

Twenty-Eighth Niwano Peace Prize Presentation Ceremony Address

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President, Rissho Kosei-kai

I would like to offer my sincere expression of gratitude to the many distinguished guests present here today for attending this Twenty-eight Niwano Peace Prize presentation ceremony.

The Niwano Peace Foundation is greatly honored to present this year's Niwano Peace Prize to the lay Buddhist leader the Venerable Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand, who is one of the founders of INEB, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.

This year's ceremony was originally scheduled for May 19 in Tokyo. Taking into consideration the lingering affects of the Eastern Japan Earthquake of March 11, we decided to postpone until today and to move the venue to Kyoto.

Despite the unusual circumstances of the earthquake and the subsequent postponement of the event, this year's recipient, Ven. Sulak, and all of you have come in large numbers to attend today's ceremony.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

Many of you are well acquainted with Venerable Sulak, and know of his sharp intellect and great passion, as well as his dynamic energy. I often participate in the programs of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP), and have seen him from time to time at WCRP's international conferences. During the discussion period, he always speaks from the standpoint of the impoverished, as he advocates for the importance of religious leaders taking an active role in social planning. For many years, his advocacy, rooted in religious practice, has continued to provide valuable suggestions to the world's religious leaders.

Ven. Sulak takes action not only as a lay Buddhist leader, but also as a lawyer, teach, scholar, author, and activist. He is extremely versatile in many fields including religion, culture, education, environmentalism, and social justice and public welfare.

In 1989, Ven. Sulak and a Japanese Nichiren priest named Teruo Maruyama put forth the proposal to establish the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) in Thailand.

With the goal of realizing a peaceful society with justice grounded in Buddhist principles, INEB is undertaking staff training, publishing, and network building among Buddhists who are actively engaged in policy planning regarding peace, human rights, and the environment.

Unfortunately, I must make a very sad announcement. Teruo Maruyama, one of the cofounders of INEB, passed away on June 13. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep respect for his many great achievements, and my heartfelt prayer that he may rest in peace.

I would now like to describe some of Ven Sulak's current activities, which cover a broad range of fields. However, I have noticed a common theme running through them all—a fundamental inquiry into what it truly means to be rich.

After the Second World War, Asian countries followed the model of the advanced nations of the West and set their course on rapid economic expansion. Japan has been a prime example of this.

On the one hand, this path satisfies people's material desires, but on the other, it has spawned several serious problems, including an ever-widening gap in wealth distribution, destruction of the natural environment, and spiritual decay.

Ven. Sulak sounded a warning when he said, "We cannot realize the true development of human society as long as people are forced to live in poverty."

He has also given us the following invaluable advice:

"First, we must uncritically open our eyes to Western models of development, which encourage violence, capitalism, materialism, and centralization."

"Second, we must open our eyes to the value of our own cultural roots. In other words, we should show respect to the culture indigenous to our ancestors and our region by ensuring that traditional values are relevantly applied to the present-day and into the future."

On the international level, he advocates that, "We should encourage Westerners to pay more attention to their own spiritual development. In other words,

when individuals change, they bring about social change, and in order to make that happen, they need to realize inner peace.”

He has also noted that “For Buddhism to be more effective today, it must be relevant to modern industrial society, and be capable of adapting to problems on the global scale.”

Ven. Sulak is the embodiment of the phrase “think globally, act locally.” With his rare intellect, he correctly perceives global problems, and is clearly showing the people of Asia the path to pursue from now on.

Buddhism is the essence of his principles and practical methods. Ven. Sulak is highly esteemed as an activist, of course, but above all else, he is known as a true “seeker of the Way.”

While Ven. Sulak’s numerous suggestions are primarily directed toward the people of Thailand, they are certainly applicable to Japan as well.

In the sixty years since World War II ended, Japan has evolved into one of the world’s handful of economic powerhouses. In the process, though, many basic things have been forgotten as people have become obsessed with consumerism and materialism. A number of problems have become plainly evident.

And now, Japan has suffered an earthquake and tsunami that occurs only once in 500 years, or perhaps only once in 1,000 years. Even in Tokyo, which is not directly in the devastated region, shortages of electric power and certain necessities are continuing to cause some anxiety.

On the other hand, some changes have become evident that we should pay attention to. Walking on streets dimly lit due to reductions in electric power, many people have realized that up until now, making nighttime so light was not normal. New customs are being born from conserving energy. For instance, people are cutting back on going out to eat. More people are packing their own lunches and eating at home in the evening, which in turn provides a good opportunity to reevaluate the importance of one’s family and immediate neighborhood.

I think that the recent disaster has once again called upon me, as a citizen of Japan, to return to basics and reassess the right way to live.

And while it may seem ironic, due to this large-scale disaster, we Japanese

may be regaining our humanity, little by little.

From long ago, we Japanese have valued a lifestyle of helping one another and sharing, leading simple lives aimed at securing basic needs and reducing waste.

In ancient times, Japan was given the name “Yamato,” which literally means “great peace” or “great harmony.” A timeless, unchanging spirit of peace was thus the national ideal of our ancestors.

As I mentioned earlier, Ven Sulak has indicated that we should open our eyes to the value of our cultural roots and adapt them to the present and the future, which I believe is one of the most important missions we have today.

No matter how materially wealthy we become, if we do not know how to be satisfied with what we have, then we will be driven by the feeling of always wanting more, and we will never find peace of mind. For me, this is further confirmation that the first step toward being truly “rich” is for each and every one of us to be grateful for what we are now receiving and allowing the spirit of “wanting less and knowing how much is enough” to take root in our hearts and minds.

Four months have now passed since the Eastern Japan Earthquake. I believe it is extremely significant that, at a time in which Japanese are reevaluating the basics of daily life, Ven Sulak has come here to Japan to be honored at this presentation ceremony for the Niwano Peace Prize. At the commemorative lecture that will follow, I hope to learn more from him.

I would like conclude by making today’s presentation ceremony the opportunity to express my hope that more people will share in the wish and activities of Ven. Sulak, and to offer my heartfelt prayers that his important work will meet with even greater success.

Thank you very much.