Voices From The Mela
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INTERVIEWS

Voices From The Mela

Saints, sages and devout pilgrims share their impressions, insights and comments on the biggest sacred festival ever

The aim should be to establish a kind of life in society by which our whole system of living is improved and our consciousness is raised.

Swami Vishwadevananda Ji

The mother power of this country has to be awakened. It is my appeal to all Hindus to spare money for the education of orphan children.

Sadhvi Kamlesh Bharati

The lower samadhi is a process,but the higher samadhi is not.There, you have left the mindbehind, and the Atman knows itself.

Swami Veda Bharati

The time and space here along with the company of spiritual people improves our sadhana. The energy works more intensively.

Ma Tapasya

The true devotee never sings hisown story. That story remains inthe inner part of him andmakes him blissful.

Sri Girijananda Puri

The youth want proof. If wescientifically explain the teachingsto the youth, they will understand, and they will definitely accept.

Swami Shyam Das

The existence of God does not depend upon our accepting it. There are two ways to know God. One is faith. The other is experience.

Swami Chinmayananda

A seed will turn into a plant only when the earth is made ready. Samadhi is the final stage. Yama and Niyama must come first.

Mahamandaleshwar Santoshi Mata

When we are peaceful in solitude, we remember our mistakes.We see our attachments. This ismy sadhana. Samadhi is the door.

Falahari Baba

Certainly, each of the 70 million people at the Mela had a story to tell. Celebratory reflections were on people's minds, and much of what we heard was not common knowledge, even among ardent Hindus. Here is a sampling from a variety of

pilgrims, interviewed by Hinduism Today correspondent Rajan Malik, including swamis,sadhus, doctors, students, scholars and traders.

Sri 108 Swami Vishwadevananda Ji Maharaj Mahamandaleshwar from the Sanyas Ashram in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, provides a philosophical perspective on the Mela. "Thesangamof the three rivers is giving one message,"

he said. "From different directions, three rivers are coming together here with great force. They have their own respective backgrounds and uniqueness. Before they met, they had their own directions. And after meeting, all the three merged their

identities into one. Even then their flow was not disrupted. We must try to merge ourselves as one. Then our tendencies to look for faults in others will become meaningless." Swami told of how the Kumbha Mela was organized long ago on the banks of meeting

rivers based on a famouspuranicstory in which thedevas (angels), weakened of their hallowed power, were forced to work with theasuras (demons) to churn divine nectar from the sea and thereby regain their strength. Relating this analogy to the

common perils of modern society, Swami stressed that before the nectar came the poison, implying that all efforts to improve troubled sociological conditions are long-range investments requiring patience, a positive attitude and, above all,

an abiding faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. If "breakage, anarchy and injustice" are expected, they will come, he says. "But if there be goodwill among men, opposites can complement each other and society can dwell in happiness."

Swami asserted that the progress for each one portends the progress for all, but opposites must meet and contend with each other in a churning progression. "Today we have gathered in this Kumbha Mela with this historical background," he concluded. "The

message is that for getting the good, churning has to be done. The evil may increase, but it is not propagated like the good. The faith connected to the good, the good action connected with the good, go into making the edifice of the whole

society. And this also leads the society towards good behavior."

Sadhvi Kamlesh Bharati,general secretary of the Sadhvi Shakti Parishad, sees the Mela as a wonderful opportunity

for the advancement of her mission of service. "At the moment, our main objective is to bring thesadhvis[lady saints] together and unite them. To organize this function ofsadhvishere for the last eight days, I have gone from one ashram to another and one

akharato another, inviting thesadhvisfor this event, and the results are here for everyone to see. It has been a great success. And the greatest satisfaction is that we have achieved a level of all-India representation here. Sadhvishave come

from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and many other parts of India."

Swami Veda Bharati, (see page 46) along with several other noted swamis, helped

host the Dalai Lama at this year's Maha Kumbha Mela. Swami talked about the Melas of the past: "The Mela was not only for the purpose of rewriting and exchanging wisdom. It was an occasion for all of the sadhusand yogis to be in one place so that

seekers could find them," he said. "It is by great fortune that a devotee finds a wise teacher, but not every wise teacher can guide every disciple. Depending on the direction of a teacher's wisdom and the level of his wisdom, a teacher is meant to

have certain students. Certain types of students are supposed to be guided by certain types of teachers. It is upon this point that jealousy arises between ashrams and disciples, and gurus become rivals. But this should be seen as something

complimentary. One teacher istaking care of one department of consciousness and another teacher is taking care of another. The student who is ready at one level automatically finds the teacher of that level. The Mela provides a one place where all

seekers can go and be inspired and find their guides and masters." But Swami showed disappointment with more recent Melas, although they have been more greatly attended. "I feel very sad that in this particular Kumbha Mela I am not finding

the phenomenon which occurred in the Kumbha Mela 48 years ago," he lamented. "The discussions on philosophy among the saints andsadhusis not happening, and the tradition looks like it has weakened. But at the same time, I am very conscious that it

is not in the camps of the most well-known figures that this wisdom might be imparted. These discussions could be taking place with someone who is sitting in a small hut somewhere looking ordinary but carrying great wisdom. The real

saints conceal themselves. We have to have eyes to spot them."

Ma Tapasya,a Buddhist nun of the Mahayana tradition, takes a mystical approach to her pilgrimage. "The Kumbha Mela is an

event which I take in an internal way. You see Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. They symbolizeida, pingala andsushumna.In the Kumbha Mela these threenadismerge together and go up to thesahasrara.So I think this is a kind of internal Kumbha Mela. I come

from Taiwan. I have a center where I teach more of a pure science relating to yoga and meditation. It is more acceptable this way. We go beyond the religion but it ends up in opening up the minds of people to all the religions. And then they come here.

Otherwise, they may not accept religion because of prejudice. They go through the science and philosophy and then they trust you. They realize that it is all coming from this religion. So they become open-minded."

Sri Girijananda Puriof the Pandhayati Mahanirvani Akhara says, "In this Melayuga dharmais being observed, and we are living in Kali Yuga [a dark age in the cosmic cycle of time]. Each Kumbha Mela has a different character. In ancient days, Melas

were held to teach how to follow the dharma. But now people are just stuck in praise. Everybody today is in a rat race. But to get away from praise and to get away from jealousy is the true tyaga(renunciation). It is difficult to leave these things. Even this

whole Mela is engrossed in these things. Ã¯My gate should be bigger than others,' and Ã¯my sound should be higher than others, my mike should be more powerful.' Somewhere in all this, spirituality is getting lost. I am not saying thatsadhusare

not here, or devotees are not there. But spirituality has gotten lost while other things are dominating. And the reason behind all this is that it is the Kali Yuga. No one can do anything about it. We have to behave in tune with the times. My message is to be

peaceful. We must stay away from anger and suppress it. Jealousy should be avoided. Jealousy eats the man who is jealous. And it does not harm those he is jealous of. Jealousy is the biggest sacrifice of them all. If jealousy is thrown out of the heart, then the

man can take a dip in the ocean of happiness and peace. But if he does not forsake jealousy, then whether he bathes at the Kumbha Mela or not, he cannot have peace."

Dr. Swami Shyam Das

of the Ramanandi Sri Vaishnav Sampradaya in the Vedic Sanatani tradition, speaks affectionately of the Ganga as the soul of India. He says, "The biggest quality of the Ganga water is that if you keep any other water in a bottle, it degenerates. But if it is

Ganga water it never gets bad, and there is no expiration date. It is this quality of the Ganga that brings croresof people here just to put a foot in it. Ganga is the soul of India and it is the identity of Indian culture. It is our heritage." Swami also

laments that this Mela is not like those of yesteryear. "In ancient times the Kumbha Mela was a medium of interaction among the holy men, and it was a powerful and successful medium, as then there was no communication system as is available today.

Without invitation, saints from all over India would gather at the Mela. The dates were fixed and everyone knew. They would then deliberate among themselves, and their final decisions would slowly be sent across the country to be

implemented. But today there are so many channels of communication working. Media is a big vehicle for carrying information. From the angle of communication, you would have to say that the importance of the Mela has gone down.

But the face-to-face discussions have their own value and impact. My message on this occasion is that all the people of the Earth are one. We see that here at the Mela. Millions of people are gathered here, and there is no struggle and no confrontation among

them. There is a feeling of brotherhood and affection awakened here. There is no city in the world with a population larger than the group gathered here. My dream is to see the globe as one family. Surely, this unity of the Mela will be felt around

the world."

Swami Chinmayananda,who is a member of Parliament and the Bhartiya Janata Party, as well as a senior associate of Parmarth Niketan, sees the Mela through a yogi's eyes

without losing sight of practical application: "From within differences, a way of nondifference and nondiscrimination, a way of unity, friendship and harmony will be allowed to emerge. The challenges and dangers that Hindu society is facing, as

well as problems related to its system and administration, must all be discussed collectively. And after this deliberation, rulers have to be directed. But why is there no unanimity at the Kumbha for this to occur? Why can't we discuss all this? Ego is

coming in the way. Getting above this ego is the search foramrit [nectar]. The ones who are coming from villages do not have any ego. So it is they who will take away the nectar. We are so low before them. We are poor before them. We have nothing to give.

They have come to receive from us, but we have nothing to offer. But still they have taken something. They have taken the nectar. That is because they are good receivers and deserve it. They have come with a two-rupee note as an offering before us. But this

offering is not enough to activate our intellect. We will not even lecture them. But the truth is that they do not need our lecture. They came with a two-rupee note. When we bow our head before statues, they do not give us anything. But the one who bows

takes away a lot. These ones from the village have taken something back. Theamrithas gone to them because they have no ego. What they have instead is faith. Faith is bereft of any questions. There is no scope for any doubt in it. It is doubt-free,

logic-free. This faith would lead to the experience of God and whenever God is available, He is available as an experience. Experience of God is attainment of God. God has nothing to do with miracles. God would never impose Himself on any

one. A father imposes himself on a son. A husband dominates his wife. A mother-in-law does the same with her daughter-in-law. Only God does not impose. Those that do not impose themselves on others--like these villagers here at the Mela--walk the path

that goes to God.

Mahamandaleshwar Santoshi Mata Jiof the Niranjini Akhara says, "The biggest achievement of the Kumbha this time has been that there has been no controversy or fights of any kind.

Croresof people came, and they had their peaceful bath and went back to their homes smoothly. There was no natural or man-made mishap here.Ahkarasalso did not have any quarrel of any sort. All had a peaceful bath. I had heard about the luxury

cottages set up at the Kumbh Mela and the controversy over it, but I have not personally seen them. I would say that so far as our ancient system is concerned, we have not been consumption-oriented but yoga-oriented. Those who have taken

birth on Indian soil have inborn qualities of sacrifice,tapas,etc. Thesesamskarasare given from the beginning to children. And the Indian way of thinking is that we go on pilgrimage to do tapas. We dotapaswith our physical body, mind and intellect, and

that is what brings us

Dr. Kumaris a neurosurgeon who has lived in Canada for 50 years but was born in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. "I attended the Mela in Ujjain ages back," he exclaimed. "But I always had a

strong desire to be here again. My discovery is that in India a lot works on faith. We live on two things in India. One is sunshine and the other is faith in God. If you take either of these from here, there would be disaster. It is this faith which brings us

all together here. There were many impediments in our reaching here, but we made it, and we had a holy dip. It was all due to determination and spirituality. This trip has certified my faith in my religion."

Shaliniis a student from Alwar, Rajasthan, traveling to the Mela with her mother. She had a message for young people: "I would say that the youth have to come here to experience this. They should come here and see for themselves what the spiritual world

is all about. What you see, you have to feel. And you feel it only when you come here. The intermingling of people is wonderful. There are no barriers between the high and the low class. Everyone is very eager to help each other. We are making each other

very comfortable. It has been really a lifetime opportunity, and I am definitely going to share my experiences with my friends."

Jagan Nath Baggais a trader from Allahabad. Understandably, his

perspective on the Mela is business-like: "The total population of Allahabad city is around two million," he said. "Around ten times that population were here in connection with the Kumbha Mela. The press has accused us shopkeepers of making too much profit, but we

have tried to provide everything at a reasonable rate. A friend of mine even lost four hundred rupees per day, because of the extra cost of transportation for his goods."

Yogendra Mishra,a

Sanskrit scholar from Eta in Uttar Pradesh, shared an insightful view of the Mela. "The Maha Kumbha is a reflection of Hindu civilization, Indian culture and Sanatana Dharma. With these feelings in our hearts, we experience the height of dharma

without discrimination. We feel the whole world as a global family. Here, there is no high and low. All is equal. It is a unity of a unique kind."

Dev Tripathiis from Allahabad and is a Sanskrit teacher. He is

proud that the Mela is taking place in his home town. "For the people of Allahabad it is a matter of great honor that the Mahakumbha is being held here. People from all over the world have come. This amoksha dham[place of liberation] and great

benefit is here. The village people have come here with more faith than anyone else, and they have come in great numbers. Each person should come here with the feeling that he is coming on pilgrimage."

Abhay Gupta, Deputy General Manager with a telephone company of the Indian government, is just happy to be here. "I cannot express my experience in words. It is very electrifying to have been a part of such a great event that is taking place now

only after 144 years. We must appreciate that everything is going on smoothly despite such large numbers of people being here. Providing food, milk and lighting for such a large number of people is a big task. All essential commodities are easily

available. My whole family is here. We are all very happy."