

ROBERT MULLER

by the author of
MOST OF ALL
THEY TAUGHT ME
HAPPINESS

NEW GENESIS



SHAPING A GLOBAL
SPIRITUALITY

ROBERT
MULLER
NEW
GENESIS

DOUBLEDAY

AUTOGRAFEN
UND SIGNIERTE KOPF

would agree with the prophecy of that spiritual believer in the United Nations, Sri Chinmoy, when he said:

Sri Chinmoy said: "At the end of its voyage, there is every possibility that the United Nations will be the last word in human perfection. And then the United Nations can easily bloom in excellence and stand as the pinnacle of divine-enlightenment."¹

¹ Sri Chinmoy, "The Inner Message of the United Nations," Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture Series, January 1973.

in human Perfection"

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Prayer and Meditation at the United Nations

Prayer, meditation and spirituality at the UN are fascinating subjects. All major world religions are accredited to the United Nations as non-governmental organizations. For example, no less than twenty-four Catholic organizations are represented at the UN. Several of the world's religious leaders have visited the international organization. Most memorable were the visits of His Holiness Pope Paul VI during the General Assembly in 1965 and of Pope John Paul II in 1979. Many religions have special invocations, prayers, hymns and services for the United Nations. The most important examples are those of the Catholic, the Unitarian-Universalist, the Baptist and the Bahai faiths. It is a common practice of the Unitarian-Universalists to display the United Nations flag in their houses of worship. So does the Holy Family Church, the parish church of the UN, with its international reliquary and its many religious services and activities catering to world peace and to the international community.

When it comes to the United Nations proper, one can obviously not say that it is a spiritual organization. How could it be otherwise? For the UN is the creation and mirror of governments, most of whom have "secularized" themselves, i.e., separated spirituality from their daily lives and preoccupations. Nevertheless, prayer and spirituality play an important role in the United Nations. It is a moving experience, for example, to witness the minute of silence for prayer or meditation at the opening of the yearly General Assembly, when men and women from all nations center their minds and souls on the job to be done and when at the end of the Assembly a similar

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minute of silence permits them to reflect on their achievements and failures.¹ Thus, the world's first universal gatherings of nations are placed under the symbol of prayer or meditation. Also, there are many delegates and world servants whose cultures do not make any distinction between spirituality and public service. Then there are those who are deeply attached to their faiths or for whom the United Nations is a new form of spirituality and ethics, while they remain faithful to their respective religions. Some delegates are known to meditate in a place of worship before speaking in a UN assembly. One of the greatest orators ever at the United Nations, Professor Belaunde from Peru, meditated on his speeches in St. Patrick Cathedral. Then we have the UN Meditation Room, which is visited by hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.² We have also a UN Meditation Group led by an Indian mystic. One could tell several moving stories of the spiritual transformation the UN has caused, to the point that this little speck on earth is becoming a holy ground. For example, the rational, intellectual economist Dag Hammarskjöld found God at the United Nations and inspiration for his work as a world servant in the mystics of the Middle Ages. Towards the end, his *Markings* overflow with spirituality and mysticism.

Then there was U Thant, the man from the Orient, who saw no difference between life and religion, who held that spirituality was the highest of all human needs and virtues. The Western distinction between secular and spiritual lives was totally incomprehensible to him. He found in such cleavage one of the principal causes of the world's conflicts, tensions, injustices and disarray. For him, every single moment of life called for prayer, virtue, reverence, gratitude and total communion with humankind and the universe. He was of Buddhist faith, a religion which does not believe in God, and yet he was one of the most spiritual persons I have ever known.

There are many also in the United Nations for whom the cooperation of all nations towards common goals and values is a kind of

¹ Rule 62 of the *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly* provides: "Immediately after the opening of the first plenary meeting and immediately preceding the closing of the final plenary meeting of each session of the General Assembly, the President shall invite the representatives to observe one minute of silence dedicated to prayer or meditation."

² It is symbolic that the new Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, on the first day of his term in January, 1982, visited the UN Meditation Room before proceeding to his office.

NOTE:

MEDITATION
RoomMeditation
Group lead

by Indian

Mystic

new religion, a supreme path or way. They see in the UN the same perennial human dream which has obsessed all great religions and philosophies, namely, the establishment of a peaceful, just, happy, harmonious world society. But there is one difference: while in the past all religions and philosophies were born within specific local, cultural contexts, today we are witnessing the birth of a new philosophy, ideology or ethics which originates from a central place of synthesis where all dreams, aspirations, claims and values of humankind converge. This is new. It constitutes one of the greatest and most exciting attempts at total human fulfillment in the entire evolution of the human race. There has never been anything like it. It is a magnificent story, the beginning of a profound world-wide transformation and transcendence of the human society, a new paradigm of the coming age. True enough, it is as yet a fragile and incomplete story, for the UN largely reflects the priorities and dominant values of our time. For the poorer countries these are food, health, shelter and education, without which there can be no decent life. First one must live, then one can philosophize. In the Western countries too, material, scientific, technological and intellectual achievements generally still occupy the highest priority. They live in an age of rationalism which believes that everything can be explained by scientific, rational means, and this is reflected in the United Nations. But increasingly there are voices which point to other values. U Thant, in particular, was the first great prophet who reminded us of the moral and spiritual dimensions of life and who firmly advocated the development of our moral and spiritual values in order to catch up with rapid technological and scientific advances. For him, the solution of many of our individual, national and international problems rested in the practice of truthfulness, integrity, tolerance, love and brotherhood. And beyond these moral virtues he felt that each individual carried in himself a fundamental question regarding our relationship with the universe and eternity. Hence the paramount place he accorded to spirituality. In his memoirs he wanted to show how spirituality and philosophy should lead, inspire and guide politics.

This point has not yet been reached in the United Nations, but year after year one can observe how moral and ethical issues are being brought to the world organization. A host of codes of ethics and conduct are being elaborated at the UN. The Charter itself is one of the boldest codes of ethics ever drafted for the behavior of

very powerful institutions: armed nations. Although its rules are all too often broken by its members, it nurtures progressively a better behavior, a greater understanding and an improved general moral political atmosphere. Our scientific and industrial age has yielded incredible progress to the human race and we should be immensely grateful for it. But this success perhaps led us to believe that material achievement and intelligence were the apex of civilization. There no longer seemed to be any need for ethics, purity, morality, compassion, love and spirituality. This unnecessary poverty of our age is now being increasingly recognized. Humanity needs also to probe the immense possibilities of its heart and of its soul. This is the great new challenge which has been raised very forcefully by a younger generation tired of war, hatred, hypocrisy and injustices.

I have a Christ in my office. My colleague next door has a statue of Shiva. U Thant had a Buddha in his room. Each of us, be he from North or from South, from East or from West, has his own way of expressing faith in the human race and destiny. When a conflict breaks out any place on the globe, we are all in agreement that it must be stopped, that people cannot be allowed to kill each other, that life must be revered everywhere, that the human person is the supreme care of all our efforts. So, despite its imperfections, the UN is becoming one of the greatest and most beautiful sagas of modern times. King Paul of Greece saw it as a "cathedral where we can worship what is best in each other." Pope John Paul II said that we were the stonemasons and artisans of a cathedral which we might never see in its finished beauty. I would not have dreamed that when I joined the United Nations a third of a century ago. The scope of the UN has widened in every direction, owing to the imperatives of a new global, interdependent world. But people do not really know how vast and vital its activities are. The tapestry of its work encompasses the total condition of humankind on this planet. All this is part of one of the most prodigious pages of evolution. It will require the detachment and objectivity of future historians to appraise fully what happened in the last third of our century and to understand what the real significance of the United Nations was.

Meditation, prayer, dream, hope, vision, faith, guidance, foresight and planning all go hand in hand in so many ways. The tall Secretariat building of the UN is an edifice of human hope and dream jutting into the universe and receiving from that universe increasingly clearer messages. Perhaps the time has come when we will un-

derstand the full significance of our cosmic evolution. Year round people from all creeds and cultures gather at the UN to design a better future for the world. And they will succeed. Our children will know a better future, a more peaceful world, an unprecedented fulfillment of individual human life and consciousness.

Little by little, a planetary prayer book is thus being composed by an increasingly united humanity seeking its oneness, its happiness, its consciousness, its peace, its justice and its full participation in the continuous process of creation and miracle of life. Once again, but this time on a universal scale, humankind is seeking no less than its reunion with the "divine," its transcendence into ever higher forms of life. Hindus call our earth Brahma, or God, for they rightly see no difference between our earth and the divine. This ancient simple truth is slowly dawning again upon humanity. Its full flowering will be the real, great new story of humanity, as we are about to enter our cosmic age and to become what we were always meant to be: the planet of God.

able. The most interesting and impressive symbol is the chapel built in the form of a spiral. Those who conceived Thanksgiving Square considered many ideas including that of a Tree of Life. The concept finally retained was suggested by a monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast. He proposed the idea of the spiral, a mysterious, thought-provoking symbol of infinity. As you stand inside, outside or under the chapel, you are taken by its spirit. In your mind you continue to draw the spiral and you visualize it expanding endlessly into the infinite, encompassing the entire universe! Such is the nature of a simple spiral. In the Orient, particularly in India, it was given in cosmic significance long before Western mathematicians became intrigued by it. In Dallas it is a symbol of East-West brotherhood on the American soil.

There is another notable symbol: the stained windows of the chapel come from Chartres, where they were made by the descendants of the craftsmen who fashioned the marvelous glass panes of the glorious French cathedral. Another feature is particularly dear to me, for it is a dream of mine that has come true. During my many years in the United States, I have often missed the sound of European church bells. Since childhood I have loved the soul-stirring, crystalline voice of morning bells which seemed to come from heaven at that very special moment when the day is born again. Bells too represent vibrations which from the tiniest human community on earth reach into the infinite, as a spiral does for the eye and the mind. Bells call the people to prayer and gratitude for daily life as it is so beautifully represented in the famous French painting *The Angelus* by Millet. Today three magnificent bells cast in Annecy, France, adorn Thanksgiving Square and try to stir the souls of the people.

There is only one rectangular shape in the square: the altar on which stands a beautiful, massive glass candelabrum from Ireland. The Hall of Thanksgiving under the chapel offers the sight of immaculate white columns representing various civic associations. Behind these columns flows a sky-blue illuminated water. In the center of the hall, right under the nexus of the spiral, stands a permanent exhibit with a plaque from the UN Meditation Group. Thus the United Nations is present in the temple calling for the prayers of the visitors for the world's first universal peace organization.

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Plaque from
UN Meditation
Group
(Sri Chinmoy:
the Peace
Meditation
at the
United Nations)



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NEW GENESIS

ROBERT MULLER

Robert Muller, who has been called the philosopher of the United Nations and its prophet of hope, believes the world can—and will—become a better place to live. His many years at the United Nations have convinced him that there is a growing movement, even in the seemingly endless conflict between nations, toward a brotherhood of all peoples. He sees the dawning of a global age.

Here is his blueprint for just that, a framework for an ever-evolving humanity, reaching toward fulfillment and happiness, grounded in the enlightened pragmatism of Teilhard de Chardin. He contends that the nations of the world are, sometimes in spite of themselves, overcoming their narrowness and working together for true peace and respect among all peoples.

He cites as proof of this emerging pattern, world conferences on:

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disarmament, ecology, the aged and the hungry, and the great distances we have come in perceiving the international scope of these problems. Simply the existence of the United Nations, as the first gathering place of representatives from all countries, is heartening evidence that beneath the worst jingoist bluster lie the natural impulses of fraternity and understanding. He also appeals to the world's religions to redouble their efforts to educate their followers to the true birthright of us all—the right to live in peace.

Robert Muller has been serving the United Nations for thirty-three years. During World War II, he fought in the French Resistance and was captured by the Nazis. He has performed diplomatic missions all over the world and today is Assistant Secretary-General in charge of coordinating the work of the thirty-two specialized agencies and world programs of the United Nations.

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No 51

Robert Muller

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First Edition

I dedicate this book to the innumerable good people of this planet who want to live in peace, friendship, freedom and justice, and to enjoy the miracle of life under the generous rays of our sun and the good guidance of the God of the universe.

It is dedicated to all peacemakers who try to heal the antiquated quarrels, divisions and insanity of those who refuse to recognize the oneness of our planetary home and of the human family.

It is dedicated to all my comrades from Alsace-Lorraine who died in the flower of their age during World War II while God granted me the privilege of survival.

It is dedicated to the United Nations, the first universal organization of this planet, from which I have learned so much.

It is dedicated to Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant, my spiritual masters.

It is dedicated to all those who have given me peace, happiness, love and knowledge during my sojourn on earth.

May the kind divine providence help us start a new history and prepare the advent of a new age, a new world, a new philosophy and new human relationships, as we approach the bimillennium.

Let us all coalesce with all our strength, mind, heart and soul around a New Genesis, a true global, God-abiding political, moral and spiritual renaissance to make this planet at long last what it was always meant to be: the Planet of God.

Robert Muller

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FOREWORD

The UN's Prophet of Hope

by Pam Robbins

Pam Robbins is a free-lance journalist writing on religious and humanistic subjects. She lives in Springfield, Massachusetts.

NEW YORK CITY—His office on the twenty-ninth floor of the United Nations Secretariat building gives him a view of more than the skyline. For over thirty years he has witnessed conflicts, crises, natural and man-made disasters around the world.

But Robert Muller remains undaunted. His round face is smiling and his blue eyes serene as he declares cheerfully, "A new world is in the making."

This is not the assessment of one whose ignorance is bliss. Currently serving as Secretary of the UN's Economic and Social Council, Muller has filled numerous posts for the organization, including that of aide to three Secretaries-General. He holds degrees in law and economics from the universities of Strasbourg and Heidelberg and from Columbia University. A native of Belgium who was raised in Alsace-Lorraine, he fought in the French Resistance and was briefly imprisoned by the Nazis.

Muller has collected some of his adventures and insights in a book titled, *Most of All They Taught Me Happiness*.¹ "People who live in the world of action," he explains, too often postpone writing until some future date which never arrives. "Rather than leave nothing behind," he decided to record "a few perspectives, recipes for happi-

¹ New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1978.

A Cosmic-Spiritual View

I have been privileged to work for the United Nations almost since its beginning. As I saw the world organization grow and change over the years, I often wondered what the ultimate destination, the end of the journey, would be. Since its birth the United Nations has grown tremendously in scope and in complexity. It encompasses today virtually all nations, thus fulfilling the dream for human universality of many enlightened philosophers, prophets and thinkers. It has branched out into a variety of specialized agencies and world programs concerned with almost every conceivable facet of our planet and of humanity. The process never ends.

I try very hard to understand what this all means in the total stream of time. Are we carried forward, half knowingly, half instinctively, by the will of God or of other forces towards some ultimate objective? What is that objective? What will the image of the world and of its organization be in a hundred, in a thousand years? In my particular function, whence I can see the totality of the world's problems, I could easily drown in an ocean of complexity and despair if I did not detect a logic, a necessity, a sense, an order in all that is happening. Humans were always faced with a very complex reality: our planet is the most complex one in our solar system and we are the most complex species on it. How could our marriage therefore be anything but complex? For our cave-inhabiting forefathers, nature and life were at least as mysterious and complex as they are for us today, but certain great simplifying means were given to us in order to survive and thrive in the maze. The heroic, astounding notions of God, love, peace, beauty, good, happiness and faith came to our rescue and helped us believe and enjoy the great

gift of life on our miraculous planet in the immense, mysterious universe.

Today, the known, uncovered reality is a billion times more complex than it was for our forebears. We know so much more about the universe, the infinitely large and outer space, and we have penetrated ever deeper into the infinitely small, the atom and its particles. For example, scientists are wondering these days how nature is able to "package" into a few microns genetic codes, the formulas of which are several feet long! Complete universes and living factories of immense complexity are unceasingly created by nature within astoundingly small spaces. The totality of scientific knowledge is today so minute, so vast and so staggering that many people give up the effort to understand. All this knowledge culminates in the United Nations, nowadays the most complex organization on earth.

And this is far from all: in addition to scientific complexity, we are also the receptacle of all social, man-made and cultural complexities: problems between the North and the South, the East and the West, the rich and the poor, regions, races, sexes, nations, occupations, languages, institutions, firms, etc. No wonder then that the UN has become the social laboratory of our earth, the vastest anthropological institute and political crucible there ever was. It has come to a point where it is well-nigh impossible to draw a complete accurate chart of the whole United Nations system and of its innumerable organs. Strangely enough, such a chart would begin to look like a brain—the brain of the human species.

There must be a sense in all this, a clarity, a heart, a bloodstream, a great human aspiration and creative motion. It is not by accident that all this is happening. There must be a law, a will, a structure in it. It is part of destiny, of our perennial forward march towards fuller, happier and godlier lives for all. It is part of our progressive settling down in our planetary home in the universe. It is part of the fulfillment of increasingly apparent cosmic laws.

I tried to find a scheme, an outline, a table of contents for this fabulous human saga which had to fit in one way or another into my mind.

First, I adopted a classification of all our knowledge from the infinitely large to the infinitely small as it had revealed itself to me during my work at the United Nations: the universe, astrophysics, the solar system, the earth's relations with our sun, outer space, the atmosphere, the biosphere, the continents, the seas and oceans, the

mountains, the rivers, the poles, the tropics and equator, the deserts, the earth's crust, the fauna, the flora, the underground sources of water, heat and minerals, down to the microbial world, the genes and the atom. To that cosmic picture of the physical world I added the view of our social cosmos with its innumerable groups, institutions and associations down to the natural family and the individual. For each of these layers of the total physical and human reality I had observed a form of international cooperation somewhere in the United Nations. World cooperation suddenly appeared to me as a prodigious, all-embracing global effort at understanding total reality! What was happening was indeed a progressive falling into place of all scattered, dispersed, uncoordinated human knowledge and efforts all over the planet and over eons of time! As a matter of fact, it is from the United Nations' living world cooperation that my thirst for logic and light was able to discern the cosmic scheme of realities which now presses itself more and more clearly upon us. This was the first facet of the United Nations' cosmic vision.

I had also noticed that humanity was moving increasingly and simultaneously towards a better understanding of our place in time. More and more I saw the United Nations and its agencies concerned with the past: preservation of our elements, of our natural and cultural heritage, of endangered fauna and flora, of genetic material, of antiquities, great landmarks, languages, legends, customs, traditions. Our planet's past evolution and history became ever more precious, as if the human species knew that some losses might impoverish it forever. Simultaneously our concern with the future increased tremendously: there is not a single United Nations agency or program today that does not have at least the year 2000 as its yardstick.

From the infinitely large to the infinitely small, and from the distant past to the unfathomable future, these are the two poles of infinities along which human progress unfolds right under our eyes! It all makes good sense. At our point of evolution, after having groped, tried, erred and learned so much, it is normal that our knowledge should suddenly accelerate and fall into perfect space and time dimensions which always existed and are now becoming increasingly clear to us.

Of course, this mushrooming of knowledge into the four infinities happens to be one of the main causes of our current anxiety. How can we make sense of it? Whom should we believe? What is

relevant and useful in all this knowledge? What will our future be? How should we behave? What does life mean in such a universe? What is in it for the individual?

It was U Thant who gave me the key to it. As a Buddhist he believed that humans would never be able to comprehend the total creation and would forever be condemned to live in mystery and "darkness." But he placed the human person at the center of all preoccupations, the ultimate question being the proper relation between the individual and the surrounding world and universe. Starting, consequently, from the individual, he persistently used and never retreated from a classification of basic human characteristics and needs into physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. What I had observed at the United Nations bore him out and again made good sense: the paramount importance attached to individual human rights, better nourishment, health, shelter, education, peace, non-violence, compassion, help, cooperation, the many programs in these fields—all this was the story of the physical, mental and moral fulfillment of individual human life. And this effort was now worldwide, with priority attached to the largest discrepancies and most crying injustices. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a new magnificent consecration of the individual, and the United Nations Charter was a first code of behavior for nations.

But there was an element missing and it happened to be the one to which U Thant attached the greatest importance: spirituality. He kept repeating that this was the highest and ultimate fulfillment of the human person. How did he define spirituality? For him it was the harmony between the innermost life and the outer life, or the life of the world and the universe. It was a serene comprehension of life in time and in space, the tuning of the inner person with the great mysteries and secrets around him. It was a belief in the goodness of life and the possibility for each human person to contribute his goodness to it. It was the belief in life as part of the eternal stream of time, that each of us came from somewhere and was destined to somewhere, that without such belief there could be no prayer, no meditation, no peace, no happiness. His belief in the long-term improvement of humanity through right individual behavior gave me the last missing piece of the puzzle. Now the universe, our earth and the individual's place in time and in space made sense. What lessons I had received from the United Nations!

Of course I could not fail to notice that this outcome resembled

strangely the visions of all great religions. Even without knowing that the world was round, the great prophets and founders of religions had visions which reached from the infinitely small to the infinitely large and from creation to the apocalypse. The Hindu view of the world and trinity, for example, is fully borne out today by the findings of astrophysicists regarding the birth, the stability and the death of a star or solar system. Each religion again saw the fundamental place of the individual human person in the total reality and considered him as a miraculous entity of divine origin, made of physical, mental, moral and spiritual aspirations. Human fulfillment was never limited to purely material and mental progress as it is so often today. Life was to be also a moral achievement and above all a spiritual transcendence. Religions never shied away from the ultimate, fundamental questions: What is life? Why am I on this earth? What is this strange miracle? What is the sense and purpose of it all? What exactly was I given when I was born and admitted to being, to existing? For what and to whom must I be grateful? What should I do, think, feel and hope for? What does my short-lived but so magnificent spark of consciousness mean in the universe?

Spirituality starts with these questions. This is why U Thant gave it the highest value: it represented in his eyes the deepest questions. The answers, of course, have varied greatly during human history: thousands of religions, (with or without God or gods, e.g., Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism), philosophies and spiritual practices have offered humans their manifold insights and beliefs. Most of them thought that they had the ultimate, total truth or universal principle, and they were all too often prone to fight each other to assert their belief.

So we find that the United Nations is repeating the same old, all-encompassing story. It is forced to it by the nature of things. Year after year, governments increase the scope of the United Nations' work and improve through it their perception of the total reality. This is one of the most prodigious and amazing stories the earth has ever seen. Alas, it is understood by only a very few. But there are two fundamental differences with the past: first, the UN and every nation must integrate the achievements of science and technology within a broader moral and spiritual dimension; and second, while most religions were born in localized, different regions and cultures, this time the story comes from a center, from the place of conver-

gence of all human problems, dreams, aspirations and exertions. The United Nations is the school where they all learn from each other, listen to each other, try to find solutions and define what is good and bad for the whole human race. It is the place of a thousand bridges, the cradle of future world destiny, a lighthouse from which one global signal after the other is emitted to humans all over the globe. It is the birthplace of unique world efforts which help humanity to know itself better and guide its behavior in our planetary home. As Martin Luther King said, "The UN is a gesture in the direction of non-violence on a world scale."

But the religions and the prophets, the poets and the artists did not need a United Nations, a world organization, conferences or experts to help them discover the truth. They saw it straight with their hearts, with an internal vision, with an instinct that went right to the core without getting lost in the convolutions of the mind. They all gave us generally correct codes of conduct, codes of internal serenity, codes of happiness, codes for the highest fulfillment of the miracle of life.

This is why we must listen attentively with all our minds, hearts and souls to what the great religions and spiritual leaders have to say. They have a long experience of human life and often their perceptions are still the quickest and most accurate. This is why we must also be grateful to anyone who gives the work of the United Nations a spiritual interpretation, thus following the examples of Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant, who saw in the United Nations the renewed story of the total dimension of human life. Their message was one of love, compassion, understanding and human fraternity. That message, after many vicissitudes throughout world history, is re-emerging as forcefully as ever, but now on a universal scale. It is a fascinating story and we are probably the first species ever able to comprehend it. I have always been an optimist, deeply in love with humanity, precisely because of its capacity to elevate and transcend itself into constantly higher levels of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual fulfillment. The march towards that transcendence has now started on a planetary scale, and we are privileged to be among its first witnesses and workers. We must cater to it, nurture it, love it, help it grow in beauty and in strength, so as to fulfill the prophecies of all great spiritual leaders. In particular I

would agree with the prophecy of that spiritual believer in the United Nations, Sri Chinmoy, when he said:

"At the end of its voyage, there is every possibility that the United Nations will be the last word in human perfection. And then the United Nations can easily bloom in excellence and stand as the pinnacle of divine enlightenment."¹

¹ Sri Chinmoy, "The Inner Message of the United Nations," Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture Series, January 1973.

6

Prayer and Meditation at the United Nations

Prayer, meditation and spirituality at the UN are fascinating subjects. All major world religions are accredited to the United Nations as non-governmental organizations. For example, no less than twenty-four Catholic organizations are represented at the UN. Several of the world's religious leaders have visited the international organization. Most memorable were the visits of His Holiness Pope Paul VI during the General Assembly in 1965 and of Pope John Paul II in 1979. Many religions have special invocations, prayers, hymns and services for the United Nations. The most important examples are those of the Catholic, the Unitarian-Universalist, the Baptist and the Bahai faiths. It is a common practice of the Unitarian-Universalists to display the United Nations flag in their houses of worship. So does the Holy Family Church, the parish church of the UN, with its international reliquary and its many religious services and activities catering to world peace and to the international community.

When it comes to the United Nations proper, one can obviously not say that it is a spiritual organization. How could it be otherwise? For the UN is the creation and mirror of governments, most of whom have "secularized" themselves, i.e., separated spirituality from their daily lives and preoccupations. Nevertheless, prayer and spirituality play an important role in the United Nations. It is a moving experience, for example, to witness the minute of silence for prayer or meditation at the opening of the yearly General Assembly, when men and women from all nations center their minds and souls on the job to be done and when at the end of the Assembly a similar

very powerful institutions: armed nations. Although its rules are all too often broken by its members, it nurtures progressively a better behavior, a greater understanding and an improved general moral political atmosphere. Our scientific and industrial age has yielded incredible progress to the human race and we should be immensely grateful for it. But this success perhaps led us to believe that material achievement and intelligence were the apex of civilization. There no longer seemed to be any need for ethics, purity, morality, compassion, love and spirituality. This unnecessary poverty of our age is now being increasingly recognized. Humanity needs also to probe the immense possibilities of its heart and of its soul. This is the great new challenge which has been raised very forcefully by a younger generation tired of war, hatred, hypocrisy and injustices.

I have a Christ in my office. My colleague next door has a statue of Shiva. U Thant had a Buddha in his room. Each of us, be he from North or from South, from East or from West, has his own way of expressing faith in the human race and destiny. When a conflict breaks out any place on the globe, we are all in agreement that it must be stopped, that people cannot be allowed to kill each other, that life must be revered everywhere, that the human person is the supreme care of all our efforts. So, despite its imperfections, the UN is becoming one of the greatest and most beautiful sagas of modern times. King Paul of Greece saw it as a "cathedral where we can worship what is best in each other." Pope John Paul II said that we were the stonemasons and artisans of a cathedral which we might never see in its finished beauty. I would not have dreamed that when I joined the United Nations a third of a century ago. The scope of the UN has widened in every direction, owing to the imperatives of a new global, interdependent world. But people do not really know how vast and vital its activities are. The tapestry of its work encompasses the total condition of humankind on this planet. All this is part of one of the most prodigious pages of evolution. It will require the detachment and objectivity of future historians to appraise fully what happened in the last third of our century and to understand what the real significance of the United Nations was.

Meditation, prayer, dream, hope, vision, faith, guidance, foresight and planning all go hand in hand in so many ways. The tall Secretariat building of the UN is an edifice of human hope and dream jutting into the universe and receiving from that universe increasingly clearer messages. Perhaps the time has come when we will un-

derstand the full significance of our cosmic evolution. Year round people from all creeds and cultures gather at the UN to design a better future for the world. And they will succeed. Our children will know a better future, a more peaceful world, an unprecedented fulfillment of individual human life and consciousness.

Little by little, a planetary prayer book is thus being composed by an increasingly united humanity seeking its oneness, its happiness, its consciousness, its peace, its justice and its full participation in the continuous process of creation and miracle of life. Once again, but this time on a universal scale, humankind is seeking no less than its reunion with the "divine," its transcendence into ever higher forms of life. Hindus call our earth Brahma, or God, for they rightly see no difference between our earth and the divine. This ancient simple truth is slowly dawning again upon humanity. Its full flowering will be the real, great new story of humanity, as we are about to enter our cosmic age and to become what we were always meant to be: the planet of God.

minute of silence permits them to reflect on their achievements and failures.¹ Thus, the world's first universal gatherings of nations are placed under the symbol of prayer or meditation. Also, there are many delegates and world servants whose cultures do not make any distinction between spirituality and public service. Then there are those who are deeply attached to their faiths or for whom the United Nations is a new form of spirituality and ethics, while they remain faithful to their respective religions. Some delegates are known to meditate in a place of worship before speaking in a UN assembly. One of the greatest orators ever at the United Nations, Professor Belaunde from Peru, meditated on his speeches in St. Patrick Cathedral. Then we have the UN Meditation Room, which is visited by hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.² We have also a UN Meditation Group led by an Indian mystic. One could tell several moving stories of the spiritual transformation the UN has caused, to the point that this little speck on earth is becoming a holy ground. For example, the rational, intellectual economist Dag Hammarskjöld found God at the United Nations and inspiration for his work as a world servant in the mystics of the Middle Ages. Towards the end, his *Markings* overflow with spirituality and mysticism.

Then there was U Thant, the man from the Orient, who saw no difference between life and religion, who held that spirituality was the highest of all human needs and virtues. The Western distinction between secular and spiritual lives was totally incomprehensible to him. He found in such cleavage one of the principal causes of the world's conflicts, tensions, injustices and disarray. For him, every single moment of life called for prayer, virtue, reverence, gratitude and total communion with humankind and the universe. He was of Buddhist faith, a religion which does not believe in God, and yet he was one of the most spiritual persons I have ever known.

There are many also in the United Nations for whom the cooperation of all nations towards common goals and values is a kind of

¹ Rule 62 of the *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly* provides: "Immediately after the opening of the first plenary meeting and immediately preceding the closing of the final plenary meeting of each session of the General Assembly, the President shall invite the representatives to observe one minute of silence dedicated to prayer or meditation."

² It is symbolic that the new Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, on the first day of his term in January, 1982, visited the UN Meditation Room before proceeding to his office.

new religion, a supreme path or way. They see in the UN the same perennial human dream which has obsessed all great religions and philosophies, namely, the establishment of a peaceful, just, happy, harmonious world society. But there is one difference: while in the past all religions and philosophies were born within specific local, cultural contexts, today we are witnessing the birth of a new philosophy, ideology or ethics which originates from a central place of synthesis where all dreams, aspirations, claims and values of humankind converge. This is new. It constitutes one of the greatest and most exciting attempts at total human fulfillment in the entire evolution of the human race. There has never been anything like it. It is a magnificent story, the beginning of a profound world-wide transformation and transcendence of the human society, a new paradigm of the coming age. True enough, it is as yet a fragile and incomplete story, for the UN largely reflects the priorities and dominant values of our time. For the poorer countries these are food, health, shelter and education, without which there can be no decent life. First one must live, then one can philosophize. In the Western countries too, material, scientific, technological and intellectual achievements generally still occupy the highest priority. They live in an age of rationalism which believes that everything can be explained by scientific, rational means, and this is reflected in the United Nations. But increasingly there are voices which point to other values. U Thant, in particular, was the first great prophet who reminded us of the moral and spiritual dimensions of life and who firmly advocated the development of our moral and spiritual values in order to catch up with rapid technological and scientific advances. For him, the solution of many of our individual, national and international problems rested in the practice of truthfulness, integrity, tolerance, love and brotherhood. And beyond these moral virtues he felt that each individual carried in himself a fundamental question regarding our relationship with the universe and eternity. Hence the paramount place he accorded to spirituality. In his memoirs he wanted to show how spirituality and philosophy should lead, inspire and guide politics.

This point has not yet been reached in the United Nations, but year after year one can observe how moral and ethical issues are being brought to the world organization. A host of codes of ethics and conduct are being elaborated at the UN. The Charter itself is one of the boldest codes of ethics ever drafted for the behavior of

very powerful institutions: armed nations. Although its rules are all too often broken by its members, it nurtures progressively a better behavior, a greater understanding and an improved general moral political atmosphere. Our scientific and industrial age has yielded incredible progress to the human race and we should be immensely grateful for it. But this success perhaps led us to believe that material achievement and intelligence were the apex of civilization. There no longer seemed to be any need for ethics, purity, morality, compassion, love and spirituality. This unnecessary poverty of our age is now being increasingly recognized. Humanity needs also to probe the immense possibilities of its heart and of its soul. This is the great new challenge which has been raised very forcefully by a younger generation tired of war, hatred, hypocrisy and injustices.

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The Need for World Gratitude

When the bells, muezzins and gongs will ring again

Invited to inaugurate the World Gratitude Center at Thanksgiving Square in Dallas, I reflected deeply and found that, although throughout my life I had been grateful for the gift of life, I had never thought much about the concept itself. I therefore turned to any encyclopedias I could find, including children's encyclopedias, but except for a few words on the celebration of Thanksgiving, I could not find anything.

I was puzzled. I consulted other books and found that the word "gratitude" was well covered only in two: the Bible and my old Latin dictionary. I was not surprised to find it in the Bible, for daily prayer and thanksgiving to God are two main pillars of religion. But the several pages of quotations from Latin authors were a revelation. The Romans had established gratitude—*gratia*—as a profound philosophical concept at the root of their empire and Pax Romana. Gratitude to the gods was a central rule of public Roman life. Then I consulted an old German etymological dictionary inherited from my grandfather, and I found that the words "Dank," "thanks," "tak" (Danish), "dank" (Dutch), etc., came from *denken*, "to think," and meant to remember something agreeable that had happened or had been given to you. At the UN I consulted colleagues from different lands, and I got some fascinating answers: the Greek *eukharistia* means "expressing joy" (*kharis*); the Arabic *shukran* is related to "sweetness" (sugar); Chinese *shie-shie* meant originally "to decline," for it was a Chinese custom to decline three times before accepting a gift or favor. The different cultural perceptions of "gratitude" were so interesting that the UN Linguistics Club de-

ecided to collect its etymology and meanings in as many languages as possible.

The concept seems to be deeply entrenched in all cultures, and it is regretful that in our modern world we have almost forsaken it. We must re-establish gratitude at the center of our global civilization. In tomorrow's planetary society, as in yesterday's Roman Empire, it must be a common spirit occupying the hearts of all citizens. We must conceive of a time when all the billions of humans of this planet, upon rising in the morning, will give thanks to God for the gift of life on our beautiful planet. The bells, the muezzins and the gongs must ring again all over the globe and reverberate into the universe our gratitude, our eucharist or expression of joy for the resurrection of life and of another day. We will never grasp the infinity and eternity of God's creation, but we must at least be joyful for seeing and knowing such a vast and marvelous part of it.

When I think of gratitude, the image of Pablo Casals comes again to my mind. I have seldom met anyone who was able so constantly and so deeply to express his thankfulness for life. When he spoke on that subject, he often ended up in tears, lamenting the incapacity of so many people to understand what an incredible miracle life is.

Another master of mine who shared this view unreservedly was U Thant. His religion was quite fundamental to him and in his memoirs he explained which precepts of Buddhism were particularly useful to him as Secretary-General of the United Nations.¹ One of them was the principle of *metta*, or impersonal love or good will which embraces all beings impartially and spontaneously, friends and foes alike. He considered that each human being was a unique manifestation of the miracle of life in the universe and that consequently we should approach all our human brethren and sisters with deep respect, kindness and wonder. He held that one should never harm or diminish another person, not even verbally. Respect, understanding and love were for him the only correct attitudes towards the prodigy of life. He applied this philosophy very strictly, never criticizing or diminishing other people, never doing harm but, on the contrary, rejoicing at the qualities, achievements, prosperity and good fortune of others. When he disapproved of another person, the worst he would do would be to remain silent.

Turning to the thinkers who had an important influence on him,

¹ *View from the U.N.* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1978), Chapter Two, "How I Conceived My Role."

he mentioned Albert Schweitzer and Teilhard de Chardin. Of Albert Schweitzer, he wrote:

In his *Philosophy of Civilization*, Schweitzer first presented the ethic of "reverence for life"—a theme consistently featured in his life and thought, and the central core of most of his speeches and conversations. . . . He stubbornly pressed hard to bring home his point and developed the theme to encompass wider horizons. Man, he said, must not limit life to the affirmation of man alone; man's ethics must not end with man, but should extend to the universe. He must regain the consciousness of the great chain of life from which he cannot be separated. He preached the necessity of "the will to live an ethical life," which should be the primary motivation of man, and he said life should be for a higher value and purpose—not spent in merely selfish or thoughtless actions. What then results for man is not only a deepening of relationships, but a widening of relationships.

U Thant himself left us some very important teachings, in particular his distinction and hierarchy of the four natures and needs of the human person. If we think for a moment of the human body, its incredible complexity, the marvelous functioning of its trillions of cells, miles of vessels, hundreds of automatisms, a miracle such as the human eye and nervous system, we can but stand in awe before this prodigy. The same is true of the brain, a phenomenal natural, organic computer. And what should we say of the heart, capable of love for our children, family, friends, profession and the entire planet, and last but not least, of the soul, hungry to seek the outer limits of the universe and of time, from creation to the apocalypse? When you think that we have been given such attributes, then there can be only one conclusion, namely, that life is indeed a miracle and that to be a human is an incredible privilege in the universe. We must therefore be grateful for it from morning to evening. In the morning when we rise we should look at the sun, as so many of our brothers and sisters still do in countries like India, in the monasteries and in the rural areas of the world. To pray to the rising sun is to perceive the greatness of the universe and of God, and to recognize the resurrection of the day and of ourselves. In the evening, we must pray again and be thankful for all we have received, learned and enjoyed. As Dag Hammarskjöld put it so beautifully:

*To everything that has been—Thanks.
For everything that will be—Yes.*

There is so much to be grateful for. It is our duty to give thanks at all times for our admittance to the festival of life, especially in those countries where hunger and poverty have been eliminated. In ancient times it was said that God punished the ungrateful. This is no less true today. For the rich to complain is really to tempt God. Nothing is more shocking indeed than the murmurs and dissatisfaction of the healthy and wealthy. Think of the 500 million hungry in this world, of the 600 million jobless, of the 450 million handicapped, and you will realize, you the healthy and rich, how thankful you should be. The least we must expect from the rich is for them to put an end to their lamentations, waste, greed and unhappiness and to come to the help of their less fortunate brethren and sisters at home and abroad. The first great step towards a happier world is for the well-to-do to acknowledge that life has been good to them and to be grateful to God. If not, what is the use of working so hard to bring about a more prosperous world? Humanity would be well advised to take inspiration from our American Indian brothers, the Senecas, for whom every moment of life is gratitude to the Great Spirit and who express it so beautifully in their greetings, their traditions and in their story of creation.²

And we must be grateful to all our Promethean artists—musicians like Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, painters and sculptors like Leonardo and Michelangelo, authors like Shakespeare, Dante and Goethe—for having sung the splendor of life and of the universe and making us vibrate in unison with the beautiful, divine, inscrutable forces of the cosmos.

Thanksgiving Square

Thanksgiving Square is a beautiful place situated in the heart of Dallas, amid gigantic skyscrapers. It is dwarfed by the masses of steel, concrete, glass and aluminum that jut into the air all around it. Nevertheless it manages to prove that smallness with a soul can be as great as if not greater than gianthood without one. While the skyscrapers monotonously look alike, the square abounds with individual features, nature, forms and symbols. A chance has been given here to practically every gradient, shape and geometric form conceiv-

² See Elizabeth Tooker, ed., *Native North American Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands* (Classics of Western Spirituality) (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979).

able. The most interesting and impressive symbol is the chapel built in the form of a spiral. Those who conceived Thanksgiving Square considered many ideas including that of a Tree of Life. The concept finally retained was suggested by a monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast. He proposed the idea of the spiral, a mysterious, thought-provoking symbol of infinity. As you stand inside, outside or under the chapel, you are taken by its spirit. In your mind you continue to draw the spiral and you visualize it expanding endlessly into the infinite, encompassing the entire universe! Such is the nature of a simple spiral. In the Orient, particularly in India, it was given in cosmic significance long before Western mathematicians became intrigued by it. In Dallas it is a symbol of East-West brotherhood on the American soil.

There is another notable symbol: the stained windows of the chapel come from Chartres, where they were made by the descendants of the craftsmen who fashioned the marvelous glass panes of the glorious French cathedral. Another feature is particularly dear to me, for it is a dream of mine that has come true. During my many years in the United States, I have often missed the sound of European church bells. Since childhood I have loved the soul-stirring, crystalline voice of morning bells which seemed to come from heaven at that very special moment when the day is born again. Bells too represent vibrations which from the tiniest human community on earth reach into the infinite, as a spiral does for the eye and the mind. Bells call the people to prayer and gratitude for daily life as it is so beautifully represented in the famous French painting *The Angelus* by Millet. Today three magnificent bells cast in Annecy, France, adorn Thanksgiving Square and try to stir the souls of the people.

There is only one rectangular shape in the square: the altar on which stands a beautiful, massive glass candelabrum from Ireland. The Hall of Thanksgiving under the chapel offers the sight of immaculate white columns representing various civic associations. Behind these columns flows a sky-blue illuminated water. In the center of the hall, right under the nexus of the spiral, stands a permanent exhibit with a plaque from the UN Meditation Group. Thus the United Nations is present in the temple calling for the prayers of the visitors for the world's first universal peace organization.

It is most interesting to observe the visitors. There are many people from Dallas, especially young people who work in the skyscrapers

and who come to dream, relax or have their luncheon in the square, sitting on benches or stone walls, under a tree or near a waterfall. Each person interprets the place in his own way, according to his soul, feelings and inclinations. When I said good-by to the chapel a hippy was sitting there immersed in deep meditation, a prayerbook resting on his lap. I asked the attendant who had been the last person registered in her visitor's book. She said:

"It was a little boy who had come a few days ago to pray to God for rain for the farmers. He came back today to thank God for having made it rain yesterday!" And she added that she could tell scores of similar moving stories.

Thanksgiving Square is a place where you can feel the need of the human being to be grateful for the gift of life, that unique, mysterious outcropping from darkness in the void, that flowering of being under sunlight and the stars. Yes, out of a cell, of a seed, as from the center of a spiral or the impact of a sound, we are grown into a cosmos, a universe of our own, sentient, seeing, feeling, thinking, linked with the great chain of being, from the nucleus of the cell to the vast intergalactic universe, capable of loving and encompassing the entire world in our heart, of feeling the divine, and of lifting ourselves to the Godhead on our own will. You can sense this in the square. It is something unique, and I am grateful that the United Nations has been associated with it. I hope that the spirit of thanksgiving for life will someday encompass the entire planet and illumine peace in the hearts of all human beings.

A Prayer to God at Thanksgiving Square

Dear God, I believe that there is an account on which we have failed You utterly—where we have been regressing rather than progressing of late. We have been able to expand tremendously our physical capacities and to transform profoundly this planet. We have been able to widen immensely the reaches of our mind, but we have not even tried to exercise fully the potential of our hearts and of our souls. This we knew to do in the past, but today sentiment, love, morality, understanding, humility and compassion are concepts which are usually derided in political and intellectual circles. The soul too has shrunk. Spirituality has been segregated from most government, public institutions and education. Finally, I am sorry to

say, most of us have forgotten the good habit of saying "thanks" to You.

When I was a little boy, I remember that we had in our dining room the reproduction of a beautiful painting which showed a peasant and his wife in a field praying in the morning at sunrise when the bells were striking. It reminded the children in every home of France that we had to give thanks to You for all the blessings of this earth. When French peasants walked by a wheat field, they took off their caps. Bread was blessed by the father before being broken. Today, this has disappeared from many homes. I seldom see *The Angelus* of Millet any more and for years I have not seen anyone make the sign of the cross on a loaf of bread.

But in this beautiful square in Dallas, a new movement has begun. The dream of restoring gratitude in the world is becoming true. It is an idea whose time has come.

You know, dear Creator, again when I remember my youth, another image often comes back to me. At that time cars often stalled or would slide down the shoulders of the road, and we children were often called to help push them back onto the road. There came a point when we got tired and so we would place a stone or a block of wood behind the wheels. Then we looked proudly back at the distance we had covered. This is what the world must also do. This is what each individual must do. We must count our blessings. We must take inventory of what we have achieved. We must look back, be grateful and then look up at the rest of the road. This is why this world center was created. It must become a world movement, a spiral of the heart and of the soul outreaching for all leaders, educators, media, world servers and people, reminding them that above all we must be grateful to You for what we have received. Each of us in his own way and all together, we must help achieve an unprecedented destiny and fulfillment of the miracle of life on our wonderful planet. To do this, our friends of Thanksgiving Square have committed their help.

Dear God, I pray that we should be able here in this chapel to report to You each year on further progress of the human family, to strike out from our liabilities wars, conflicts, injustices, hatred, dishonesty and prejudice, and to add to our assets new friendships, more love, more world cooperation and a greater recognition of the miracle of life in the incomprehensible, vast universe.

Thank You, O God, for our little planet so rich with life, light,

warmth, beauty, dream, invention, history, diversity and future. Thank You, O God, for the prodigy of life. My heart is smiling at the thought of all Your gifts. Thank You, dear God, thank You very much.