

The 39th Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony Address

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Greetings to all of you at the thirty-ninth annual Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony.

This presentation ceremony is being convened online again this year. It is truly regrettable that we could not invite this year's recipient to be here in person. Thank you for understanding that this decision was made out of concern about the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Although this presentation ceremony is being held online today, there are a great many participants.

Everyone, I sincerely thank you for joining us.

The recipient of this year's Niwano Peace Prize is Father Michael Lapsley, SSM, an Anglican priest in South Africa. I would like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to all members of the Niwano Peace Prize Committee for making this year's selection.

As we just heard in the committee's rationale for this year's selection, Father Lapsley established and presides over the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM). Its workshops are a place for those who have suffered trauma, such as apartheid, to be heard, grow close to other people, and find hope.

At present, Healing of Memories workshops have spread globally and expanded to include many kinds of participants: those suffering from discrimination and injustice; victims of domestic, criminal, or political violence; and military veterans and incarcerated persons.

The intense psychological stress of a traumatic experience can leave a deep wound that, for some people, will never completely heal. In many cases, it is impossible for them to express to anyone the deep suffering and sadness that remains trapped inside.

I would like to talk about one such example that has symbolic meaning here in Japan. As all of you know, at the end of World War II, atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Seventy-seven years have passed since Japan experienced the devastation of war. And yet there are still many people who have never spoken of their personal experience of the atomic

bombings. That experience was so excruciating, so traumatic for them that their deep psychological wounds remain unhealed to this day.

For people suffering from such unbearably painful memories, a Healing of Memories workshop provides a safe haven where they can talk, with peace of mind, about traumatic events.

At a workshop, trustworthy people create a warm and welcoming, faith-based atmosphere, in which participants can talk about and listen to each other's experiences.

Central to healing people's psychological wounds are two principal matters.

First, acknowledging and understanding that something terrible has been done to them. Second, their being able to grow close to those who genuinely care about their well-being.

As Father Lapsley says, "Telling others, in your own words, about painful past events works to detoxify them and promotes healing."

These words of Father Lapsley's remind me of hoza, which is one of Rissho Kosei-kai's core practices.

The prototype of hoza is said to be dialogue between the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni, and suffering people. At a hoza session, from seven or eight people to a dozen or more form a circle, sitting around a hoza leader, to discuss various problems and troubles they are dealing with in their daily lives.

Hoza is a place where people share each other's suffering and sadness. When one person speaks honestly about a problem, the other participants become close to and give encouragement to that person. Together they study the way toward a solution that comports with the Buddha's teachings.

While some aspects of a Healing of Memories workshop are different from hoza, I think that they are basically activities with the same purpose. Therefore, I am all the more deeply impressed by Father Lapsley's accomplishments.

Father Lapsley has said that we need to heal painful memories because "it is far too easy for a victim in the past to become a victimizer in the future."

In general, people who have been treated unjustly or suffered abuse become angry at and hate the persons responsible. When their emotions run high, they respond to hatred with hatred and counter violence with violence. This situation may gradually deteriorate into an unceasing chain reaction of distrust and aggression.

One of the earliest Buddhist scriptures, the Dhammapada, teaches us that “Hatred does not cease by hatred; only through compassion is it dispelled. This is truth eternal.”

Our earnest desire, as human beings, is that this spirit of compassion breaks that chain reaction of anger and hatred and we build a world of coexistence in which we can all live together.

The teachings of the Buddha are also called “the teachings of compassion.” Simply put, being compassionate means that you sincerely want to give people peace of mind. In other words, you sincerely want to alleviate other’s suffering. And this compassion is directed at everyone—it makes no distinction between friend or foe.

I believe that the Institute for Healing of Memories is the realization, in contemporary society, of this spirit of compassion, which Christianity calls, “the spirit of love.”

Therefore, I would like to once again express my profound respect for Father Lapsley.

We are now confronted with the brutal reality of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This conflict will take a long time to resolve, but even if both parties agree to a ceasefire, people’s minds will still be coping with their memories of this war—the fear, anxiety, anger, and hatred it has incurred.

As Father Lapsley says, “As soon as war or conflict breaks out, we must find a just resolution to the political and economic issues that have divided us. But part of this resolution must be addressing the psychological, emotional, and spiritual consequences that come with war.”

This is a matter that must be kept in mind not only by religious people, but by everyone, including members of international organizations and NGOs.

I hope and pray that hereafter, Father Lapsley will continue to share the experience and wisdom of the Institute for Healing of Memories with as many people as possible and lead us toward a world of peaceful coexistence.

I have heard that while Father Lapsley is a person of strong faith, he also has a wonderful sense of humor and is very amiable. I am really looking forward to meeting him in person someday.

In closing, I would like to express my hope and prayers that today’s presentation ceremony serves as an opportunity for as many people as possible to share Father Lapsley’s wishes and join his program and that hereafter, in good health, he continues his vital work.

Thank you very much.