

**Maria Pushpam**  
*Renewal Centre, Kanjirappally*

## PEACE-PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS IN THE CONTEXT OF SANTI-MANTRA

Peace has been the object of search for men from time immemorial. Saints and sinners alike have pleaded and prayed for peace whenever they encountered violence, discord, discomfort, tensions and moments of helplessness. In all such situations, man in all his humility and sincerity, has addressed prayer to God for peace the source of peace. The aim of this article is to set out in clear terms the elements and conditions necessary to real and stable peace in a world fragmented by external and internal conflicts, the antithetics of such human experiences as love and hatred, injury and pardon, faith and doubt, hope and helplessness etc. This polarity marks out strikingly the need for working out a reconciliation within one's own life as a precondition for achieving peace in the world. In this sense peace-prayer has a meaning beyond all religio-cultural boundaries, as can be seen from the present article.

### 1. Peace: The Common Goal

Built on the foundations of *Sruti* (Sacred Scriptures) and nurtured in the garden of virtues, the Indian culture is, indeed, rich with the fragrance of spirituality born out of the seeds of non-violence (*ahimsa*), love, peace and goodness. God-experience is the true foundation of this serenity and peace-experience. A peace-message coming from

---

• Peace-prayer of St Francis Assisi :

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace

Where there is hatred, let me sow love,

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, joy.

And where there is sadness, joy.

Indian Peace-formula:

*Om santi, santi, santi (Om, peace, peace, peace)*

whatever source, either from Christ or St. Francis, would only add greater luster and glory to this Indian spiritual tradition. This comparative study, however, stresses only the point at issue, namely that prayer is invariably connected with the search for peace.

*i. Peace of Christ*

Christ gave peace as his parting-gift to his disciples. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (Jn 4:27) "Peace to men of good-will" was the greetings of the angels to announce the birth of Christ to the shepherds (Lk. 2:14). "Peace be with you" was the greeting of the risen Lord to the frightened disciples (Jn 20:19). The Kingdom of God, the first thing a Christian is duty-bound to seek, is a kingdom which ensures peace. A true citizen of the Kingdom of God ardently desires peace and joy (*shalom, zedaka*). The Kingdom of God demands a receptivity, *metanoia*, a change of heart. The quest for the experience of the immanence of the supreme spirit in the heart is central to the ideal of realizing peace in the Indian tradition. For a Christian peace is the all-inclusive promise of God to his people.<sup>1</sup>

*ii. Similarity in Etymology of Salom and Santi*

The Hebrew word *salom* was the accepted word for expressing greetings and good wishes. It includes everything given by God in all spheres of life and the well-being that comes from God. Throughout the OT, *salom* covers well-being in the widest sense (Jgs 29:20); prosperity (Ps 73:3); bodily health (Is 57:18); contentment, good relations between nation and men and salvation (Is 43:7; Jer 29:11). *Shalom* also designates the fact of being intact, complete, authentic and integrity. It indicates the state of the man who lives in harmony with nature, with himself and with God. Concretely, it is blessing, rest, glory, riches, salvation and life. In NT we find three more new meanings: namely,

---

Divine master, grant that I may not so much seek  
 To be consoled as to console  
 To be understood as to understand;  
 To be loved as to love.  
 For it is in giving that we receive,  
 It is in forgiving that we are pardoned  
 And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life—

1. Cf. Bernard Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, Vol. III (London: St. Paul's Publications 1978), p. 301.

(i) peace as the reconciliation which Christ has brought (Eph 2:14-17) and a harmonious relationship within the whole family (Mt 10:34; Lk 12:51), (ii) peace as the restoration of right relationship between God and man (Rom 5:1) and (iii) peace as the serenity of mind which has its association with joy, patience and self-control.

Etymologically the word *santi* is derived from *śam* which mean to pacify, to calm, to quiet. That which is disturbed is calmed, quieted. The *muni* who devotes his ceaseless thought to the divine glories of the Lord gains supreme peace (Gita V. 29). *Śanti* is synonymous with *mukti* or emancipation. Then he becomes a man of righteousness and obtains lasting peace (Cf. *Gita IX*, 31). Since man is designed as the expression of divine consciousness, the true order is the integration of his being into the divine. This integration is *santi* in India and *salom* in Hebrew—Aramaic tradition.

## 2. Peace-Prayer of Francis Assisi

### i) Origin of the Prayer

This prayer originated before World War I in Normandy. It was printed on one side of a picture of St. Francis holding a book, bearing the clear inscription "this is the Rule of the third Order". In the card there was no indication that the prayer was composed by St. Francis. By the year 1936, in England, an English translation of the same prayer came to light. With the Post-World War II experiences, the prayer became very popular. Since the name of Francis was attached to the prayer it gained brush-fire diffusion throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> In fact the prayer had its origin in a Franciscan milieu; hence it rightly evoked the spirit of Francis."

### ii) Main Divisions

This prayer has three parts. In the first part we find a series of paired statements, namely, hatred-love; injury-pardon; doubt-faith; despair-hope; darkness-light and sadness-joy. The second part is highly reminiscent of the sayings of Brother Giles; and the third part

---

2. Cajetan Esser, *Antonianum* 1970, p. 197.

is a sort of scriptural justification from the dispositions evoked in the preceding parts. The second and third parts together present the preferential options that a man can and must exercise in order to achieve greater perfections.

*iii) Inspiration from Francis*

Francis of Assisi continues to hold a magnetic sway over the lives of so many and is even today held as the prophet of peace and universal brotherhood. He understood the deepest meaning of the call to universal love and sang its praises incessantly. In the course of time, this song touched the heart-strings of humanity and brought about a renewal of faith and new life and was transformed into the universal prayer for peace. He was a seeker of peace. In his Testament he writes "God reveals to me that I ought to say as greetings 'May the Lord give you peace'".<sup>3</sup> Francis began all his sermons with these greetings and call for peace.

### 3. Opposing Ideals and their Reconciliation in Prayer

*i. a) The Cosmic Dimension of Love Versus Hatred*

Assisi had a cosmic vision of love. His love and simplicity had won the hearts of all. The love of this saint for the lowest and rejected members of society was evident even at his funeral. His body was buried in the cemetery meant for criminals according to his wishes and thus the 'hell hole' was transformed and elevated by the presence of his mortal remains. He was filled with a kind of frenzy for the Kingdom of God. The picture of Francis with doves on his shoulders and hands typifies his true life as the embodiment of cosmic love which embraces not only human but also the whole of creation. The poor man of Assisi grasped in its truest sense the idea of Christian charity and put it into practice. His rules and admonitions bear witness to his vision of universal love.

... courtesy is one of the attributes of God and  
courtesy is sister to charity that queneth  
hatred and kindleth love.<sup>4</sup>

3. Marion A. Mabit, *Omnibus of the Sources* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), p. 68.

4. Marion A. Mabit, *Omnibus of the Sources*, p. 82.

b) *Love, the Creative Impetus of the First Being*

The theme of love is fundamental also in Indian thought. By loving all and especially the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed the sages reaped the benefit of more than a million *yajnas* or sacrifices and by that they became the models of *viswaprema*. An inert reed functioning as an instrument of music in the hands of the Lord can animate the universe. The destructive feeling of hatred has no place whatsoever in the life of a devotee in the Indian tradition.

Of one heart and one mind I make you  
devoid of hate  
Love one another.  
Never may brother hate brother  
Or sister hurt sister  
united in heart and in purpose  
Commune sweetly together.

(*Adharva Veda* III.30)

c) *To be an Instrument of Love*

The Franciscan ideal of life would be to become an instrument of love against all discrimination of castes, creeds, religions and of corrupt socio-economic-political realities. This ideal challenges the modern mind haunted by endless worries and cares to make effort to discover in itself the lasting peace and joy by means of interior integration with oneself and with the whole universe.

ii) *Pardon Versus Injury*

Lack of mutual love, trust and acceptance has led the humanity to a state of conflict between persons and these eventually end up in fights, injury and even murders. Men have to be free from hostility, contempt and distrust as well as racial hatred. For this they need to be healed of their injuries of body and mind and this can happen mainly through forgiveness of one another. Christ in his revolutionary statement puts anger, whether nursed secretly in the heart or expressed in passionate or contemptuous speech, in the same category as murder. Both have a killing tendency; a man's soul can be murdered as effectively by contemptuous and angry speech as his body with a knife.

Hence he commands to abandon this destructive way decisively and permanently.

a) *Human Dimensions of Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is not only the noblest of human acts, but it is the act in which man most resembles God. Forgiving is the saving grace that carries with it the balm of the memory of a noble deed of overcoming ourselves in spite of ourselves. This attitude is based on the belief that the breach between man and God cannot be healed until the breach between man and man is healed. One has to accept forgiveness as the basic ingredient of all prayer-life to establish peace in homes, neighbourhood and among friends and to testify that the Kingdom of heaven is with in oneself.

b) *A Sign of God's Pardon*

According to G.K. Chesterton Francis of Assisi walked on this earth like the sign of pardon of God. A forgiving person is humble, meek, lovely in his attitude and leaves peace and joy of heart where before there was unrest, discontent and even hatred. The mission of his friars minors is to heal the wounded, console the broken, and recall them to the love of the Lord. In his rule, he insists that the friars should not offer resistance to injury. He forbids detraction or speaking injuriously of one another.<sup>5</sup>

c) *Ahimsa, the Soul of Indian Spirituality*

The greatest of all Dharma in the Indian tradition is non-injury. All ethical rules were based on this great vow of non-violence. It is not merely non-killing, but total abstinence from causing any pain or harm whatsoever to any living creature either by thought, word or deed (*manasa, vaca, karmaṇa*). *Ahimsa* is the noblest and best of traits that are found expressed in the daily life and activities of perfected souls. It is cosmic love, the mental attitude in which hatred is replaced by love. It is true sacrifice, forgiveness, and true strength (*sakti*). Thus

---

5. Marion A. Habig, *op. cit.*, p. 43

one should be a master of a forgiving heart, forgiving again and again, ready to break down the walls of selfishness and build bridges of understanding with others.

*iii) Faith Versus Doubt*

The turbulent restlessness of our time proves that inspite of all the materialism, all the comforts and pleasures that modern technology brings, the question concerning life's meaning comes up with renewed intensity. Man needs some values which can help him to find reasons for continuing to live in a world of unsteady fortune. The world of today is a world of tottering faith. It is a question of creating faith in one who is doubting, and faith is a source of positive strength and comfort to the doubtful. Doubt and depression occur frequently in one's personal life and pose problems. Hence the prayer, 'make me an instrument of peace . . .,' where there is doubt faith is a very relevant one. A doubting situation is an unhappy state of affairs and it will obstruct all progress in ones personal growth. Unbelief, worry, suspicion, fear and anxiety are the various forms of doubt. It is a symptom of lack of faith in oneself, in the Divine Being and it cannot be dispelled completely until the realization of the Divine is attained. Worry is faithlessness, and anxiety a mark of selfishness.

*a) Faith as a Remedy for Doubt*

Faith is an all-embracing reality in religious existence. It is faith that makes it possible for men to enter and remain in the realm of redemption. Faith in its true meaning is the weightiest act of conscience, the most radical and fundamental option, a total self-commitment, the revealer of truth.<sup>6</sup> Faith is a pledge of fidelity, a firm conviction, a personal surrender and a certitude. Faith persistently rejects anxious care and it trusts in God's care which will bring about tranquility and serenity. Deep faith of Francis in Christ dispelled all his doubts and created a deep well of love in his heart and that, finally, constituted the mystical union with the Divine. This firm and bold faith transformed the young man into a prophet of peace.

---

9. Bernard Haring, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 210

b) *Faith in Indian Perspective*

According to Indian tradition the spiritual realization (*sakṣātkara*) is of prime importance. Faith is an essential discipline (*sadhana*) of realization. There are many *sadhanas* for God-realization and in the scheme of the six-fold virtues (*shatsampat*) needed for inquiry into Brahman, faith occupies an important position and lays a vital function. Faith in the revealed Word of God (*vedas*) and in the master (Guru) are essential for self-realization (*atmasakṣātkara*). In the *Gita* faith is experienced as a loving surrender to the Lord and there faith is strongly linked with *bhakti* (*Gita IV 39-40*). Man is made up of faith and as his faith is so he is. The doubting self has neither this world nor next, nor happiness (*Gita IV 40*).

iv) *Hope Versus Despair*

Today we are threatened by constant tension on the polarity of hope and despair on various levels of life. There is a tremendous decline in the credibility of the traditional orders and attitudes. This is clear from the frequent outbreak of violence and brutality. The aggressive and criminal acts are generally the product of anxieties, frustrated hopes, loneliness, rejection and the sense of utter failure. All these are nothing but a desperate cry for hope. Humanity today is both torn and shaken by the shattering of existing hopes of yesterday and the groping in the sea of anxiety-neuroses of uncertain tomorrow. Hence there is the need of men who can enkindle today the extinguished fires of hope in the heart of humanity.

a) *Hope the Fountain of Life*

Despair is like a spider that settles itself in the centre of the web of man's life and entangles him. Man lives insofar as he has aspirations and plans insofar as he hopes. Hope is founded in the most fundamental human drives, the will to 'live'. Life is hope because it looks to the future, and hope is life because the new birth has already occurred. Each day offers one a chance to be reborn to hope, to enrich his life, develop its potential and build a beautiful future. In the Old Testament we find Abraham who hoped against hope; Job, the man of hopeful, contentment; Moses, the prophet of redeeming hope; and



in the New Testament St. Paul, an apostle of hopeful struggle for the Gospel, and Jesus Christ, the Messiah of hopeful commitment.

b) *Hope in the Life of Francis*

Hope is an oasis to Francis and amid vast arid distances of worldliness, the rock of safety in a turbulent ocean, a sweet assurance that God will protect us at all times and in overflowing measure. Francis suffered rejection, and disappointment on various occasions. He himself passed through a period of despair lasting two years. He felt that some of the learned friars were resisting him. When the Cardinal persuaded him to make concessions he was in a dilemma. He was filled with doubt asking himself, whether he had been deceived. He found heaven mute and became a prey to doubt and indecision. Though he felt the apparent absence of God, he persevered in faith and confidence in Him during that prolonged and agonizing trial. Finally, he received consolation from God and that was a milestone on the path of his spiritual journey. It was in the midst of untold sufferings that Francis composed the most beautiful poem 'canticle of the Sun'. It is the expression of gratitude of a soul jubilant in the experience of peace and salvation.

c) *Indian Accent on Śaranam*

In the crucible of sorrow (*dukkhah*), hope (*śaranam*) is the Indian alternative. The pre-occupation with the problem of suffering may even be said to be its distinguishing mark. According to *Mahabharata*, the world is a battlefield of righteousness where the forces of virtues (*dharma*) and vices (*adharmā*) meet and fight a ceaseless battle. *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* also deal with the same theme. What is more, each individual is a battlefield according to *Bhagavad Gita*. Though there are no specific lines addressed to hope in *R̥g Veda*, most of the hymns addressed to Dawn could be interpreted as songs and praises of hope. Uṣas is the goddess of hope. In our own times Tagore the mystic poet, and Gandhiji, the advocate and practitioner of *ahimsa* are examples and apostles, of hope enriched and enabled by the peace and serenity of the Lord.

v) *Light Versus Darkness*

By birth all men belong to the Kingdom of darkness. Darkness symbolizes objective sphere of activity involving concrete

forms of peril, and the subjective sphere of imaginary fear. There are several situations around us which can blind our eyes and distort our vision. Everyone who, wants to be good to others feels the need of being enlightened and of lighting a lamp, though a small candle, to dispel the darkness instead of just undermining it.

a) *Assisi, the Morning Star*

The Morning Star removes the darkness of the early twilight and it is a symbol of guidance and enlightenment. In the context of the dark ages of Medieval Europe, Assisi's life was a real light to those who were in the pursuit of amassing material wealth. Possessing a glowing fervour of heart and a magnetic personality emanating from his consuming love for men and sympathy for their miseries, Francis dispelled their inner darkness. Thus he may be called the *Morning Star of the Dark Ages*. He was a true trumpet of Moses keen to arouse the world from its slumber and a pillar of strength, able and willing to support the true mission of the Church.

b) *Search for Eternal Light*

The well known ageless, oft chanted *Upanishadic* hymn for light, life and truth expresses the fear of the Indian mind to darkness! For the man in search of Eternal Light, day is the symbol of his whole life-span and of the world's entire history. Day is grace-filled and enlightening through the light of truth. This is what St. John means when he says that there is a light which enlightens everybody who comes in the world (Jn 1:1). Here, in these lines, we find that the 'peace-prayer' is quite in tune with the prayer of the Indian *rishis*.

vi) *Joy Versus Sadness*

The world is beset with numerous kinds of sorrows. This world is described variously as 'the vale of tears', 'the region of sorrows', 'the land of death,' the ocean of grief unlimited, 'a forest of thorns' and so on. The history of mankind has not always been glorious. Christ greeted his disciples with 'peace and joy' and he shared the joy of his resurrection with his disciples who were awaiting the arrival of his kingdom. This kingdom is heralded as the kingdom of joy: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy". Joy is amplified by sharing it with others and by using it in the service of others.

a) *Joy as Divine and Human*

Turning to the Indian scene, we find that the *Vedas*, and *Upanishads* highlight the spiritual outlook as well as the life-style of great sages. According to them, the union with God is man's supreme goal, the supreme treasure and the supreme bliss (*parama ananda*). *Ananda* is joy, bliss (*sukha*) and the delight of love. Brahman is *sat-cit-ananda*. Renunciation of desire is an essential *sadhana* for experiencing bliss. The one who is established in selfconsciousness (*stithaprajna*) is authentic in all his dealings with others and he enjoys perfect harmony of life.

b) *Francis a Happy Man*

Francis is rightly regarded as the cheerful saint. He used to tell the friars that the devil cannot hurt God's servants when they see them filled with holy mirth. "Good cheer and solace" was to be their motto. He was a man of equanimity, a man who curbed all desires and had found his perfect contentment in the self. Interior joy and tranquility are the precious legacy he bequeathed to Christian spiritual tradition. He died singing the exquisite "Canticle of the Sun."

#### 4. The Reconciliation of the Opposites in the Peace-Prayer

A prayer usually includes two things: a set of wishes to be fulfilled by the help of God and a personal experience to be realized in practical life. The fulfilment of the wishes of the praying person depends on how well he discharges his obligations towards his fellow beings. There are preferential options that a man can and must exercise in order to achieve greater perfection. In the second part of the 'peace-prayer' there are such preferential options for a man of peace who expects better results. If the first part of this prayer consists of six wishes, the second part proposes a six-fold option for preferential action. Accordingly, the second part of the prayer has a greater importance, from the point of view of achieving personal realization of the ideals of peace.

i) *The Preferential Poles of Peace*

In the 'peace-prayer' the following are enumerated as options one must choose from in order to experience lasting peace in one's own life: Consoling in preference to being consoled; understanding in pre-

ference to being understood; loving in preference to being loved; giving in preference to receiving; pardoning in preference to being pardoned; dying in order to be born again in eternal life. The *Bhagavad Gita* portrayed the picture of a devotee in almost parallel terms as under:

He who hates no being, who is friendly and compassionate to all, who is, free from the feeling of 'I' and 'mine', evenminded in pain and pleasure and forbearing. Ever content, steady in meditation, self-controlled and possessed of firm conviction with mind and intellect fixed on Me, he is my devotee dear to me (XII. 13; 14).

ii) *The Dissolution of Polarities*

Man is a unity made up of a number of relations, and humanity is called upon to realize a union of many hearts and a oneness of spirit. It is a call for a fraternal, harmonious living together. Peace (*shalom-santi*) is the environment for the realization (*sakṣatkāra*) of this harmony. We have to enter into the wonderful calm of divine peace, by stilling the seething mind and restraining and the ordering the hustle and bustle of our everyday existence.

Peace demands a right relationship with God with the world and with the people. The 'peace-prayer' deals with these relationships. Peace is a shared experience of mutual respect, mutual justice, mutual sympathy and empathy. It starts with the practice of altruism on the part of the devotee. Only by the cancellation of the negative poles through preferential option for the positive can we realize our integrity or wholeness of being.

Peace is also an entry into the "peace of the Lord" and eternal rest (*nidanta santi*). People inscribe the epitaph—"rest in peace"—on the tombs of their dead. May the resonance of the inspiring *santi-mantras* of the Indian sages "*Om santi santi santi*" help a seeker of peace to soar high on the wings of ecstasy of prayer. To all my fellow pilgrims let me wish the *shalom* and *santi* of the *sadguru*!