**Together towards tomorrow**

Respected Adhyatma Shiromani Shri Acharya Mahashraman ji, Sadhvi Pramukha Karunamurti, Maha Shramani Kanak Prabha ji, … , dignitaries, youth leaders from Nepal, India and overseas, ladies and gentleman.

Thank you for inviting me today as the keynote speaker in this forum.

* It is my great privilege to share this forum with right honorable Shri Acharya Mahashraman ji. Talking about youth and a future of youth, we can just turn to him and be instantly filled with inspiration. Getting the coveted title of Yuvacharya of the massive international following of Terapanth at the age of 35 is no small feat. And he got the title of Acharya at the age of 48. This is amazing achievement indeed! There must be a reason for it – and I am sure it is his unwavering commitment to the furtherance of knowledge.
* Commitment we need – in all fields. Not only in religion, but in business, politics, social service, science, and any profession. Talking about knowledge, it is what we need. It is where the future is. It is where we are headed – towards a knowledge-based, information-based world integrated by technology.
* I will focus on business. We say this is the age of information. I say this is the age of innovation and imagination in the fields of information and knowledge. There is unprecedented, unmatched opportunity here.
* It wasn’t like this before. Looking back 20 years, there was predominance of traditional manufacturing industries. In Nepal, India and South Asia we used to have big opportunity in capital-centric industries such as jute, sugar, steel, and textile.
* In India, big names like the Birlas, Singhaniyas and Modis used to dominate the market. That whole scenario has completely changed today. Industries that we never heard of before have appeared – industries based on technology, telecom, financial services -- from Infosys to Wipro, from Sunil Bharti Mittal to Dipak Parekh and Aroon Purie. The canvas of India’s top business houses has changed. The direction of business has moved towards technology-based, information-based industries.
* In the global context, we have people like Mark Zuckerberg, Bill Gates, and the late Steve Jobs. The traditional business houses have almost disappeared.
* If you research the top businesspeople today, if you look at the Forbes billionaires, you will see that their lines of business have changed. The direction of their business has changed. We now have Facebook and Google, Microsoft and Apple, Alibaba and Amazon.
* Capital is no more the biggest strength today, but innovation and entrepreneurial initiatives are the biggest strengths. If you have innovative capacity and caliber, there are plenty of venture capitals and private equities that are going to fund you. Capital is no more any constraint.
* It is all about innovation, about coming out with something new that is going to change the lives of the people.
* What are the things that have changed the lives of the people in the last 20 years? First, there is the telecom sector -- the mobile set. Due to innovation in mobile, it has practically become a single device for information, communication and entertainment.
* Second, the travel sector has changed the lives of people. Traditional way of travelling is slowly becoming irrelevant. Now people go for budget travel. They fly budget aircrafts. It has become so competitive that costs can no longer deter people from travelling.
* Third, the world has seen a vast change in information technology. There used to be a time when we spent months going from one place to another to get one piece of information. Now any information from any part of the world is available to you at one touch, and that too, free.
* The world has completely evolved. It was never like this before. The world used to be very fragmented. Now it is fragmented only politically. Otherwise, it is very well integrated.
* IT-based and telecom-based businesses – there is no limit if you venture out in these sectors. No nationality, no political form of the government can restrain you.
* With a mobile phone, you will be able to do all your transactions. From settling your household bills to paying your children’s school fees, from handling airline tickets to buying shoes for your spouse, from making charity donations to giving salary to your employees, you can manage everything from your mobile. Your mobile wallet will slowly replace your money wallet.
* On the one hand, technology is creating efficiency. On the other hand, it is reducing cost. But at the same time it is pushing the world to be much more competitive and technology-driven. Look at the smart phone giants Samsung, Apple, and their Chinese and Indian counterparts. Every day they are coming out with something new at a lower price. On the other hand, look at Blackberry – this is an example how due to rapid pace of growth can one technology and ultimately an entire industry become redundant!
* There was a time when Kodak ruled the world in terms of celluloid films. Not only that technology has vanished because of emerging technologies, but the name of Kodak has also vanished from the market! Nowadays, you will find camera, movie, calendar, internet, news updates, and messages in one smart wristwatch.
* What does that speak for? It speaks for a world that is going to be so compact, so technology-driven, so integrated, and so efficient that if you cannot catch up with the race, you will be out of scene at no time. That is the message – that is the race for tomorrow. And that is where the opportunity exists.
* Twenty years ago, at least 10 of the world’s biggest businesses and companies were nowhere in the scene. They are all driven by young minds and young brains. They are not capital-oriented. There is prediction that in the next 20 years, there will be plenty of such new names that will be based on technology – something on which there is still research going on. There will be something based on innovation that will place these new people on the top. In the next 20 years, there will be more Mark Zuckerberg’s and Steve Jobs’s in the global scene.
* Can you be that? Are you are going to be just the followers or are you going to lead the process?
* There is no monopoly of any particular race or country in today’s world. Technology is so dynamic. It keeps moving. Its seat keeps moving. Once the American Silicon Valley used to be the hub for the world’s new technology. Today countries like India have developed IT cities like Bangalore and Hyderabad. For the hardware, nobody can beat China. For the automobile industry, it used to be the U.S. Now it is no more the U.S. Not even Japan. Even for the Japanese automakers to be competitive, they have to set up factories in India. The world is no longer a limit!
* Geography, age, gender, nationality, climate, society – nothing can stop you if you are really committed to excel. Do you know that the famous Jack Ma of the Internet giant Alibaba saw computer at the age of 33? His parents were ordinary people from a small town in China. His job applications were rejected more than a dozen times. He finally got a job as an English teacher. But his innovative mind was always at work and he tried a few other things before finally convincing his friends to invest in his idea of an internet marketplace. Look at him now -- he is the second richest man in China.
* In china, 4 of the top 6 billionaires made their fortunes through internet and information technology-related ventures.
* In India, we have people like Bibek Nayar, Azim Premji, and Shiv Nadar who reached the pinnacle of success through information technology-related ventures.
* Jan Koum, the co-founder of WhatsApp, was a poor Ukrainian immigrant who used to sweep floors of a grocery store in California. In February 2014, when Facebook announced it was buying WhatsApp for $19 billion, Koum became an instant celebrity.
* Jack Ma and Jan Koum did not have money. Talking about the groundbreaking Google, its founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin were just 25 and 24 years old when they started Google. We all know that they rule the world of internet. So it’s not about the age also.
* It’s not about the race or geography as well. Citing a research, Forbes recently reported that Indian immigrants in the United States started 8% of all technology and engineering ventures in, whereas the total population of Indian immigrants was less than 1% of the U.S. population. The research also showed that Indians have outnumbered the next 7 immigrant groups combined and began 33.2% of all immigrant-founded startups in the U.S. The proportion of all immigrant founded companies has fallen in Silicon Valley, but Indians have resisted this downward trend.
* This region has no dearth of innovative entrepreneurs for whom capital wasn’t a deterrent. Look at Dinesh Agrawal, who started the internet marketplace -- IndiaMart -- with just the seed capital of Rs. 40,000. The founder of Maxx mobile, Ajjay Agrawal, started his venture with Rs. 10 lakh. Pradeep Jain started Karbonn mobiles with Rs. 5 lakh.
* In India there are many inspiring stories. Look at Flipkart. Their founders, Sachin Bansal and Binay Bansal, started the $7 billion company with just Rs. 4 lakhs out of a small flat in Bangalore. They expect to post sales of $1 billion this year.
* The founders of the mobile advertisement network InMobi -- Naveen Tewari, Abhay Singhal, Mohit Saxena, and Amit Gupta – are all below 40. They started the venture out of a small one-bedroom flat in Mumbai in 2007. Now their business has grown to such an extent that they can say their competitors are no less than the global giants Facebook and Google!
* **There are dozens and dozens of such examples. These all speak for a world where you sell your idea, your innovation, and your entrepreneurship. Nothing else matters. You just have to imagine, have a dream, be committed to it, and pursue it fully. That is the way. That is where our collective future lies.**
* There are a few things in business that we need to be cautious about. We talked about Blackberry. We can look at the case of Nokia also. These two companies once ruled the world of cell phones. Where are they today? They are both examples of arrogant fall in business. These companies thought they could over-rule the super-fast changing technological events and consumer expectation. Blackberry did not allow front-facing camera and other apps when people needed it. Likewise, Nokia did not recognize android technology and continued with their own operating system. Certainly, we would not like our tiny little egos to bog down our hard-earned business.
* These two examples speak of another very critical dimension of the business world – reading the pulse of consumers every day and taking action without delay.
* I will tell you the curious story of Ranbaxy. It was built very passionately by Bhai Mohan Singh who bought it in 1952. There was a stage when the company was a force to reckon with globally with exports in 125 countries and 21 production plants in 8 countries. One fine day Bhai Mohan expired and his sons could not keep it. They later sold it to the Japanese company Daiichi Sankyo, who could not manage it either and sold it to Sun Pharma that was 31 years younger than Ranbaxy! Now Sun Pharma is the largest pharma company in India, and the 5th largest specialty generic company globally.
* What does it say? It is an example of what it takes to create a business and take it forward. After a business is built, the next generation, instead of taking the company to the next level, chose an easy solution to exit. Why the 3-generation saga continues to haunt the corporate world? One struggles and creates it, the other one consolidates it, and the third is ready to disengage it.
* I remember my conversation with one Everest conqueror. I was inquisitive as I am an avid trekker myself who has done the 5,400 meter Thorang-La Pass at the age of 54. I asked him what was the toughest part of scaling the Everest. He explained how difficult it is to train yourself, to build stamina, to acclimatize yourself. But the more difficult part than scaling the Everest was to stay up there! I asked why. He said the air up there is so strong, its unbearably cold, and you are under so much pressure. The body is fatigued and there is so much excitement. On the other hand, there are many people waiting for you to come down. The whole world is looking at you. There is limited space at the top, and there is the fight to get there. The fight to unseat someone from there is much more intense than you can imagine. That is another reason why not many people can remain at the helm. This applies in your life as well. Once you achieve something, all forces gang up to pull you down, especially in the South Asian context. You not only have to demonstrate a will to stay on, but also the determination and courage to fight back.
* That much for business. I must also talk about the other important aspect of life – spirituality. With the permission of Respected Shri Maha Shramanji and the divine gathering of today, I want to state that spirituality is in fact the most important aspect of human existence. It should be an integral part of our lives, if we want to live a balanced live. We are talking about becoming successful in our lives, and to move together towards a shared destiny of mankind. We cannot think of having true success if we leave out spirituality.

* The millennia-old tradition of the Indian subcontinent where we dwell, teaches us four aspects of life – Dharma (the right way), Artha (money), Kaam (action and enjoyment), and Mokshya (liberation). We can pair second and third together – that is, business -- and first and fourth together – that is, spirituality. So basically the four aspects of life can be grouped as two – business and spirituality. If we do not take the two together, our lives become incomplete.
* Let me give you an example. You know these days you can get artificial flowers. These flowers look so real that you cannot differentiate them from the real ones. Their color, texture, softness, everything is like real flowers. If you touch them they feel so real. But they don’t have the very basic of a flower! What is that – you must have guessed. Yes, it’s the scent, the aroma! A life without spirituality is just like an artificial flower – without the scent.
* My Guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar ji mentioned in a conference entitled ‘Spirituality and Corporate World’ that the combination of spirituality and the corporate world is so close and so integrated that it can be likened to making your cloth. Say you have a piece of cloth. To fit it to your body perfectly, you have to cut it right, which requires a lot of skills and knowhow. That is what the corporate sector does. But at the same time, unless you sew it equally well, which spirituality does, you cannot have a well-fitting beautiful dress that everybody would admire. Corporate world cuts it, spirituality sews it. You can call it the corporate-cut and the spirituality-stitch!
* Particularly in our part of the world, where running business and making money is not always appreciated and admired, where it is considered to be an act with a shade of discrimination and exploitation. Often the reward for your accomplishment will be jealousy and an attempt to defame and pull you down – to level you down! To deal with this kind of situation and to mitigate this kind of eventuality, your connection and selfless engagement with the world is the only way, and that’s what spirituality does.
* Thanks again for inviting me as your chief guest and the keynote speaker today. I would be really happy if one day, we swap the positions. You in the audience, each one of you, come to deliver the keynote speech in a similar forum like this, and I listen to you in awe. Each time, I applaud in awe seeing you giving the world a direction. I would love to see the leaders in you come out in full glory and show the world the way that it is missing. I am sure that day will come. That day, I will be really really happy.

Thank you.