

Thirty-third Niwano Peace Prize Ceremony Address

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I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to Mr. Sadayuki Tsuchiya, Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, His Excellency Prof. Dammika Ganganath Disanayake, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Japan, Rev. Akisato Saito, President of Japanese Association of Religious Organizations, His Excellency Archbishop Joseph CHENNOTH, Apostolic Nuncio to Japan and to our many distinguished guests, for attending today's presentation ceremony of the thirty-third Niwano Peace Prize.

It is a great honor to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka (or CPBR, for short).

Present at today's ceremony are Mrs. Dishani Jayaweera Dr. Jayantha Seneviratne, the founders of the CPBR. I would like to thank both of them for making the long journey from Sri Lanka to join us here today.

It is ten years since we have presented the peace prize to an organization, rather than an individual. The last time the prize was presented to a group, Rabbis For Peace, was in 2006. This is the seventh group to be awarded the Niwano Peace Prize.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation has continued to sponsor programs aimed at healing the scars of Sri Lankans affected by the civil war and reconciling people of different ethnicities and religions. Specifically, they have quietly dedicated themselves to programs that build true peace and reconciliation, capable of overcoming the hatred and anger still smoldering in people's hearts and minds.

Their work reminds me of an important historical event.

In 1951, at the San Francisco Peace Conference, the leader of the delegation from Sri Lanka (at the time, Ceylon), Finance Minister J. R. Jayewardene, quoted from the Dhammapada: “Hatred ceases not by hatred, but by love,” and proposed the abolition of Japanese war reparations. His speech was, as all of you know, a great catalyst in restoring Japan’s place in the international community.

And now, in this spiritually rich soil of Sri Lanka, every day the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation is making progress with its programs. Although it will take time, I believe that they will definitely succeed in realizing true reconciliation and harmony.

In Buddhism, the realm of the Buddha and the realm of hell have always been defined as mental states rather than as places existing outside the human mind.

As the mind becomes increasingly deluded, it harbors anger toward humanity, toward nature, and toward others people, and thus appears the realm of hell. The anger in people’s minds is the trigger that causes such hell-like states in this world as conflict, discrimination, and chaos.

On the other hand, Buddhism teaches us that when we realize that ourselves and other people are inherently one and the same, and we become capable of interacting with consideration and compassion toward humanity, toward nature, and toward others, therein appears the realm of the Buddha.

Simply put, the teaching of the Buddha shows us the mental state necessary for human beings to live in harmony—this is certainly one way of understanding it.

Of course, it goes without saying that peace is not as simple as maintaining an outward appearance of calm. Because as long as hatred and anger are smoldering in people’s minds, no one can know when the seeds of

conflict will again catch fire.

Considering that armed conflicts and acts of terrorism are frequent occurrences in the current state of world affairs, clearly there is no problem more urgent than finding how we can transcend the hatred and anger in the human mind.

A famous Japanese author wrote an essay called "The Spanish Woman." One section of her essay is so inspirational that I would like to quote from it.

This author was once introduced to a Spanish man who was very cheerful. He was a Christian whose face seemed to say that he had never experienced any worldly hardship.

However, the person who introduced her to the Spaniard later told her his story.

"After that man's father was killed in the Spanish Civil War, his mother raised their ten children. His mother was a great person, and told her children, 'You must never feel hatred for the man who killed your father. You must make it your life's work to forgive him.'"

When the Japanese author heard this story, she wrote the following account.

"For people's hearts to succeed in forgiving the man who killed their loved one is not the sort of accomplishment, like a teacup leaving the kiln, that I could see with my own eyes. Moreover, theirs is a dull and painful journey that may take a lifetime. And even were they to say that they have forgiven him, they would receive no recognition for doing so. Therefore, I think that this is the way of the unsung hero. Even more so than a lifelong goal, I think that theirs is a noble undertaking, excruciating and silent, yet full of the sweet smell of love. In fact, such a story tells us the real reason that human beings are alive."

It is a difficult choice, indeed, whether to hate and seek revenge upon the person who killed your loved one, or to forgive him. Unless forgiveness, acceptance, and coexistence are firmly rooted in religious faith, they are extremely difficult to find. The programs of the Centre for Peace Building and Reconciliation are just such a noble undertaking, and therefore I have the most profound respect for their tireless efforts to help people move beyond extremely painful and difficult circumstances.

Just as it takes about twenty years for a baby to become an adult, to tackle a difficult problem also requires about twenty years. I therefore am always praying for the continued success, steadily and surely, of the CPBR as it works together with religious leaders, with youth, and with women, that is, with people bearing responsibility for the future, as well as with its many staff members and volunteers.

I would like to close my address with my heartfelt prayers that today's Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony becomes an opportunity for the hopes and activities of the CPBR to be shared by many more people, and also that from this time forward, as before, Dishani Jayaweera and Jayanda Seneviranda will enjoy good health as they continue their important mission.

Thank you very much.