

cial projects.

Certainly the most significant concrete achievement on the sidelines of the summit, was the agreement struck by Putin and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, for talks, later this month, on connecting the inter-Korean railroad with the Trans-Siberian Railroad system. The talks, to be held at the prime ministerial level, will also discuss construction of fiber optics telecommunications cables, energy and power supplies, as well as the development of Russia's Nakhodka industrial complex and Irkutsk gas field. South Korean Presidential spokesman Park Jun-young said, "The two leaders shared the opinion that the two Koreas and Russia will be able to maximize mutual benefits through close economic cooperation," and that, "on the basis of this agreement, regional economic cooperation involving China, Japan, and Mongolia will become possible."

The two Koreas are taking steps to restore two key railroads, one running from Seoul in South Korea, to the northwestern city of Shinuiju in North Korea, and then to China, and the second, from Seoul to the northeastern city of Wonsan in North Korea, and then to Siberia. President Kim Dae-jung was quoted telling Putin: "Once the Seoul-Wonsan line is linked with the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Asia will be connected to the European continent and this will add momentum to the prosperity in East Asia."

As Putin mentioned in his press conference, it is regrettable that the North Korean delegation was not able to attend the summit. This was due to the outrageous harassment, to which the delegation was subjected by American Airlines, at the Frankfurt Airport in Germany. Despite this sabotage, significant progress was made in North Korea's reintegration in South Korean/Russian economic projects, an important example of how, indeed, economic cooperation can solve political problems.

President Putin also presented an important proposal for the expanded use of nuclear power globally. Entitled "The Initiative of the President of the Russian Federation to Secure Power for the Sustained Development of Humanity, with a Fundamental Solution of the Problems of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Improving the Ecological Health of the Planet Earth," the proposal cites the need for developing countries to have cheap energy sources, and proposes international collaboration on improvements nuclear power technologies, the nuclear fuel cycle, and the use and disposal of radioactive wastes. Russia proposes "to unite the efforts of all interested countries, in an international project under the aegis" of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Putin said (see box).

Despite attempts on the part of the "Gang of Five" to impose an Orwellian new world order, a totally different paradigm has come into being, philosophically articulated as the "dialogue of civilizations," which is becoming manifest in a plethora of regional agreements which embody the notion that, indeed, the new name for peace is development.

Seyyed Mohammad Khatami

A Call for 'Dialogue among Civilizations'



The highpoint of the United Nations Millennium Summit was reached before the summit formally convened, at a conference on the Dialogue of Civilizations. The conference was cosponsored by the UN, UNESCO, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which had proposed that the year 2001 be designated by the UN, the Year of the Dialogue of Civilizations.

The roundtable, on Sept. 4, was attended by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, as well as the Presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Namibia, Nigeria, Mali, Algeria, Indonesia, Latvia, Qatar, Georgia, Mozambique, and the foreign ministers of Costa Rica and India.

The following speech, as reported by the Iranian News Agency, was delivered by Iranian President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. It has been slightly edited, and subheads have been added:

The General Assembly of the United Nations has only recently endorsed the proposal of the Islamic Republic of Iran for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. Nevertheless, this proposal is attracting, day after day, increased support from numerous academic institutions and political organizations. In order to comprehend the grounds for this encouraging reception, it is imperative to take into account the prevailing situation in our world today, and to ponder the reasons for widespread discontentment with it. It is, of course, only natural for justice-seeking and altruistic human beings to feel discontented with the status quo. The Millennium Summit at the United Nations provides the international community with a unique and unprecedented opportunity to discuss political aspects of the calamities that afflict humanity in our day and age. Today, in this esteemed gathering, allow me instead to begin with certain historical, theoretical, and, for the most part, non-political grounds for the call to a dialogue among civilizations.

One of the reasons that I can only briefly touch upon today is the exceptional geographical location of Iran: a situation connecting various cultural and civilizational domains of Asia to Europe. This remarkable situation has

placed Iran en route of political hurricanes, as well as that of pleasant breezes of cultural exchange and also avenues for international trade. One of the unintended, if only natural, consequences of this strategic geographical location, has led to the fostering of a certain cultural sense which forms a primary attribute of the Persian soul in the course of its historical evolution.

‘The Capacity To Integrate’

Should we try to review this primary attribute from the vantage point of social psychology, and then attempt to scrutinize the constituent elements of the Persian or Iranian spirit, we would recognize a remarkable and exceptional capacity that we could refer to as its “capacity to integrate.” This “capacity to integrate” involves reflective contemplation of the methods and achievements of various cultures and civilizations in order to augment and enrich one’s cultural repertoire. The spiritual wisdom of Sohrevardi, which elegantly synthesizes and integrates Ancient Persian wisdom [and] Greek rationalism with Islamic intuitive knowledge, presents us with a brilliantly exceptional example of Persian “capacity to integrate.”

We should also note that Persian thought and culture owes an immense debt to Islam as one of its primary springs of efflorescence. Islam embodies a universal wisdom. Each and every human individual living in each and every corner of time and place is potentially included in the purview of Islam. The Islamic emphasis on the essential humane quality, and its disdain for such elements as birth and blood, had conquered the hearts of those yearning for justice and freedom.

The prominent position accorded to rational thought in Islam, and the rejection of an allegedly strict separation between human thought and divine revelation, also helped Islam to overcome dualism in both latent and manifest forms.

Islamic civilization is indeed one of only a few world civilizations that have become consolidated and have taken shape around sacred text—in this case the Noble Qoran. The essential unity of the Islamic civilization stems from the unique call that reached all Islamic peoples and nations.

Its plurality derives from the diversity of responses evoked after Islam reached various nations. Herein lies the crux of diversity and plurality we observe in achievements of the Islamic civilization: a single message interpreted and understood in a variety of ways.

The Emergence of a ‘World Culture’

What we ought to consider in earnest today is the emergence of a World Culture. World Culture cannot and ought not overlook characteristics and requirements of native local cultures with the aim of imposing itself upon them. Cultures and civilizations that have naturally evolved among various nations in the course of history are constituted from elements that have gradually adapted to collective souls and to historical and traditional characteristics. As such, these elements

cohere with each other and consolidate within an appropriate network of relationships.

In spite of all constitutive plurality and diversity, a unique form can be abstracted. On the other hand, World Culture presumes exchange emanating from cultural agents belonging to disparate geographical locations. Compared to local and national cultures, World Culture is a selective culture deliberately formed and abstracted from a natural set. This culture is therefore intrinsically non-uniform and non-monolithic, both in form and in content. It also lacks any primary or essential elements, and as such there can exist no cross-composition between primary and secondary elements.

We can only hope to find a way out of this anarchy and chaos in civilizational form, through engaging all concerned parties in a dialogue where they can exchange knowledge, experience, and understanding of diverse areas of culture and civilization. Today, it is impossible to bar ideas from freely travelling between cultures and civilizations in disparate parts of the world. However, in the absence of dialogue among thinkers, scholars, intellectuals, and artists from various cultures and civilizations, the danger of cultural homelessness would seem imminent. Such a state of cultural homelessness, would deprive people of solace, whether in their own culture or in the open horizon of World Culture.

Examination of social and political aspects of the past century has fortunately gone beyond mere critique of political activities of superpowers in the world. Regarding social theories and political ideologies as mere “narratives” has helped to [discredit] the excessively flamboyant claims of some 20th Century political philosophies and social theories. It is now aptly agreed that the exclusive claim of such ideologies to being “scientific” and “True” has indeed been arbitrary.

The notion of dialogue among civilizations undoubtedly raises numerous theoretical questions. Especially, when we attempt to redress this proposal in an academic context for philosophical, anthropological, sociological, and linguistic analysis, problems become more acute. I do not mean to belittle such intellectual and academic undertakings. I would rather want to stress that in formulating this proposal, the Islamic Republic of Iran presents an alternative paradigm for international relations. This should become more clear when we take comparative notice of prevailing paradigms of international relations. It is incumbent upon us to found the grounds for replacing it with a new one.

In order to call governments and peoples of the world to follow the new paradigm of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, we ought to learn from the world’s past experience, especially from the tremendous human catastrophes that took place in the 20th Century. We ought to critically examine the . . . glorification of might.

From an ethical perspective, the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations requires that we give up the will-to-power; and [without] the will-to-empathy, compassion, and understanding, there would be no hope for the prevalence of

order in our world. We ought to gallantly combat this dearth of compassion and empathy in our world. The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilizations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion.

Two Ways To Develop Dialogue

Esteemed participants, there are two ways to realize dialogue among civilizations:

1. The interaction and interpenetration of actual instances of cultures and civilizations with each other, resulting from a variety of factors, presents one model in which this dialogue takes place.

This mode of interaction is of course involuntary and optional, occurs in an unpremeditated fashion, and is driven primarily by vagaries of social events, geographical situation, and historical contingency.

2. Alternatively, dialogue among civilizations could also mean a deliberate dialogue among representative members of various civilizations, such as scholars, artists, and thinkers from disparate civilizational domains. In this latter sense, dialogue entails a deliberate act based upon premeditated indulgence, and does not rise and fall at the mercy of historical and geographical contingency.

Even though human beings inevitably inhabit a certain historical horizon, we could still aim at “meta-historical” discourse. Indeed, meta-historical discussion of such eternal human questions as the ultimate meaning of life and death, or goodness and evil, ought to substantiate and enlighten any dialogue in political and social issues.

Without a discussion of fundamentals, and by simply confining attention to superficial issues, dialogue would not get us far from where we currently stand. When superficial issues masquerade as “real,” “urgent,” and “essential,” and where no agreement, or at least mutual understanding, obtains among parties to dialogue concerning what is truly fundamental, in all likelihood misunderstanding and confusion would proliferate, instead of empathy and compassion.

The Spread of ‘Great Books’

Travelling of ideas and cultural interaction and interpenetration recurs in human history as naturally and persistently as the emigration of birds in nature. Even the inauspicious and abhorrent waging of wars has sometimes led to the enrichment and strengthening of the cultures and civilizations involved. For instance, as a consequence of war, “Great Books” of various civilizations, such as primary philosophical, literary, and sacred books, have become available to other civilizations.

Translation and interpretation of texts and symbols has always proved to be one of the prime venues for dialogue among civilizations and cultures. Today also, scholars, artists, and all concerned should embark on a methodical re-reading and a deeply reflective re-interpretation of “Great Books” of various cultures and civilizations of our world.

Translation does not necessarily mean translating from a

certain source language into another target language with a different vocabulary and linguistic structure. There are times when a text needs to be translated within the same source language. This happens when the original language has undergone radical semantic change over time. Even more difficult and exacting is when the language under translation sounds the same as the one we use, whereas the universe of discourse to which that language belongs has changed. Sacred and spiritual language is essentially and structurally different from the language rooted in utterly terrestrial and temporal needs of the times in which heaven and earth are split asunder.

In formulating this proposal, the Islamic Republic of Iran presents an alternative paradigm for international relations. This should become more clear when we take comparative notice of prevailing paradigms of international relations. It is incumbent upon us to found the grounds for replacing it with a new one. . . . The ultimate goal of dialogue among civilizations is not dialogue in and of itself, but attaining empathy and compassion.

It is difficult to make a transition from one to the other. One of the most arduous passages in the road of dialogue among cultures arises when a party to the dialogue attempts to communicate with another by employing a basically secularist language in an essentially sacred and spiritual discourse. By secularism I mean the general rejection of any intuitive spiritual experience and any belief in the unseen. Such a dialogue would, of necessity, turn out to be absurd. The true essence of humanity is more inclusive than language, and this more encompassing nature of the existential essence of humanity makes it meaningful to hope for fruitful dialogue.

It now appears that the Cartesian-Faustian narrative of Western civilization should give way and begin to listen to other narratives proposed by other human cultures. Today, the unstoppable destruction of nature stemming from the ill-founded preconceptions of recent centuries threatens human livelihood. Should there be no other philosophical, social, political, and human grounds necessitating dialogue but this pitiable relationship between humans and nature, then all selflessly peace-seeking intellectuals should endeavor to promote dialogue as urgently as they could.

One goal of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is to recognize and to understand not only cultures and civilizations of others, but those of “one’s own.” We could know ourselves by taking a step away from ourselves and embarking on a journey away from self and homeland and eventually attaining a more profound appreciation of our true identity. It is only through immersion into another existential dimension that we could attain mediated and acquired knowledge of ourselves, in addition to the immediate and direct knowledge of ourselves that we commonly possess. Through seeing others we attain a hitherto impossible knowledge of ourselves.

. . . Dialogue among cultures and civilizations, rests upon rational and ethically normative commitment of parties to the dialogue. In order to exchange understanding instead of proliferating misunderstanding, special moral and ethical training is needed, as well as a special rational and logical methodology. Dialogue is a bilateral or even multilateral process in which the end result is not manifest from the beginning.

We ought to prepare ourselves for surprising outcomes, as every dialogue provides grounds for human creativity to flourish.

Great Artists Should Get Due Recognition

. . . In dialogue among cultures and civilizations, great artists should undoubtedly get due recognition, together with philosophers, scholars, and theologians. For artists do not glance at the sea, mountain, and the forest as mere mines and sources of energy, oil, and fuel. For the artist, the sea embodies the waving music of a heavenly dance; the mountain is not just a mass of dirt and boulder; and the forest not merely as inanimate timber to cut and use. By excluding the artist’s “innocent” understanding from the political and social realm, human beings fall down to the ranks of the tool-making working animal. Such a being would surely look with disdain at the possibility of dialogue, and any empathy or compassion that may result from it. A world so thoroughly controlled by political, military, and economic conditions inevitably begets the ultimate devastation of the environment, and the eradication of all spiritual, artistic, and intuitive havens.

This would result in a dreary world in which the human “soul” can find no solace and no refuge. The inevitable fate of such a world is nothing but nihilism. Rational thinking of the philosopher, the learned language of the scholar, and the earnest efforts of the social engineer cannot suffice to remedy this nihilism. We need the magical touch and spell of the enchanted artist and the inspired poet to rescue life, at least part of it, from the iron clasp of death and to make possible the continuation of life.

Poets and artists engage in dialogue within and through the sacred language of spirit. This language has remained safe from poisonous winds of time, and in the very cold and merciless season of faithlessness it still brings us good news of original human ideals. It still calls people to persist on the

path of hope and faith. As some thinkers have emphasized, the present situation of man in nature is indeed a tragic one. The sense of solitude and monologue and the anxiety rooted within it embody this tragic world. Our call to dialogue is aimed at soothing this sense of tragedy. We do not want to trivialize deep-rooted and genuine human pains, nor to propose a superficial panacea for profound human questions concerning the meaning of life and death. However, in the course of dialogue, the way in which various cultures and civilizations embrace and encounter grounds for tragedy should beneficially be discussed.

In addition to poetic and artistic experience, [there are] mysticism, language, or dialogue. Mystical experience, constituted of the revelation and countenance of the sacred in the heart and soul of the mystic, opens new existential pathways to the human spirit. A study of mystical achievements of various nations reveals to us the deepest layers of their “life experience” in the most universal sense. The unified mystical meaning and content across cultures, and the linguistic parallelism among mystics, despite vast cultural, historical, and geographical distances, is indeed curious. . . .

The proposal for a dialogue among civilizations builds upon the study of cultural geography of various fields of civilization. Yet the unique and irreplaceable role of governments should never be overlooked in this process. In the absence of governmental commitment to their affirmative vote to the resolution on dialogue among civilizations [one] cannot maintain high hopes for the political consequences of the proposal. Member-states of the United Nations should endeavor to remove barriers in the way of dialogue among cultures and civilizations, and should abide by the basic precondition of dialogue. This fundamental principle rejects any imposition, and builds upon the premises that all parties to dialogue stand on essentially equal footing.

Let Us Ask Themis To Set Aside Her Blindfold

The symbolic representation of Themis—goddess of divine Law and Justice—has already gained virtually global acceptance, as its statue appears on judiciary courts of many nations. It is now time to ask Themis to remove her blindfold. Let us ask her to set aside the lofty scale that currently weighs political and economic might as the sole measure. Instead, she should call all parties to an open discussion in various domains of thought, culture, and civilization. She ought to look observantly at the evidence with open eyes, and by freeing herself from any prior obligations, she should finally charge citizens of the world with the task of making political, economic, and cultural decisions.

At the very same time that political organizations and academic institutions consider and discuss various aspects of the proposal for dialogue among civilizations, the dialogue continues to take place day after day as a matter of fact. In the domains of economics, politics, and culture, problems and issues rarely remain local and indigenous. We all deeply en-

gage in making use of each other's cultural and spiritual findings. The penetration of Eastern religions to the West, repercussions of Western political, cultural, and economic developments in the East, and most significantly, the expansion of global electronic communication have all rendered dialogue among civilizations a reality close to home. Gradually, these developments should penetrate to deeper layers of our lives. As elements of World Culture seep through—and these should, of course, be deliberately screened—common underground water tables would form connecting disparate cultural and geographical regions. The science of “sermiotics” provides us with tools to excavate common underground links and thereby approach the “common language” that we need for any dialogue.

We should listen in earnest to what other cultures offer, and by relying on profound human experiences we can seek new ways for human life.

Dialogue is not easy. Even more difficult is to prepare and open up vistas upon one's inner existence to others. Believing in dialogue paves the way for vivacious hope: the hope to live in a world permeated by virtue, humility, and love, and not merely by the reign of economic indices and destructive weapons. Should the spirit of dialogue prevail, humanity, culture, and civilization should prevail. We should all have faith in this triumph, and we should all hope that all citizens of the world would be prepared to listen to the divine call: “So Announce the Good News To My Servants—Those Who Listen To the Word, and Follow the Best [meaning] In It” (Holy Quran, 39: parts of 17, 18).

Let us hope that enmity and oppression should end, and that the clamor of love for truth, justice, and human dignity should prevail. Let us hope that all human beings should sing along with Hafez of Shiraz, this divinely inspired spirit, that: “No ineffable clamor reverberates in the grand heavenly dome more sweetly than the sound of love.” Thank you.

Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani

‘That Peoples May Know One Another’

From the address by His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, to the roundtable meeting on the Dialogue among Civilizations, during the UN Millennium Summit, on Sept. 5:

... The choice of “Dialogue among Civilizations” as a theme for the roundtable, and activity within the framework of the

Millennium Assembly organized by the United Nations, was extremely opportune due to the utmost importance this subject represents to the world in the post-Cold War era. We are, therefore, indebted to President Mohammad Ali Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his initiative in raising this subject. Indeed, it is not surprising that such a call should emanate from him due to his profound knowledge of both the Islamic and Western cultures and because of his past responsibilities of cultural affairs and his present responsibilities as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. . . .

The importance of this meeting is evident from the theme chosen for it—Dialogue among Civilizations. The theme is also indicative of the positions of those present here regarding the issue of the relationship between different civilizations and the fact that it is based on positive interaction which we all enrich. It is, accordingly, a most eloquent repudiation of those counter-claims that were circulated a few years ago and culminated in a well-known essay entitled “The Clash of Civilizations?” written by the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington and published in the Summer 1993 issue of the periodical *Foreign Affairs*. In that essay, Mr. Huntington gives expression to the dangerous idea that the post-Cold War world will witness an increase in conflicts within and among states because of cultural differences. Basing his theory on the premise that differences among civilizations are not only real, but also fundamental, he asserts that in a world that is becoming smaller, shrinking distances are increasing interactions between the peoples of different civilizations, thus intensifying the awareness of differences between civilizations; local identities and loyalties as well as national ties are weakening and are being replaced by allegiance to religion; the growing power of the West is creating an increased animosity toward it among the members of the other civilizations; and cultural characteristics and differences do not readily disappear but could, perhaps, acquire regional dimensions leading to the emergence of major regional groupings in North America, Europe, and East Asia.

For those reasons, he foresees the clash of civilizations occurring at two levels. At a lower level, namely, within states, tensions would escalate between culturally different groups, and may explode into violence, as a result of rivalries for control over territory and people. At a higher level, states from different civilizations would compete among themselves in order to acquire greater military and economic power, gain control over international institutions and third parties, and spread their own political and religious values.

The Nation-State

No doubt, this hypothesis, although put forward by a well-respected intellectual such as Samuel P. Huntington, is replete with contradiction and is inconsistent with historical facts and with reality. Moreover, it has dangerous political conse-