

The Thirty-eighth Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony Address

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Warm greetings to everyone at this thirty-eight Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony.

As happened last year, this year's presentation ceremony is also being held online. I truly regret being unable to meet in person this year's recipient and everyone involved in awarding this year's prize, but as a precaution against the possible spread of coronavirus, we decided on this format. Thank you for your kind understanding.

Today, despite their busy schedules, many people have joined this online ceremony. I sincerely thank you all for your participation.

As you know, the winner of this year's Niwano Peace Prize is a Taiwanese Buddhist Master, the nun Shih Chao-hwei. I would like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to Chairperson Sarah Joseph and the members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee for making this year's selection.

Ven. Chao-hwei is a Buddhist monastic from Asia, as was the case with last year's Niwano Peace Prize winner, the South Korean monk Pomnyun. The committee carefully reviews all recipients to ensure that the prize is awarded without bias or favoritism toward any region or religious faith. I hear that Ven. Chao-hwei's achievements are so highly esteemed that her selection was all but inevitable.

Chairperson Sarah Joseph just told us about the reasons for this year's selection. Thank you, Mrs. Joseph.

Ven. Chao-hwei, firmly grounded in the essential Buddhist spirit of liberating all living beings from suffering, has developed social programs that promote the sanctity of all life, including animals and the natural environment; the abolition of the death penalty; and the prohibition of gambling.

She is also actively engaged in eliminating gender-based discrimination and inequality as well as protecting the rights of the LGBT community.

I just used the Buddhist term, “all living beings,” which means “everything that is living in this world” or “all forms of life.” In the Buddhist world, not only humans, but animals, plants, and even things that are said to be inanimate, are equally respected as forms of absolute being.

The wish that all living beings have happiness, security, and peace of mind is none other than the great compassion of the Buddha.

To use more personal terms, this is the feeling that, as long as there is even one person around you who does not have happiness, you cannot let yourself freely enjoy your own happiness. Ven. Chao-hwei’s mind is full of unlimited compassion for all living beings while she takes a hands-on approach to tackling real-world problems.

She has called for the prevention of inhumane treatment of animals as they themselves are always nearly powerless. I think we can say that her activism is symbolized by her successful work toward Taiwan’s ratification of the Wildlife Conservation Act and the Animal Protection Act.

Ven. Chao-hwei explains the most important Buddhist teaching to put into practice is getting rid of suffering and bringing peace of mind.

The Buddhists aphorism “get rid of suffering and bring peace” literally means removing the causes of living beings’ suffering and giving them peace of mind and therefore, it is another way of explaining the compassion taught by Buddhism.

The Japanese word for “compassion,” *jihi*, is a compound written with two Chinese characters. The first of these characters, *ji*, means the sincere wish to give other people peace of mind. The second character, *hi*, indicates the earnest desire to be able to remove suffering from their lives.

Compassion is more than just a moral concept. We could say that it is called forth by a profoundly religious spirit commanding us to rejoice in the joy of others and experience the suffering of others as if it were our own.

Of course many of you know that a core teaching of Buddhism is the principle of dependent origination, which states that all phenomena in this world are brought about through the interrelation of various causes and conditions.

If, after letting go of your preconceived notions, you really look at the world,

you will come to see that everything on earth is always interrelated, coexisting, and connected as one.

The stars spreading out across the universe, the sun, the moon and indeed, all life on Earth accords with this principle of dependent origination and exists in a state of great harmony.

The life of each and every human being, here and now, is supported by parents and ancestors, of course, as well as countless other people and things and the blessings provided by nature.

If you look deeply into this—the true nature of all things—you can transcend the narrow viewpoint of your individual life and perceive everything as one great life-force. This is how Buddhism sees the world in which we live.

In other words, this is the realization of the unity of self and others, of oneself and others being one and the same, and that we all are brothers and sisters. And this is why all life is equally sacred and we feel other people's joy as our own joy and other people's sadness as our own sadness.

The very natural, human emotion that arises from that sense of unity is none other than compassion.

At the same time, there is profound wisdom underlying Buddhist compassion. As we often see in daily life, the self-centered lavishing of affection and attention, although well-intentioned, can instead lead to unhappiness.

Let me cite a familiar example.

Someone saw a cicada struggling to climb out of its shell and decided to help it. With human help, the cicada easily shed its shell, but it did not develop the strength to fly and so it eventually died. By exerting themselves to get free of their shells, cicadas gain the strength to fly and survive.

I myself lived in a mountain village as a boy and I was often told not to touch cicadas trying to climb out of their shells as well as cicadas that had just emerged from their shells. This is a piece of wisdom that had taken root in a local region.

Buddhism is called a religion of wisdom and compassion. It is often said that wisdom equals compassion and compassion equals wisdom. Let's say that growing

close to other people through a compassionate mind, using wisdom to find the root cause of that person's suffering, and taking appropriate actions according to the particular circumstances—that attitude and approach is most important.

Although our minds comprehend such a process, comprehension does not easily take the form of action. However, no matter how difficult the issue, Ven. Chao-hwei is undaunted in speaking out and taking the lead to bring about positive change. I would like to express my deepest respect to Ven. Chao-hwei, who embodies the compassion and wisdom of the Buddha.

I hear that Ven. Chao-hwei is very energetic and has a strong backbone and, at the same time, she is unfailingly in demonstrating care and consideration for those around her. I am really looking forward to meeting her in person someday.

I would like to conclude this address by expressing my sincere hope that today's presentation ceremony will serve as an opportunity for even more people to share the goals and activism of Ven. Chao-hwei and that she will continue, in good health, to pursue her important mission.

Thank you very much.