

Good morning to all of you! A very happy Mother's Day. I am privileged to be here this morning and I thank you for your invitation.

My name is Niroop Kasthuri Srivatsa. A little bit about myself. I grew up in Madras, India, in a large joint family spanning 4 generations of relatives. Although it was a crowded house, it was one filled with great love and learning. I earned my degree in architecture and came to the United States in 1979 to be with my then boyfriend, and now husband, Sanjay. We lived in the Chicago area, then LA, and moved to Lafayette in 1992. Our love for Lafayette grows with each passing day.

We have two wonderful sons – Vikram, who lives in Los Angeles, who, when not counseling kids, aspires to be the first Indian American comedian on Saturday Night Live. And Arjun, who lives in New York and is pursuing a career in journalism and pledges to do all he can to get rid of the terms “fake news” and “alternative facts.” These days I find myself learning far more from my sons than what they learned from me!

May I ask you to close your eyes for a moment and visualize these words – Loving. Kind. Patient. Nurturing. Comforting. Caring. Generous. Warm. Soft.

Now open your eyes....don't you feel better? These are the words that are used most often to describe a mother - whether she is called Madre, Mom, Mater, Mataji, Mummy, Amma, or Ma.... The word “Maa”, by the way, comprises the Sanskrit consonant “M” and vowel “aa”. This consonant ‘mm’ pertains to the heart while the vowel ‘aaaa’ relates to “anand shakti” or the power of bliss. It is not by chance, then, that one's mother is the treasure-house of all bliss and love.

When Pastor Sheffer asked me to speak at the Mother's Day service, I was frankly petrified. Speaking about motherhood is a daunting task. And, although I practice being a mother every day, I certainly haven't perfected that skill. So, to prepare for this morning, I looked for guidance from the religions of the world. It will probably come as no surprise to you that all

religions hold mothers in the highest regard and offer praises to the institution of motherhood. I would like to share a few of my favorite finds with you

❖ *As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.* Isaiah 66:13, where God likens himself to a mother, bringing to mind the incredible comforting ability of a loving mother.

❖ From the hadeeth, the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed.

A man came to the Prophet and said O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: your mother. The man said: Then who? The Prophet said: then your mother. The man further asked: then who? The Prophet said: then your mother. The man asked again: then who? The Prophet said: then your father.

❖ From Hinduism – *Maatru Devo Bhava* - Revere your mother as God.

❖ From Gauthama Buddha - *Just as a mother would protect with her life her own son, her only son, so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings, and loving-kindness towards all the world.*

❖ From Hinduism, a saying that still rings in my ear because my grandmother would say it all the time – *Maathaa Pithaa Guru Deivam* - In the order of giving respect, the mother comes first, the father Pithaa second, the teacher Guru third and God Deivam fourth.

❖ From Proverbs 31: *Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

I was struck by the similarity of the sentiments expressed in all our holy books. And, I questioned, if the message from all religions is essentially the same, why does today's humanity focus on identifying differences rather than celebrating commonalities?

I read somewhere that the one "ideal" that binds humanity beyond the limitations of religion, time, space, and geography is this ideal of the Mother. The simple, yet undisputed fact that we all have mothers who create, nurture and protect is the common thread which binds society. It is also that most precious thread that connects humanity to divinity.

Today, we are bombarded with news of conflict, genocide, famine, torture, greed and unrest – words that, when I close my eyes, make me nervous, angry, unhappy and fearful. Sometimes it feels like nothing can be done to make this madness stop. May I offer a suggestion to you on this special day; one that I pledge to practice myself? Here it is.....

Let's begin to look at the world through the eyes of a mother. View your friend – and more importantly – your adversary - through the facets of: Loving. Kind. Patient. Nurturing. Comforting. Caring. Generous. Warm. Soft. Maybe, just maybe, your adversary will become your friend, and he, in turn, will learn to look at life like a mother. As Buddha said - *Like the mother of the world, touch each being as you would your beloved child. **Touch each being as you would your beloved child.***

Happy Mother's Day.