the Shramadana Action to build up a more human society. Therefore, this memorable occasion is a moment of joy not only for me but equally also for several thousands of brothers and sisters who tread the Sarvodaya path. On behalf of all of them ranging from the humblest people in

the backwoods of Sri Lanka to discerning people of advanced societies who gave them fraternal cooperation, I wish to thank the Foundation most sincerely for selecting me to receive this prestigious award.

In the Words of my Supreme Teacher The Revered Gautama Buddha, who dwelt in North India during the Sixth Century B.C.

*"Manôpubbangamā dhammā
Manôsetthā manômaya
Manasā cē padutthēna
bhāsati vā karōti vā
Tatō nam dukkhamanvēti
cakkam va vāhatō padam".*

The meaning of this Pali stanza is :

" Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief ; mind - made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught - ox. "

Then the Exalted One continues with a second stanza :

*"Manôpubbangamā dhammā
Manôsetthā manômaya
Manasa cē pasannēna
bhāsati vā karōti vā
Tatō nam sukhamanvēti
chāya'va anapāyini".*

which means—

“ Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. Mind is chief ; mind-made are they . If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves.”

The lesson we learn from this teaching is that if we can put our mental faculties right then everything else in the world would be put right.

Looking at our human society dispassionately, you will bear with me when I say that in spite of the great affluence and marvels of science we see around us, most human beings are unhappy. Some do suffer due to their excessive indulgence in the pleasures of the senses. Others suffer because they lack the basic needs of a decent life. Yet others suffer due to hierarchical violence imposed upon them by the way their societies are structured or from wars and strife imposed upon them by opposing religious, ethnic, or ideological confederates.

The governments of the world have generally failed to show a way out of this sad impasse. But governments are formed of human beings. If governments have failed then we have to acknowledge that as human beings there is much for us to do. If we are to succeed in our endeavour we have no choice but to accept the importance of re-building man, his immediate family his community and probably his whole environment. This is a great and difficult task fraught with immense challenges but I do believe that there is no easier way.

Such a human re-construction effort has to be sustained locally as well as globally in its thought as well as its practice. The motivation for such an endeavour has to be derived from very powerful reflection relevant to the times we are living in. It should have an unique appeal to the affluent and the deprived in our world so that together they may search for and march towards a common goal of real happiness.

The supreme thought that we have chosen in order to march towards that happiness is Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya is a word coined by Mahatma Gandhi. **'Sarva'** means All ; **'Udaya'** means Awakening. Therefore Sarvodaya means the Awakening of All – the awakening of the entire humanity as individuals, families, rural and urban communities, national societies and as inhabitants of the one and only planet in which all of us live.

What is Awakening ? If I apply it to myself, the human being, it is a three dimensional integrated process that should take place in my personality.

Firstly, I must continuously awaken myself to the real nature of my own psycho - physical entity called my personality. Who am I ? What is the path leading to my supreme happiness ? Is it through increased greed, hatred and ignorance within me that I can find happiness or is it through a process of gradual decrease in these threefold defilements ?

Secondly, how do I awaken to the realities of society with all its complexities ? What should be the nature of the

moral, cultural, social, political and economic environment which will help me to awaken my personality to the fullest ?

Thirdly, how do I awaken myself to the realities of my natural environment consisting as it does of land, water, air and sunshine and various living beings including the plant kingdom ?

If I succeed in getting my personality to awaken in this three-fold dimension then I believe that I am on the path to happiness which will help my inner life to be in harmony with the outer world.

The acceptance of the thought of awakening of all or Sarvodaya motivates one to work not only for one's Personal well - being but also for the well - being of all other human beings. It even extends further. One has to safeguard the purity, survival and sustenance of one's environment. Truth, Non-violence and Self-denial become living tenets in such a person's life.

Why do we as individuals need such an unassailable value system ? Because we need strong personalities in the world guided by such value systems if we are to develop the sense of faith needed to survive as a species on this planet. We have always to remember that we are living in a world where greed in man is manifested in wide-spread extremes of poverty, hunger, squalor and disease, where suspicion and hatred among nations are manifested in the swelling stockpiles of armaments in rich and poor countries alike and where organised ignorance is manifested by the mountains

of propaganda and counter propaganda material distributed the world over in order to force one's sectarian views down the throats of others.

The type of human being we need for the world today is one which has the courage to reject these dreadful systems of organised evil which have made us decivilized ; we need the type of leadership which will strive to re-build a new man who has the strength of character to harness the good that is in all of us. This new man in turn shall re-build our human society and a new human civilization on more abiding values.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is determined to build a new man and a new society. In Sri Lanka we started this process by enabling human beings to come together to share their time, thought and energy for the awakening of a process of sharing which is called Shramadana.

We selected several of the poorest of the poor villages in Sri Lanka and while living and working with the villagers, together we evolved a series of concepts and a methodology to improve their quality of life by their own efforts. Self reliance, Community Participation and a Planned Programme to satisfy their basic human and community needs were three important ingredients in this self-development process.

Sarvodaya defines development as an awakening process. An ever increasing accumulation of goods and services created to feed greed in man is not development. On the

contrary development is an awakening process taking place within individuals, families and communities in which their needs are first satisfied without polluting the mind, poisoning the body, destroying the ecological balance, violating the cultural boundaries, widening prevailing disparities or demeaning human nature.

Development in a true sense should enrich people both materially and spiritually so that qualities of sharing, brotherhood and peace ennoble all people.

The Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka has grown in stature in its 25 years of existence. The participation in its programmes of thousands of people from all walks of life and from all parts of the world has enabled it to attain its present strength. Today the movement is active in over 5000 villages in Sri Lanka alone. People in these Sri Lankan villages belong to different religious, ethnic, linguistic and political groups.

Building a Nation is Building its People. People mean infants, children, youth, mothers, farmers, workers, elders and other adults. Nobody can be excluded, not even the infirm and the disabled. Sarvodaya has designed a development process so that all categories of people are enabled to participate meaningfully in their own development.

Nearly five thousand nurseries for pre-school children, over 300 village re-awakening and coordinating centres, 24 district development education institutes, several agricultural and rural technical services centres, and over

3000 Shramadana camps organised every year, are conducted by the movement as a living and growing experience in its endeavour to build a new man and a new society.

A common characteristic of all these programmes is their indigenous spirituo-cultural base on the one hand and their international dimension for universal application on the other.

The Sarvodaya effort as inspired and encouraged governmental and many non-governmental institutions to adopt several of its concepts and programmes in the services of the nation. Similarly the Sarvodaya message and services have reached many countries both rich and poor because of its universal validity.

I first came to Belgium in the late nineteen sixties. At that time I was surprised at the poor level of understanding of the so-called third-world problems and the indifferences displayed towards these even by people who could claim to be educated.

I remember the days and late evenings I spent with communities in Belgium beginning with the village Balen, and then Merrhout and Zelzate and later with many others to explain the importance for the peoples of our countries to establish communication link of their own so that one day there could be a dialogue on problems we face in each other's situations and the ways and means of helping each other to find solutions to those problems. The day the first

village link-up programme was established between Balen in Belgium and Halmillawewa in Sri Lanka, that was a historic day of joy for me. I was very much moved when I came to learn that I was nominated for this award by one of those pioneers in Balen, Mr. Jef Sleenck who is now a Member of Parliament. Today we have over forty such links in Belgium. The Netherlands, West Germany and Canada followed suit immediately after.

I must mention here with a sense of gratitude the contribution made by the people of Belgium through the National Centrum of the 11-11-11 Campaign and the World Assembly of Youth towards the promotion of our Movement. This was the first ever international contribution our Movement received. Later NOVIB of the Netherlands, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung of West Germany, Helvetas in Switzerland, OXFAM (U.K.), OXFAM (Canada), OXFAM (America), World University Service (Canada), International NGO Division of CIDA (Canada), NORAD (Norway), UNICEF, WHO, ATI (Washington), HKI (U.S.A.), IDRC (Canada), Ford Foundation, DANIDA (Denmark) and ITDG (U.K.) and several other individuals and groups helped the Movement at various stages to reach its present level of development and credibility.

On this historic occasion it is equally fitting that I should refer to the Belgian youths who came to Sri Lanka and worked for the Movement and participated in its activities. They blazed a new trail in international development co-operation where the need for building psychological bridges between our countries was recognised. Today

volunteers from over 30 different countries are working shoulder to shoulder with our workers in the Movement.

With this ceremony at which I receive the King Baudouin Award for International Development in the presence of Your Majesties our mutual concern for the people of our two countries and our commitment for a new world order are further cemented and strengthened.

In our Sarvodaya terminology I wish to call such a friendship 'Vishvadana' which means Universal Sharing. If in your country people suffer due to the ill-effects of an over industrialized technological civilization such a situation should become the concern of us in Sri Lanka too. By the same token if people in my country suffer due to an international system of economic or political exploitation such a situation would no doubt receive your concern too. With mutual respect and understanding we should be able to help each other to overcome our problems by a process of universal sharing.

I do not like the word aid in vogue today. It has a connotation which demeans the giver as well as the receiver. On the other hand a process of sharing the best in our Cultures for the mutual benefit of human awakening towards peace and happiness ennobles both parties. No country in the world could lay claim to what they have achieved as the outcome of their own exclusive endeavour.

Universal Sharing or Vishvadana should invariably lead to Universal Awakening or Vishvodaya. Universal Awakening

is not a distant or illusory ideal. It is with you and me here and now.

What we call 'I' is only continuously changing phenomena of the five aggregates, namely, of form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. These make up the sum total of all human existence. We should not pre-suppose that there is an 'I' as distinct and separate from the 'world'. In reality 'I' and 'world' are part of the experience which arises because of consciousness. Through mindfulness of the arising of phenomena we can liberate ourselves from the illusory conjuring of the mind.

The first, second, third and even fourth worlds of which we are talking are all illusions of our mind. Apart from our consciousness, these worlds do not exist. Therefore let us look at our own minds and try to observe how universal we are, The more I develop a universal consciousness, to that extent I am free. Only true freedom leads to true happiness.

Universal consciousness awakening – Vishvodaya – and universal sharing – Vishvadana – have to develop and progress hand in hand. The one cannot develop without the other. Without progress in both there will never be an end to suffering suspicion, exploitation, strife, wars and misery.

Let us not wait until North - South and East - West dialogues succeed. Let us radiate from our minds and hearts a universal love towards the entire living world. Let every single one of us take a personal responsibility and make a personal commitment to eradicate hunger of a

fellow human being somewhere on this planet, to bring shelter to a family exposed to sun and rain, to help self-development of a community of people who are denied their fundamental human rights and last but not least bring joy of living and mental peace to millions of human beings who are spiritually starved.

This is what I meant at the beginning of my address when I spoke about putting our mental faculties right. This personal commitment on our part will extend itself to our families, groups, institutions and governments so that we become active participants in liberating a universal process where causes that lead to suffering are removed from this earth. When the causes are removed the effects will not be there. This is the true joy of living.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is committed to strive towards this universality. Its target groups are drawn not only from the materially impoverished but extends to the spiritually starved as well. The recognition you have given this Movement re-affirms our faith in the efficacy of our thought and actions. The monetary award you have given will go in toto into a common fund to help and encourage individuals and small groups in Sri Lanka and elsewhere who selflessly work for harmony, development and peace among human communities. I appeal to all concerned human beings, families and institutions, to make a commitment to strengthen this effort. I appeal to all governments of the world and their leaders to invest more of their time and resources to rebuild a new world on the solid foundations of personality, family and community reawakening.

Your Majesties, Your Highnesses, Your Excellencies and distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I in all humility appeal for your continued co-operation in spreading the message of peace, harmony and goodness among all peoples.

May the Whole Living World be Well and Happy !

*Address delivered by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, the
President of the Sarvodaya Movement on
receiving the King Baudouin Award
for International Development at the
presentation ceremony held at the
Royal Palace in Brussels
Belgium on 24th
November 1982.*

