

Universal Oneness Celebration Brings More Than 5,000 People Together Around a Message of One Humanity

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, August 31, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On August 29, 2026, more than 5,000 people from 853 cities across 39 states, representing 250+ U.S.-based organizations, gathered at the Infosys Theater at Madison Square Garden for the Universal Oneness Celebration—a landmark cultural and interfaith gathering centered on a powerful message: We can be different and still belong to one another. The celebration reflected the Hindu philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—the world is one family.

Hosted by [AHEAD](#) Forum (American Hindus for Engagement and Dialogue), the event brought together people of diverse faiths, cultures and generations through music, dance, prayer, dialogue and reflection. Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Indigenous voices joined participants representing 18 faiths, 29 countries and four continents, celebrating diversity while affirming our shared human dignity and responsibility.



RSS Chief Dr. Mohan Bhagwat



Interfaith Declaration

The keynote speaker for the event was Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, Chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, (RSS) which is celebrating 100 years of service along with Reverend Adrian Thorne, Senior Minister of Riverside Church in New York City; and Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, President and Imam of Masjid Muhammad in Washington, D.C and Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, CEO of the

Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). There were four faith leaders on the dias representing four traditions, four distinct voices. Yet across their messages emerged a striking common ground: human dignity, compassion, responsibility and the possibility of choosing connection over division.

The “United in Rhythm” presentation brought together the sounds of dhol, and tasha while the Rudra Dance Academy presented an international dance mosaic celebrating movement across cultures and traditions.



Universal Oneness Celebration at New York City

Hindu-American youth performed an a cappella medley celebrating harmony, equality and shared responsibility. Award-winning and internationally renowned singer Mahesh Kale led thousands in the collective chanting hymn called “Sangachhadhwam,” a Sanskrit call to move forward together in peace and harmony.

Prayers and blessings from Native Elder, Elizabeth Araujo brought Indigenous spiritual wisdom into the gathering, reminding participants of humanity's responsibility to one another, to nature and to generations yet to come.

A highlight of the day was a collective Raksha Bandhan ceremony, where the traditional rakhi—a thread symbolizing love and protection—was transformed into a powerful symbol of our shared responsibility toward the wider human family.

Our responsibility extends beyond family and faith. Participants united in this act, transforming an ancient tradition into a modern expression of shared human connection.

The interfaith character of the gathering came alive through the voices of four speakers:

Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, CEO of the Rabbinical Assembly and USCJ, reflected on the Jewish teaching that every human being is created in the image of God. He offered a profound reflection: faith is not only about humanity having faith in God, but about recognizing that God has faith in humanity, that human beings can choose wisely, build relationships and care for one another.

Reverend Adrian Thorne, Senior Minister of Riverside Church, spoke about the many paths people take through life and faith. Drawing on an experience from her early seminary years, she

described people taking different paths up a mountain while ultimately discovering that they are moving toward the same summit. Her message transcended religious boundaries. In a world increasingly defined by division, she called on people to choose connection over isolation, compassion over condemnation and hope over hatred.

Imam Dr. Talib M. Shareef, President and Imam of Masjid Muhammad, emphasized that diversity should not become a reason for separation. Differences can instead become windows, bridges and classrooms opportunities to discover and learn from people whose experiences and traditions may be different from our own. He reminded the audience that every child enters the world first as a human being, before society places labels of religion, race, nationality, ethnicity or politics upon them.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr. Mohan Bhagwat, Chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, spoke about Oneness within diversity and the responsibility that comes with being human. His message emphasized that differences do not need to disappear for humanity to experience unity. Instead, people can honor their traditions, identities and cultures while recognizing the deeper connection that binds humanity together.

He spoke about the unique capacity of human beings to think, distinguish right from wrong and recognize the suffering of others. With that capacity comes responsibility to society, to nature and to the world.

For Indian Americans, his message carried a particular resonance: heritage and service can reinforce one another. Those who have made America their home, he emphasized, should contribute to America, serve its people and fulfill their responsibilities as citizens, while also carrying forward the values and wisdom of their motherland. "Honor your heritage. Serve your homeland (US). Give back to (the American) society."

He challenged people to think beyond achievement and ask a larger question: What can I give back? The ultimate measure of a meaningful life, he suggested, is not simply what we accumulate, but what we contribute.

His Excellency Bawa Jain, Secretary General, [World Council of Religious Leaders](#), presented an interfaith declaration to Dr. Bhagwat and other religious leaders and scholars at the Universal Oneness gathering. The declaration recognized the extraordinary power of religion to heal, reconcile and inspire, while calling on faith communities to reject hatred, humiliation, dehumanization and violence.

"No one was asked to give up their identity or tradition. Instead, we were invited to bring our identities to the table and discover what connects us. That is what made this gathering so meaningful," responded one of the attendees.

"Attending the Universal Oneness event was an honor. The message beautifully reflects the

philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'—the world is one family. In our divided world, embracing unity, compassion, and mutual respect is more vital than ever, and I am proud to support this movement," said Dr. Avinash C. Gupta.

Ultimately, the event turned labels into people and strangers into neighbors, proving that our shared humanity doesn't require erasing differences. Universal Oneness is simply about expanding our circle of responsibility to one another.

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