



# WORLD PEACE SUMMIT 2008

The Message of Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Swami Madhavananda

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## His Holiness opens World Peace Summit with Joyous Multicultural Evening

At the opening tonight of the 7<sup>th</sup> Sri Swami Madhavananda World Peace at the Wellington, New Zealand, His Holiness Mahamandaleshwar Paramhans Swami Maheshwarananda was received with a traditional Maori welcome called the “Powhiri”, performed by local Maori children and adults who practice yoga at the Ashram.

The Powhiri is a beautiful ceremony for formally greeting visitors to a Marae, or meeting place. The word Powhiri means a venture into the unknown and the act of exchanging information and knowledge. The Powhiri follows specific stages. The first stage is a “Karanga”, performed exclusively in the Maori language, by women who are skilled in the ceremony, called Kaikaranga. The Kaikaranga last night were Maori yoga student, Nicole, and local Maori leader, Ani. Nicole said having a local leader perform the Karanga following the local protocol, called “Te Atiawa”, was very auspicious. She said “Ani is a ‘Tangata Whenua’, a person of this area, a guardian of the local area and land. Having Ani here brought ‘Mana’ (power) to the ceremony because Ani is a true representative of this area”.

The Karanga is an exchange of calls that take place as the guests move towards a formal meeting area. Nicole explained, “in Maori culture the house, the building, is very auspicious. The house is regarded as a living, breathing, ancestral spirit, the domain of peace, the abode of ‘Rongo’, the God of peace, and the walls hold the thoughts and intentions of people who have occupied it before”.

The calls between Kaikaranga are sung in soul-stirring tones and accompanied by specific hand movements. Nicole described the Karanga as “a process of creating a spiritual pathway and clearing obstacles between visitor and host at the meeting place”. Ani added, “Karanga is about the birth of something new”. Last night, Ani acted as host for the Wellington Ashram, and initiated the Karanga, referring to His Holiness as the “treasure of peace” and calling to Him to “come forth on this occasion of peace”. Nicole represented His Holiness, slowly leading the honoured guest towards the main door of the yoga centre and responding to Ani with the call “we come in peace”.

The Kaikaranga women need to be versed in the history of the tribe and its proverbs. She conveys important information to all present about the tribe, the guests and the purpose of the meeting. Nicole said, “it’s most important for the Kaikaranga to know about the ancestral line of the tribe. The Kaikaranga women establish the intention of the visit, who the guests and hosts are, as defined by their lineage, and acknowledge the tribe’s descendents”. At one stage in the exchange, Nicole called for the blessing of Sri Alakh Puri Ji the originator of the lineage that His Holiness belongs to. Ani said, “I called in the twelve heavens. I was taught Karanga by an old man who said when you call, you send your voice to heaven and ask the heavens to witness your meeting”. Both visitor and host paid their respects to those who have passed away recently as well as to their ancestors. Nicole explained, “when we pay our respects to the ancestors, the words we use may be interpreted as wishing our ancestors liberation. We sing ‘be free’, we don’t want them to stay in an intermediary stage, we want them to be set free”.

As His Holiness reached the front door of the Ashram, he was invited to “Hongi”, to press noses with the hosts, signifying the joining together of host and visitor. Ani said the Hongi represents “the exchange of your breath and my breath and now we are one”. Nicole also said “the Hongi is the uniting of energies on a spiritual and physical level. Once you’ve shared breath you are one people, you come under same umbrella, united in the same intention”.

On entering the Ashram, local Maori man, Matiu, welcomed His Holiness with a formal speech, called a “Whaikorero”, and then sang the “Waiata”, acknowledging the Creator, His Holiness, the people who organised the event and the descendents of the house. Nicole said “the song is an embellishment, a compliment to speech. While speaking, we are in a “Tapu” (spiritual) state, and singing is ‘grounding’. Following tradition, His Holiness then presented the hosts with gifts. The response from Ani was the call “thank you for your gift, your love”.

Deeply moved by the welcome, His Holiness responded with a traditional Hindu prayer, saying “our prayers and adoration to our ancestors, prayers and blessing for our next generation. Dear brothers and sisters, New Zealand is very spiritual and, to the Maori people, I say that I adore, respect and accept your warm invitation and welcoming. Though I’ve been coming to New Zealand for 16 years, this is my first time to experience Maori culture. It reminds us that where there are humans there is beauty, culture and heritage”.

This was a lovely surprise for His Holiness, who has actively promoted the preservation of culture around the world for the past four decades, since he first embarked on a life of ceaseless travel and teaching. His Holiness has been decorated with Croatia’s highest order, the Danica Order of Croatia, and many other awards recognising his tireless efforts to bring peace to warring regions of Eastern Europe and to promote mutual respect amongst people of different cultures and religions. In this respect, His Holiness follows in the footsteps of a lineage of masters who historically resolved conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in India. His Holiness often speaks of and encourages his devotees all over the world to retain their traditions and pass them on to their children saying, “without culture, humanity is lost”. He has established an education and research centre in Rajasthan, India, a landmark building in the shape of the sacred symbol “OM”, to protect and nurture Vedic culture, the root of all world cultures.

Many more cultural performances followed the Powhiri; a group of Maori teenagers dressed in traditional bamboo skirts both charmed the audience with their songs of spiritual unity and pounded the floor with their fierce war dance; a young classical Indian musician sang two heart-stirring ragas, and finally, 50 local Wellingtonians took to the stage for a some joyous songs, finishing with a round of singing “we all love peace, so let us have peace”. His Holiness stood up and joined the choir who sang songs about “mother earth” from East Africa, Mexico, Bolivia and Russia.

It was a beautiful evening for all present. Later, Ani reflected on what it meant to her to meet His Holiness and Karanga for him: “I feel that we’re on a journey to quietly bring in the Maori people, who are ready, to the teachings of Swamiji, because his teachings are not a threat to us. All his teachings are familiar to us, chanting is familiar; the similarities between our paths are comforting”. His Holiness told the Maori people present, “this is your Ashram too” and Ani, Nicole and others said they feel part of the Yoga in Daily Life community.

His Holiness concluded the program with some thoughts on multiculturalism saying, “in the world, many cultures are discriminated against. All fighting in the world is firstly about conflicts between religions and secondly about cultural conflicts. For the past 37 years I have been trying to bring cultures together and you see tonight we enjoyed and respected each other, without conflict. Tomorrow’s World Peace Summit is concentrated on culture, environment, world peace and sustainability. Why do we have a cultural evening to launch the summit? To know, understand, respect and welcome each other. It is written in the Vedas, that the guest is God and you see that concept in Maori culture and many others. Nowadays humans don’t trust each other. They put up signs saying “private property” and warnings that an alarm has been installed. ‘Alarm’: Allah and Ram, both are there ! We have lost our confidence. There is only one human race, there are no differences, no races”.

**End**

**For more information –**

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