



## **BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY**

### **Wisdom in Action**

Statement to the

### **Fourth World Conference on Women**

September, 1995, Beijing

One of the first questions asked on encountering the Brahma Kumaris is, "Is this a women's organization?" The answer is "no." Although largely administered by women, it is an organization in which both women and men can participate in a process of self-growth and personal development. The principles of self-worth and self-esteem may be as old as humanity itself, but humanity's persistent abuse of its own kind underscores how little they are practically expressed and the need therefore for personal development. The full realization of the unique, original and inherently good identity of each individual, whether child, woman or man is thus the ultimate goal of the education offered by the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University.

The organization's approach to education for life started in 1936 in a rather revolutionary way when its founder, a respected 60-year-old Sindhi diamond merchant named Prajapita Brahma, surrendered all his property and assets to a trust administered by eight young women. Such an action was unheard of in the Indian subcontinent, and so the organization was confronted by harsh and abusive reactions from a community whose norms were molded by generation after generation in which a woman's life typically involved little more than compliance with the dominance of men.

Prajapita Brahma's vision of the future world was one of truth, justice and equality based on the foundation of a harmony and balance between the sexes. If there were a part of the human race which had been suppressed over a long period of time, then efforts needed to be made to redress this imbalance and opportunities needed to be given to for all individuals, regardless of sex, to demonstrate their inherent capability and equality. Women and young girls were chosen as administrators and spiritual teachers, and the soundness of that decision can be seen in the increasing recognition of the need for the more traditionally feminine qualities of patience, tolerance, sacrifice, kindness and love as core values necessary for personal spiritual growth and human development. Thus, from a group of young women in 1936 the organization has grown to about 350,000 women and men in roughly equal numbers in 1995; and as the year 2000 approaches, another quantum leap can be expected as popular participation in the creation of a better world continues to grow.

This new and evolved role of women was not a question of being "in charge" or in authority. Replacing male chauvinism with female chauvinism can never be a solution, as any form of discrimination or prejudice is destructive to a world which depends on the strategic balance of a full and equal partnership between women and men. This equation of woman and man, girl and boy creating together, collaborating together, and cooperating together is as important as the balance of the left and right brain in the decision-making process required to make this world a better place. If the problems which have arisen through suppression and abuse are to be corrected in a way that will last, then this must be done through a change of consciousness rather than a reversal of positions or roles -- a change of consciousness which takes its birth from a base of spirituality and not from a base of sexuality. The work of the Brahma Kumaris is therefore based on a process of lifelong learning which seeks to revitalize the spiritual dimension of human life, and this is seen as the key to the realization of the full potential of the individual and the broader aim of a better world for all.

The United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women is focusing on the three objectives of Equality, Development and Peace -- themes which have been referred to as "old goals which still have to be attained." The themes, which cut across all areas of concern, include: Empowerment of women; Full and equal partnership between women and men; Mainstreaming women in the development process as agents as well as beneficiaries; and Diversity of women and their situations.

In a world in which the humanity of women and girls is so minimally acknowledged, they have little incentive to value themselves or to have faith or hope in the future; and so humanity is deprived of half the world's potential. This potential, that untapped eternal spring of truth, love and strength which lies at the core of our being, must now be recognized as the umbilical cord through which equality is nurtured by spirituality, development by empowerment and leadership by peace.

## **EQUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY**

Spirituality is the key to freedom and self-respect. Without spirituality there cannot be true equality. It is also an inherent part of our nature -- as are freedom and self-respect. In order to find these inner treasures, one must learn to see oneself as a soul, an eternal spirit, and understand that the body is a vehicle that the soul uses to play its part, expressing its own unique qualities. Experiences, character, powers and virtues all lie within the soul, and it is the soul that gives life to the body so that the individual can enact her or his part in the drama of life. It is the soul then rather than the body which must serve as the foundation of our sense of identity.

Spirituality thus involves going within, transcending the differences between the male and female aspects of identity, and distinguishing between innate and acquired values. The soul is a tiny star of divinity, and its inherent nature includes the strengths of both the female and the male. To be in touch with our inner spirituality and the innate values that go with it is to be aware of and balance both these aspects within ourselves.

Research has shown that the left and right hemispheres of the human brain are used for different functions. The left side deals with matters of logic, analysis and the examination of things of day-to-day existence. It is linked to the characteristics of understanding,

discrimination, logic and comprehension, and the qualities associated with it are courage, decisiveness and action. The right side of the brain deals with things of intuition, creativity and spirituality. It is linked to the characteristics of nurture, sustenance and care and the underlying values of love, mercy and compassion. Just as the human brain has these two aspects, so too the complete human being has both these attributes and energies, and both are equally valuable for the full and equal partnership between woman and man and the integration of humanity as a whole.

If the values that we live by are only those values we acquire from our physical surroundings and circumstances, including basing our identity on being male or female, then we deprive ourselves of half of our innate nature. Spirituality is the practice of opening the inner eye of wisdom and becoming aware of the depth and wealth of our true nature -- a harmonious balance of the best of both the masculine and feminine. This is the first step toward equality, for the spirit has no gender and the soul in the female body is equal to the soul in the male body. Equality is a question of human rights, and human rights derive their authority from the sanctity of the human spirit, not the sex of the body that surrounds it.

The dialectic nature of the human soul must therefore be understood -- that it comprises two distinct parts or opposites that, rather than conflicting or diverging, together make a greater whole. With this understanding and experience comes a conviction of one's own wholeness and completeness which banishes any sense of personal deficiency or inadequacy -- a realization of personal integrity that declines to accept discrimination, whether self-imposed or resulting from the attitudes of others. As is the soul, so too is humanity. Only when individuals learn to see themselves as whole human beings, and therefore not accept any feelings of personal incompleteness or attitudes of discrimination, will society be healed. This shift in consciousness is the bedrock of a transformed partnership with a long-term commitment to people-centered sustainable development. It is an essential first step for the removal of those obstacles which stand in the way of goals such as equal rights, equal responsibilities, equal opportunities and equal participation of women and men.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT**

A further prerequisite for the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of public and private life is the principle of shared power and responsibility. This principle must first be applied in the home if it is also to take root in the decision-making processes in the wider world. Respect and value must be given to the full diversity of women's situations and conditions. Women must no longer be excluded from active participation in the making of key decisions which have lasting effects on the quality of life of the immediate family and of the community as a whole. Such participation and empowerment is crucial to all aspects of development.

The Platform for Action has been described as "an agenda for women's empowerment." Empowerment is not something that is conferred from outside. It is a process of learning about the core values and qualities which lie within and how to use them. Empowerment is not simply a question of externally redressing age-old wrongs or strengthening survival skills. It also involves inner growth and development -- changing our state of mind more than the state of affairs -- since the greatest limitations are those we place on ourselves.

The real surrender of power has taken place on a mental or spiritual level, rather than just physical, and so it is on this level that empowerment must first take place. We have learned to acquire, accept and live by powerlessness, and each one of us must now learn to re-acquire that inner power that is the source of lasting social, economic and political change.

The process of lifelong learning needs to be developed in a way which caters to a healthy educational and social environment and consistently encourages all human beings to foster moral and spiritual values as effective means to eliminate all causes of discrimination, corruption, violence and abuse. Girls and women should be enabled to play leading roles in both formal and informal ways of learning as a means of building self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. Empowerment must not be seen as a means to control others but as the pure expression of human potential and spiritual power. Such spiritual power can develop strength and leadership in the powerless and inspire youth to develop a clearly defined personal identity and dignity that can bestow faith and hope for the growth to future generations.

Deep within the core of every individual is an oasis of spiritual strength known in Hindi as "shakti." In ancient times, women were worshipped for their spiritual attributes and presence, and shakti was the praise of the goddess, the one with spiritual power received directly from God. True empowerment is to forge a direct connection with God, the source of justice, courage and love. That connection balances might with right and results in a power that no one can suppress.

## **PEACE AND LEADERSHIP**

To meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, a new light needs to be shed on the concept of leadership. History has taught us that the achievement of a secured peace is the precondition for a stable and developing society. Women are increasingly establishing themselves as prime players and leaders in a variety of peace initiatives. They are rescuing themselves from being restricted by discriminatory attitudes by discovering that their consciousness (and spiritual identity) need not stay only within the confines of their womanhood (or physical identity). The power of spiritual dignity can expose and burn the roots of the injustice of discrimination far more effectively than physical strength. Once the temporary or false self is renounced, the true self can flourish and be respected and trusted.

Trust in oneself and respect for others lie at the heart of authentic leadership; integrity and high moral standards sustain it. Leaders must constantly look within to take power and support from the essence of their self-worth and then turn outward and see others through the lens of equality and respect.

It is no longer enough, if ever it were, for a leader to lead from the front. What we must learn to do now is to lead from within because effective leadership of any kind is built on inner strength:

- the strength of vision that sees and brings out the best in others,
- the strength of example that inspires action in others, and
- the strength of self-respect that enables one to serve and care for others.

Power no longer lies in the hands of others who make decisions for us, but within our own hearts. To lead then is simply to be visible and noticeable as one who is worthy of others' attention, and a leader is someone who follows her or his own inner principles, conscience and truth.

That inner truth is within each one of us -- woman and man -- and the more we draw strength from it the more we become leaders who inspire others to join us, making us together the co-creators of our common destiny: a destiny in which justice, freedom, equality, respect and individual potential flourish in a world at peace with itself; a destiny for which we have been waiting too long. We have the spirituality, we have the power, we have the leadership. Let us now use them to bring that destiny closer to all members of the human family.

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## **Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University**

The BKWSU is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and in consultative status with UNICEF.  
The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.  
It has been affiliated to the United Nations Department of Public Information since 1980.

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