



PEACE, THEN PROSPERITY

Prem Rawat, known also by the honorary title Maharaji, has travelled the world for more than four decades, inspiring people to find peace within.

He recently attended a special event at Parliament Buildings in celebration of the United Nations Day of Peace.

Kate Manson interviews Prem Rawat, internationally known voice for peace

Bomb blasts tore through Baghdad, and Fiji was in the grip of a military coup when I spoke to peace advocate Prem Rawat about his recent visit to New Zealand. I have to admit, when your daily paper's filled with stories about an ever more violent and complex world, the idea that lasting peace is possible in the midst of this turbulence seems a little optimistic. Not according to Prem: peace is possible, he says down the line from his LA office, because it is something that is fundamental to every human being; we all have an innate desire to feel peace no matter what our circumstances.

Prem has travelled the world continuously for 40 years promoting his message and was in New Zealand

to present the keynote address at Parliament Buildings on United Nations International Day of Peace. He says the institutions set up in this country to promote peace are valuable and should be an example for the rest of the world; however, we should not lose sight of the fact that "peace is needed on the inside" first and foremost.

Prem first began addressing audiences as a child growing up in the foothills of the Himalayas. By the time he was a teenager, he had been invited to speak in Britain and the US. It is perhaps the simplicity of his message that has struck a chord with people. However, he is quick to point out that the message of peace and self-awareness he brings is not his; it is a message that has been around over the millennia.

-- Kate Manson

KM: You have travelled the world year round for several decades, bringing a message of peace to people. Watching the news, it feels like peace is becoming more elusive each day. How do you see the world situation?

PR: There has always been some kind of a conflict going on in the world, and of course, taking a look at the present, it's only gone up, not down. But by the same token, there's always been a voice for peace. As far as you can go back in history, there has been a voice for peace that has said that if you want prosperity, you need to have peace first. Then you can have prosperity.

Sometimes people feel that we can get to prosperity without any roadmap to it. This is what we have been doing, and history just keeps repeating itself.

We teach history, we document it, but we don't learn anything from it. While so many people have had a passion to end wars, wars get started because we are not paying attention to what is really important. We all want prosperity in our lives, but that will only happen when there is peace.

KM: If we all want this peace, why have we not learned the lessons from the past?

PR: The way I look at it is that we always want shortcuts. To lose weight, we want to be able to just push a button. If we don't feel well, we just want a pill. Peace is a very fundamental thing. We understand that if we don't have electricity, we won't have lights. If our car has broken down, we won't be able to use it. But when it comes to ourselves, we think that we can function fine without peace, that peace is a luxury item.

But it is fundamental to every human being to have peace in their life. And we won't find peace by taking shortcuts. We're looking for it on the outside, and we won't find it because the peace that we really need is within us. We are searching for something, and we are looking for it in the wrong place, not having any idea what it is.

KM: Why did we end up where we are?

PR: Because we don't have that fundamental thing in place, we have built a house of cards. Anything can come along and shake it, and it falls down because it is not on a solid foundation. A person with a solid foundation is strong from within—their strength is inner strength, not just physical strength. When the storms come in life, it is not physical strength that will see you through. It is inner strength. And sometimes we don't pay attention to that inner strength till we need it. Then, when we need it, it's a little too late because we never did anything about it.

KM: New Zealand has had a history of promoting peace. In 1897, a New Zealand woman called for a court of arbitration to resolve international disputes peacefully. This became the World Court. We were also the first to declare a ban on nuclear vessels, and we have a Department of Peace. What more can we do for peace?

PR: To make any step towards external peace is a valiant effort, and I really hope the world looks at New Zealand as an example for that.

But having said that, peace is also needed on the inside. Regardless of whether we are in New Zealand or in a conflict-torn area, we need to

find peace inside because that is the place of permanence. Peace on the outside can come and go, but peace on the inside can stay. That is our strength. That's what makes us who we are, and that strength needs to be recognised. Every person—rich or poor, educated or uneducated, happy or sad—needs to find that peace inside, because at the end of the day, that is what's going to count.

KM: You recently delivered the keynote address at Parliament Buildings in Wellington, on the occasion of United Nations International Day of Peace. What message did you share?

PR: It was the same message—that peace inside is so important for all of us. Of all the things we do, one thing we have to recognise is that we should have peace. This is not my idea. It is an innate calling within everyone. Whatever is happening in their lives, every human being wants to feel peace, and when they feel that peace, it feels good to them. That is a fundamental thing. Socrates said, "Know thyself." That call has always existed: to know yourself, to know your inner strength, to know who you are, to know peace inside of you. And that's the message I deliver everywhere I go.



The Prem Rawat Foundation was founded by Prem Rawat to advance the message of peace around the world and to help improve the quality of life for people most in need. Focusing on food, water and eye

care, it has responded rapidly to numerous crises caused by natural disasters, including providing meals for a month for 9,000 people after the tsunami in Indonesia, for 6,000 people after the earthquake in Pakistan, and for 2,000 people during the famine in Niger. The Foundation has also helped to develop infrastructure for ongoing sustenance, such as building water wells in Ghana and water tanks in Lebanon, and developing a programme to provide nutritious meals to tribal villagers in northern India. The Foundation also holds free medical clinics in India, providing over 10,000 consultations so far and dispensing spectacles and simple medications.

Addressing a distinguished audience at the Australian Parliament



KM: When she introduced you at Parliament Buildings, Dame Laurie Salas, the former Vice President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, said that your message is “valuable, original and profound”. What is it in your message that elicits this reaction from people?

PR: I don’t write my speeches. My message comes from my heart, from within me. It comes from the experience that I have. It is my personal passion. And when something comes from the heart, it touches another person’s heart. It is not my words, it is not me, it is the message. I am just echoing a message that has been echoed for a long time. And it hits home because it is so simple. It is not trying to explain what the universe is or what it feels like to touch infinity. It is not playing games with the mind. This is just a simple message coming from one heart to another, that what I have found in my life, you can, too.

We are taught about our differences, but sometimes we have to look at our similarities. The things that hurt are the same for each one of us. When we are discontented, we feel that discontent and we will do anything to get out of it. That is innate to all of us.

KM: Can you see a time when everyone will feel that peace?

PR: I certainly hope so. I really hope so. That is an inspiration for me. That is what drives me to travel all the time to talk to people. If whatever effort I make contributes to the dream that not just I have, but everybody has, that is good.

KM: After you spoke in Wellington, Marian Hobbs, our MP from Wellington, said that what she retained from your address was how important it is to know ourselves. How important is that and why?

PR: I have a little story. There is an old man sitting on a street corner crying, and a stranger asks, “What is the matter?” The old man says, “I just bought a beautiful new house. I have a beautiful wife and a great job.” So the stranger says, “Then why are you crying?” And the old man says, “I don’t know where I live.”

It’s a bit like that. If you don’t know who you are, who can you connect with in this world? One of the worst punishments in prisons is solitary confinement. People can’t stand to be with themselves. Some people might argue that we are social beings, and therefore, it is important to be with others. That’s fine, but

you also have to know yourself. What is your treasure? You know the goods and bads of others, but do you know what you have inside of you?

So many people judge their lives by what they don’t have, not by what they have. As Socrates said, “Know thyself.”

KM: So, how can we know our self?

PR: Start with the understanding that peace is inside of you. You are not a void. Once you understand that, understand also that there is a thirst within to know yourself. Once you have put those two together, you begin to search for the way to go inside and feel that beauty.

What I say to people is: Search for it. If you find it, great. And if you don’t find it, look me up. I can help. What I offer is four techniques that I call *Knowledge*. These techniques take your attention from the outside and place it inside so you can feel the beauty that is within.

Parliament’s Kaumatua and Kuia (Maori elders) welcome Prem Rawat



KM: Can you tell me a little bit about those techniques?

PR: Once you have made the connection between the two points—that the peace you’re looking for is within you and that you have a thirst for that peace, the techniques can help you. It’s not the techniques that are important as much as making that connection. The rest is easy.

KM: What are the benefits of knowing one’s self?

It is fundamental to every human being to have peace in their life.... We're looking for it on the outside, and we won't find it because the peace that we really need is within us.

PR: One is that you never have to get lost, and if you do, you know how you can get back. And there is the beauty it provides, the joy it provides every day. We do so much to have fun. And there is also the fun of enjoying peace in your life. That is the most fun. There are people who have Knowledge who are in prison and are having fun. There are people who are in the middle of a war, and they are still able to feel peace inside.

KM: Does the search to know one's self and find peace within mean renouncing worldly or material attachments?

PR: That's the myth—that you have to give up everything and then you can have peace within. You don't. Because peace is inside and the world is outside. There's no sacrifice involved.

KM: Many people are interested in living better lives through better health, success and freedom. What, in your view, is true success?

PR: External success is relative. For a person who has a two-bedroom home, having four bedrooms might be success. For somebody who has food only once a day, success could be having food three times a day. But true success, in my opinion, is feeling successful from within. Outside success will vary. We have seen this so often. A person is a multi-millionaire, then there is a big corporate fiasco and it's all gone. They were not really successful because there was no inner strength. There was no understanding of themselves. As the formula clearly states: Peace then prosperity, not prosperity then peace.

KM: When we pursue better health, success and freedom, ultimately, it is to live better. How can we truly live better?

PR: Health, success and freedom are

all important. Yet, ultimately, to live better, we also need to feel within ourselves the joys of health, freedom and success. If we don't, what is the point of having all those things?

It's like having a garden that you never tend to. All the flowers will wilt and the weeds will take over. If you really want to live better, you need a clear idea of what that really means. You need to understand that it includes being healthy from inside: Feeling full. Feeling the joy of every breath. Trying as much as possible to live life consciously every day. That is living better.

KM: You bring a message of peace, and you also advance humanitarian causes. Your foundation, The Prem Rawat Foundation, does a lot of humanitarian work and stands for "Dignity, Peace and Prosperity". Can you tell us about this?

PR: I think every human being needs their dignity. When you offer a hand of help, it has to be on equal ground, never making a person feel you are giving them a handout, that you are better than they are. There are so many people who need so much. So the work we do through the Foundation is to respond to those needs however we can with respect for people's dignity.

We have a beautiful project in Ranchi in northern India. The life span of children there is very short. They're beautiful children, beautiful people. They are happy people, but they have to forage for food. We've built a facility that is run by the tribespeople, where the children are fed good, clean food—local food, not something from the West that they have never seen before. They love it. These are happy kids, but they need that little break. And with great dignity and great care, that break comes to them. The day we opened

this facility, there were hundreds of kids. They were each given a portion, and they wanted seconds.

KM: Fantastic. That must've put a smile on your face.

PR: Yes, it did.

KM: You have said that we all have a fundamental need to feel peace and contentment. On a practical level, what can we actually do to realise this?

PR: First of all, we can begin by understanding that what we are looking for is within us, so we don't have to stress about it. It is a matter of finding our thirst and understanding that what we have been given is so wonderful, so incredible. And it is being given every day. Every breath that comes, indeed, is a miracle. That, I think, is the most important thing—a very practical level to begin with.

KM: Lovely. Thank you. I appreciate your time, and it's been a fascinating conversation.

PR: Thank you very much.

Prem Rawat's message has a sort of Kiwi "do it yourself" element to it that has obviously been embraced enthusiastically by people both here and overseas.

And indeed, it is an exciting thought that we can, one by one, go some way to bring about a world where peace is the norm. While the idea of the world's entire population finding the peace that Prem says is within each of us may seem idealistic to some, it's pretty clear he's not suggesting it is going to happen any time soon. But he believes it is possible.

Imagine how good it will be to sit down and open your daily paper when that day arrives.

To discover more:
<http://www.tprf.org>

