

Twenty-fourth Niwano Peace Prize Ceremony Address

Nichiko Niwano

President, Niwano Peace Foundation

I would like to sincerely thank our many distinguished guests for attending the presentation ceremony of the Twenty-fourth Niwano Peace Prize.

It is a great honor to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to the founder of the Taiwan-based Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation, Dharma Master Cheng Yen.

The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation is one of the world's leading Buddhist volunteer groups.

The Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation —please allow me to say Tzu Chi for short— has four principle programs, which are charity, medical care, education, and the spread of humanistic culture. They also take on international relief efforts, bone marrow banks, environmental protection, and local volunteer programs. All of these efforts are being promoted in Taiwan and to every region of the world, and therefore Master Cheng Yen was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. This event is one measure of the how good reputation Tzu Chi enjoys around the world.

I had the opportunity to visit Tzu Chi's Headquarters in Hualien, in eastern Taiwan, earlier this month, and to meet with Master Cheng Yen. In fact, I also toured the general hospital, the elementary school, junior high school, high school, university, technical training institute, and recycling center managed by Tzu Chi. I listened to the people responsible for managing each facility, and the pride and joy with which Tzu Chi members take on their activities was readily apparent to me. I was deeply impressed to see that each person's heart, and each program, is rooted in the spirit of Master Cheng Yen and is a living example of it.

Master Cheng Yen practices asceticism every day in a practice hall called the Abode of Still Thoughts (靜思精舍). She became a Buddhist nun and left behind worldly attachments, deepening her faith through a life of austerities. I had the privilege of joining the "volunteer assembly" that is held every morning at the Abode of Still Thoughts (靜思精舍), and there I felt that I was catching a glimpse of the origin of the spirit of Tzu Chi, that is, the spirit of compassionate relief. The religious faith and conviction Master Cheng Yen transmits from the Abode of Still Thoughts (靜思精舍) is the guidepost of the Tzu Chi and binds the Bodhisattva practice that is the various programs and activities in Taiwan and around the world.

We are apt to notice the large scale, international dimensions of the programs and activities of the Tzu Chi. However, the "compassion relief" of Tzu Chi is the short form of "saving the world through compassion"—that is, bringing relief and salvation to all the world's people through the Buddha's mind of compassion. It also has, as its goal, all people revealing their buddha-natures and

becoming bodhisattvas. What I mean to say is that, above all else, through the religious awakening of the people who encounter it, Tzu Chi is a modern-day embodiment of the mind of Shakyamuni.

In my analysis of Tzu Chi, I find there are four characteristics of its guiding spirit.

First, there is the spirit of "By saving other people, I myself am saved."

In Buddhism, there is the aphorism, "One's own profit is the profit of others." The meaning is not that our actions for the sake of other people will somehow come back to profit ourselves. The idea it expresses is that when we have the profit of others in mind and put into practice this consideration for others, we find our own salvation and joy.

In Tzu Chi, volunteer activities are always performed gratefully—after all, we have the opportunity to be of service to others because there are people who need assistance.

The second characteristic of the Tzu Chi spirit is the religious willpower to "plant seeds of goodness in the field of the mind, and continue to cultivate them."

It is no exaggeration to say that all of the multitude of events in this world are born in the minds of human beings. Allow me repeat what Master Cheng Yen has said on this point:

"Let's plant many seeds of goodness in the field of the mind. With each seed of goodness we plant, there is one less weed. Where the land is left untilled, weeds will certainly thrive. Therefore, we must persevere in our good deeds, never becoming lazy for one day, or even for one hour. Let's try to remember the goodness in our minds in every little thing we do."

The greatest goal of Tzu Chi is transforming barren land into fields of plenty by cultivating the mind-fields of the masses, and thereby making better societies and a better world.

The third characteristic of the Tzu Chi spirit is the religious conviction that "Human beings and the Buddha have the same fundamental nature."

Master Cheng Yen sometimes preaches "Making the Buddha-Law everyday life" and "Humanizing the bodhisattva." She believes that a bodhisattva is irreplaceable existence imbued with the possibility that all living beings become buddhas and every human being finds enlightenment.

All of Tzu Chi's programs and activities are born from the unshakable belief that if the buddha-nature, which resides in every human heart, is actively developed, then there will be peace in our world.

The fourth characteristic of the Tzu Chi spirit is the day-to-day attitude of "treating the present moment as precious, and living life to the fullest."

The core teaching of Buddhism, the Law of Impermanence, say that "All things in this world are constantly changing, without stopping for even a moment." I myself, every day, create something while I am changing, have this life because I am caused to live. And in the end, finally, we all approach death. There is no one who can escape the fact of death.

Master Cheng Yen tells us in these words: "Because life in this world is short, it is all the more worthy of respect. And because we have been so fortunate as to receive life as human beings, we must ask ourselves if we are going to use our talents and abilities to make a better world."

The basic frame of mind for members of Tzu Chi is to focus upon what must be done in the present moment, with a heart full of compassion.

These four characteristics of the Tzu Chi spirit are, in and of themselves, the spirit of Shakyamuni. Furthermore, in reality, Tzu Chi is doing work like Kannon, the bodhisattva of mercy, by resolving social problems, and like the bodhisattva Yakushi, the Medicine-Master, by building hospitals to treat people's illnesses. And where there are impoverished people, Tzu Chi's members come right up to them like the bodhisattva Jizo and offer a helping hand.

I would like to express my heartfelt admiration for the members of Tzu Chi, who have devoted themselves to practicing compassion, aiming at becoming bodhisattvas and embodying the mind of Shakyamuni. And I would like to also express my deep respect for Master Cheng Yen, who founded Tzu Chi and has led so many members to it.

In today's world, self-centered values are more strongly engrained than ever. I hope that, in such circumstances, the compassionate work of Tzu Chi will continue to be even more broadly and deeply developed, from this time one.

I would like to conclude today with my prayer that today's presentation ceremony will become the catalyst for the Tzu Chi spirit to take hold in even one more person's heart, and for Master Cheng Yen to enjoy every blessing of health and the even greater success of her sacred mission.

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