

Andry Morikawa: Good afternoon. I'm Andy Morikawa. I am a fellow at the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance. I am a board member for Via International which is based here in San Diego, and was a pre-conference program presenter in Chicano Park. It's my privilege to introduce and welcome Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, leader and spiritual guide of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, to the stage to be our keynote speaker.

Dr. Ariyaratne is the leader and the spiritual guide of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement which he founded in 1958. Sarvodaya is the largest nongovernmental organization in Sri Lanka serving over 20,000 villages. During a time of great civil unrest and violence in Sri Lanka, Dr. Ari founded Sarvodaya with the goal of bringing people from all ethnic and religious groups to build villages and to live peacefully and safely together.

Twenty years ago I had the good fortune to travel with three friends to Sri Lanka to learn about Sarvodaya and to meet Dr. Ari. Shortly after we arrived, we were surprised and delighted to learn that Dr. Ari had invited us for breakfast with him and his wife, Neetha, in their modest home in Moratuwa, and he asked if we'd like to join him after breakfast for a day of visiting Sarvodaya's centers and villages. Traveling with Ari was amazing and eye-opening - to watch him as he plunged in to help working on a road building project wielding a pickaxe himself. I watched as people came up to him to seek his advice and wise counsel. He dedicated water systems that saved people countless hours of having to haul water to their homes from distant wells. And occasionally he would wander off into the fields and into the forest nearby to pluck out interesting plants. Ari is a gardener and he loved gardening, he said. He imagined, he said, retiring and just gardening. That was 20 years ago. I think he'll not retire for he sees so much more that needs to be done.

In those rare moments 20 years ago, I came to see and experience a leadership of a new sort for me - a leadership without borders, one without limits that would receive the Gandhi Peace Prize along with Desmond Tutu, Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela - and would seek the transformation of an entire nation, Sri Lanka, through spiritual awakening; and a leadership that would invite four scraggly travelers into his home for a breakfast of yogurt and porridge. This was a leadership that I would follow and do. That makes sense for it grows in those whom it touches. Dr. Ari brings to us, to this gathering, insights and experiences that grow us as human beings. May today mark another unfolding toward the awakening of us all. "We build the road, the road builds us," he says. Be well and happy. It's my great privilege to introduce you to my friend, Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne.

A.T. Ariyaratne: Thank you, Andy. Good evening everybody. I'm still jet-lagging, so if I fall asleep on the stage, please excuse me. Twenty-four hours of flying is quite a difficult task. Thank you, Andy, for the excellent introduction you made.

I have come here, of course, to share my experiences, but not to teach anything. Rather, I would like to learn from your 16 years of great experience in building leaders and on leadership. When I recollect what I have been doing without any kind of training or without any kind of leadership training, I was wondering how all these things are achieved. At the very beginning of this session, Paul Cuero said implement from here (points to head), but think and feel from here (points to heart).

Now that was the principle which I followed right through because I belong to a culture, we had about 2,600 years of a certain value system, mainly Buddhism and Hindu, and non-violence, so respect for all life is the central theme of that culture. Unfortunately people do not live up to those values I think -- really because of the materialism we have embraced which does not know any limits. So greed has taken a very organized form in the world - greed not only for wealth and power or publicity, but greed along with hatred. When you can't get what you want, then you turn to violence. All this happened because of ignorance. So greed, hatred, and ignorance are bad enough. But when they get organized, when they enroll the young generation, I think we will end up with the world without any living beings on this planet. So, what we are doing in "conscious leading for global change" is something that should spread further and further to every corner of this earth.

For 66 years I have been in it, trying to bring about a change first within myself, then within my family, then within the community in which I lived, then within all the communities in my country. And then, whatever possible I could do at the global level, to do that too. I did not believe that anybody can transform this world unless you transform yourself. Therefore, as a teacher, with my students I thought I should go to the most backward villages in my country - villages that are economically backward and also socially ostracized. That's how we started this movement called Sarvodaya 56 years ago.

In the formal education system in those days and even now, it is not possible to take education out of the classroom. The classroom-based, textbook-based, examination-oriented, that kind of education we are giving children without any consideration for the awakening of the total personality. Of course, we do a lot of things for our physical well-being, emotional well-being, mental or intellectual well-being. But spiritual well-being is almost completely forgotten. So we thought at that time, that is 56 years ago, we should try to add this component to the educational system. But it could not be done by getting the authorities to agree to that kind of change, so it had to be done in a very indirect way. So during vacations and weekends we got permission from parents and took the students to rural areas and the excuse we gave was we are going to broaden their education by taking them in to these rural areas and going to live and share with them. And we told the students: "Now try to practice four principles in the villages. The first one, human beings or animals or the plant kingdom you see, try to extend loving kindness to them. Don't even just cut a branch of a tree unnecessarily. They also have life. So respect for life is the first principle we are going to practice. Secondly, this kind of loving kindness is of no use unless we try to help communities to solve one or more of their problems. For example, if they have no drinking water, let us all get together with the village people and dig wells. Build them up during these holiday camps. So you have loving kindness that will lead into compassionate action. And that gives you immediate joy because joy of seeing other people happy in having clean water to drink or an irrigation canal or a reservoir we built so that they have the satisfaction of getting their paddy field, rice field irrigated. Now that is compassionate action, not development." Though I think the word "development" started with livestock farming and things like that. Now human beings are also using that word for development, human resources, like any other non-human resource. So we're told that when human beings are directed in this way, the joy they get out of that service is something that lasts forever in their life. But when you do this kind of thing, naturally people - some of them praise this work, some do not do that. They will oppose,

obstruct. So we didn't mind that because we want to develop the fourth principle of equanimity as something lost and gained, name and blame with equal detachment.

So the objectives that we placed before the students were to practice these four principles. So we dug hundreds of wells, thousands of irrigation canals, thousands of houses, school buildings, like that. What started as an educational extension experiment ended up with the total integrated community development movement, imagine, and we had to give it a name. So we borrowed the word that Mahatma Gandhi had coined, Sarvodaya. Sarvodaya means welfare of all. That is what Gandhi said. We interpreted it as awakening of all. When we went into villages, we got village communities also to join us. Let us cook in the same kitchen for all, outsiders and the village people. We took the raw material. Let us get up at 5:00 in the morning. At 5:30, let's sit down and meditate -- meditation without any religious connotation. It's totally looking at one's self, one's body, and one's mind and how one could control. One could really understand the body, the emotions, the thinking and the principles that govern our thinking or our talking or any actions. Anyway, we made the village community along with us to be like a university. From 5:00 in the morning until 10:00 in the evening we had a program which included six hours of physical work plus three or four hours of sitting down and learning. A university professor sits down with an illiterate villager, and the villager begins to understand how much he has lost by way of education. So here is a place where both could meet.

So as this movement grew to a hundred villages in 1967, then a thousand villages by '77, then almost more than half the communities in the country by 1980s, we had to formulate. I had to give up my job because I had to really concentrate on this work. That is in 1972. Without any other form of income I thought, "No, I must make a sacrifice." Both myself, my wife and the one child we had at that time -- we decided to take the risk. And today I'm happy to say that in six areas of leadership we have managed to have certain programs that function well.

First with the spiritual field, because the religions are becoming increasingly materialistic, religions are not emphasizing the spiritual core of religions. So without antagonizing religious leadership, we had to show them that certain principles we have learned in religion could be practiced in what is called development welfare and day-to-day activities. Now, for example, while the individual objective was developing loving kindness, compassionate action, altruistic joy, and equanimity, when we work as a group four principles emerged - sharing, pleasant language, constructive activity, and equality in the association. All these qualities or principles we learned from the village community because after 450 years of colonial rule, those who were modernized -- "westernized" we call - had forgotten these principles. But the village people preserved them for a long time so our students and we, ourselves, learned from these people. And we never tried to find out what caste, or race, or religion, or linguistic group participants belong. We only wanted them to understand that in a particular village community, villagers know about their needs.

So 10 basic human needs we identified by getting 600 people who were not illiterate and at the same time were not highly literate to come together. So these people were made to write down what they believe to be their basic human needs. So they wrote down and first, the majority said number one should be environment. Second, clean and adequate supply of water. Three, a house to live. Then clean food, healthcare, toilets, and wells and things like that. Other requirements:

education, health, spiritual and cultural needs. And then we got them to divide them into sub-needs. So they divided them into 300 sub-needs, I remember. Then I got 400,000 of these little books printed and distributed in Sinhala, Tamil and English in all the villages in the country ... so much so -- like they spread to every village so it was very difficult to share the same discipline we had within the movement. But then we thought the best is now. The leadership that the students were learning and practicing at that level of the community should make the community take all leadership. So in every village we organized pre-school children. I remember there were no nurseries in our country at that time. I, myself, have gone and opened about 8,000 preschools.

We had no money to put up permanent buildings. But we put up sheds on the trees, trained the preschool teachers and guided them to do three or four activities pertaining to children. One is good nutrition, healthcare, then psychosocial development of the child, and also to organize mothers' groups. So children's groups, mothers' groups, students' group, farmers' group, those who are doing various other kinds of crops and all that, businessmen, they form different groups and related them to the 10 basic needs. When they were functioning well, we got them registered under the government as legal entities. As much as 15,000 villages we were able to bring under that legal kind of organized form. So leadership was developed. And in the village executive committee, they had to have one child representing the children's interest - two children, two from the youth group, three from the mothers' group. Like that in a committee of 25, even children were enrolled. And the children were told that in the constitution, when you attend the meeting, how you should behave. Supposing if you are drunk, you can't come to their meeting. Even when adult comes after taking alcohol or drunk, a child gets up and says: "Uncle or father, you have no right to attend this meeting, you are violating our constitution." So right from the childhood, a seven-year-old child pointing out to this adult, then that adult will never come drunk to a village meeting. In that way, I'm not going to -- I can give hundreds of examples like that, how the children became instruments for changing the lifestyle and behavior of adult. So it was a question of viewing leadership not by a particular set of people but everybody developing those qualities and being able to control one another.

Now, when we had this integrated community development programs, we took it through five stages. First, psychosocial development stage. Secondly, social and trust activity. Third is legal. Fourth has something to do with savings, credit and all that kind of thing - economic. Fifth was political, not party and power-oriented politics but real democracy at the grassroots level. Remember we were doing all these without getting ourselves attached to any political party or political organizations. We wanted this to be outside political power game, similarly outside in a religious or communal thing like that. It was above all these divisions. So when in our country from time to time various conflicts occurred, our movements could go to those places and bring about reconciliation among people who were in conflict. We had a 30-year war which is purely political. Various leaders representing various communities. They try to divide people for the sake of acquiring power, which ultimately led to a very difficult situation in the country where there was the government and what they call terrorism. They were fighting.

So Sarvodaya had to play a role. It started with immediate effect from 1983. First, a relief program for those who were affected. We didn't care whether they were Sinhalese, Tamils or Muslims. Second, while giving relief, to do whatever rehabilitation we could. Thirdly,

reconciliation. Fourthly, what we could do with the help of government and others in reconstruction. Then bring back to the old situation we call Five R Program (Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Reawakening). So during these 30 years we did this Five R Program. And therefore, when the war finally ended, we were in a situation to get into the field to heal the hearts and minds of people because a war can end but it can't continue.

After all these things happened, we thought that from the spiritual side we were able to get religious leaders of all religions to come together in every district and every sub-district to form groups to maintain peace and also contribute to general development. Then we were able to organize various programs. For example, lots of drug addiction was taking place in our country. So to rehabilitate that drug addiction and prevent people from this, we had a special branch. Like that, there were 15 organizations we created during the last 56 years in various fields: a peace brigade for the peace movement; then for the children, another section. Like that, there are 15 incorporated for this with separate membership and executive committees. We were all working together like a group of companies.

And then after the war, we did two things -- we wanted political and economic sector also to be influenced. These two are major forces which can bring about peace or which can create conflicts. So with great difficulty we managed to organize right across the country in 326 places; that is, districts and divisions, groups, every district and a council of hundred. Their idea is not to get into politics but change the political system without bringing in any outside factors and trying to train leaders in real democratic practices. Representative form of governance in our country has not done well. But that is the form we have. What shall we do? Why don't we try what Mahatma Gandhi -- even in America I went once, maybe 15 or 20 years ago, and I saw Lincoln's Village - or something - Incorporated. When I saw the word incorporated, I thought why don't we try this?

[Of our] 3,000 villages, we selected who had reached the third or fourth stages, and these villages were asked to develop a self-governance system. So in the village a council of 25 people including women, children, everybody represented meeting once. They look at the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, economic and political aspect. Social means human rights, health, education, community leadership, then individual leadership, leadership in different fields, business leadership and like that. And for all these, we had a theoretical base. The roots were in Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism is not a religion as such. It's not a sectarian thing. It is an explanation of nature within ourselves and for us to get back to nature. It's not a religion. It's a thinking around which we can get all people together. So we have the Muslim area. We have our Muslim leadership, and the Hindu area, Buddhist area, Christian area. Without any religious distinction, we are able to work together. So in that way, we have been trying to promote in Sri Lanka a kind of direct participatory form of politics. This is a pyramidal system. Pyramid is like this, then the executive head and others in many countries control the whole thing right down to the bottom. So there's a narrow-based triangle here and the power is only there. But the people are outside, most people. Even the number one expert in the world who is not with that political regime, that man will never be used to that kind of politics. So we want to bring this down like this, a very broad-based politics. That is what Mahatma Gandhi called *Commonwealth of Village Republic*. Those are the words he used.

So now we are organizing all over the country this kind. It's very difficult. Vested interested are not going to just leave you alone, so you have to be fearless. To be fearless, you have to meditate. Meditate means every moment, whatever comes to your mind, you must be mindful or conscious. Whatever you are going to act, you have to be conscious of that or mindful of that. Whatever you are going to do, you have to be very mindful. So developing mindfulness is number one. Any leader who is not mindful, who is not conscious will do more harm than good; therefore, we were very, very conscious of the importance of developing right mindfulness. Right mindfulness can take us slowly to right concentration.

When you go on a direction of right concentration, traditionally the eight principles we followed - right understanding, right thoughts, right words, right deeds, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Those are called the Noble Eightfold Paths. If anybody follows these paths in their life, day-to-day life, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, such a person is a person who is developing his consciousness. That's why meditation is not something that should be confined to a particular time in the morning and evening. It may be to practice that kind, regular practice is necessary; but in every moment of our life we should try to develop mindfulness. And the world needs very much mindful conscious leaders.

Now, for all these, we need an organizational, institutional form. In every district we have formed leadership training institutes, sometimes very special ones. Sarvodaya Institute of Higher Education is like a university. So from all over the world people come there just to have a short experience, maybe from two weeks to even up to a year. So we are happy that a lot of universities in the world and also in Sri Lanka have given us recognition to what we have been doing all these years.

And now the second and third generations have taken over. I'm not involved in anything in the administrative work of money-handling or anything. Only if I'm called for by the second and third generation for some advice or some celebration, then I go. I avoid as much as possible getting involved in day to day work because I am now -- though people call me 84, I call myself 12 years.

So finally, what I have to say is what you are doing is very special. Once before or twice before I have come to the ILA meetings, but today you have expanded so much. Don't stop with it. Now I do have quite a large number of contacts. So in your networking I will tell them you must network with ILA and I'm sure this moment you can contribute so much. Our environment is being totally destroyed. The food we eat in our countries, like here, in most of the poor countries it's poison that is consumed as food. So in every field we need leadership.

So now we have formed our economic organization. We have savings, credit. We are not accepting -- if we know that this money has come from bribery or killing anywhere else or alcohol, we don't accept that. Similarly, we don't give credit to anybody who is not doing right livelihood programs. Therefore, thank you very much for everything you are doing. And as far as the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka is concerned, we will always be with you. And I'm here because Elisa Sabatini and your chairman, (Dr. Getz) they were insisting I should come and I just couldn't say "No" -- so I have come.

And all I can tell you is that don't wait until our governments - with due respect to governments, the United Nations or other bodies who do this work. We have to do it. We ourselves, the ordinary people in the world, have to build leaders. But one thing you are not doing I know, what is that? Start building leaders while they are still in their mother's womb. What do I mean by that? In Sri Lanka, in Sarvodaya, we have organized programs for pregnant mothers. These mothers and their husband or spouses, they are trained to train the child while the child is in the mother's womb. So there are the physician, musician, meditator, all those people training them. Sometimes when we go to the North's poorest areas, I have been to 1,500 and there are 750 couples who have come with their pregnant wives. We teach them what to talk, what not to talk, what not to eat because right from conception of a child in the mother's womb, the human person grows and grows. Then the preschool stage is very important. So for all those, we have developed programs. There are about 140 programs we have developed. So I think you should also try to introduce a program. Not only the physicians and others, but really those who are good meditation practitioners, we should get right from that age until death. Even at our age. I spent maybe most of my time in looking within myself, while the other time I encourage the work we have started. So thank you very much.

MOD: We're going to take some questions from the floor. We have folks who've got mikes and if you will just raise your hand, we'll get a mike to you. Anybody have questions for Dr. Ari?

Female: Hi. Thank you so much for speaking. My name is Nila and my family is actually from Sri Lanka. So it's been an honor to hear you speak this afternoon. My question is regarding the civil war in Sri Lanka and how your work helped bring about peace, if at all. And if you could talk a little bit more about the ethnic conflicts and how your organization played a role in that.

A.T. Ariyaratne: Yeah, this conflict? Before the conflict in 1960, before you are born I took 1,500 people from the South with a friend. And there are 3,000 people who joined us. For one week we lived together and pleaded with people while we constructed the 18-mile road for we really need that road. That main road was done by us first. I said, "Let us not allow this to be generated into islands." But the politicians are more powerful than we were, so they created this. When really it started, there's no way we could do anything. The only thing we could do was to take a risk and go and do that five R program - Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Reawakening. We did it until the end of the war. After the war ended, the government took over the entire rehabilitation thing. So we don't get mixed up with governments, though we don't fight governments also. They generally attack us, but we don't attack them because we don't want to. We remove the outside, we want to heal from inside. So every month about 300 young people and families also are exchanged between north and south. Silently we are continuing with that. And in all the eight districts in the north, we were able to play. I think we may be doing most of the work for rehabilitation and other stuff.

MOD: Other questions for Dr. Ari?

A.T. Ariyaratne: How many minutes are left?

MOD: Five.

A.T. Ariyaratne: Can we be able to do meditate? Shall I lead them to meditate? As the speech seems to be unquestionable, that means you have not listened properly. So we will have three minutes of meditation. Don't lean against your chair. Put your feet firmly on the ground. Don't lean against the chair. Put your right hand on your left hand. That is the best way to get the nervous system working. Close your eyes very lightly. Look at your own body from head to foot. Extend loving kindness to your own body. This body of mine which is a combination of coming together of solidity, liquidity, air, and heat should be healthy. I should be physically healthy. I should be physically healthy. My mind is created by various sensations I get through my eyes, my ears, my nose, my tongue, my body, and the mind itself. Me and my mind also be healthy. May I not get any feelings of ill will, or anger, or greed. May I be well in my mind. May there be peace in my mind. May all of us in this hall be healthy in body and mind. May all of us in this hall be healthy in body and mind. May all the people in this city, may all the people in this world, may all the living beings in this world be well and happy. May I have peace in my mind. May I have peace in my family. May I have peace in the place where I work or I study. May there be peace in my country. May there be peace in the world. Thank you very much.

Female: On behalf of the ILA Board and staff, I'd like to thank Dr. Ari for his very generous contribution tonight. Thank you very much Dr. Ari. Well, as you can see, the evening has gotten going. So we're going to move on to the reception. A reminder that the University of San Diego's Reception and Book Award Evening is at 6:30 right outside. Have a good night and we'll see you tomorrow.

[End of transcript - 29:15]