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Religious Education: Saving the Earth

Venerable Master Chin Kung AM

The 3rd World Peace Forum

Yogyakarta Indonesia, 30 June 2010

Honorable organizers and all the distinguished guests:

I am very honored to have received the invitation from the organizers to attend The 3rd World Peace Forum held here in Indonesia. The major theme of the forum, Mainstreaming Peace Education, is very meaningful because (1) all of humanity wishes to eliminate disasters and maintain world peace and stability, and (2) everlasting peace can only be fulfilled by education.

I have long admired the traditional Chinese cultures of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as the sacred teachings of different religions in the world. Even with fifty-nine years of learning, I often feel that I have much more to learn. I never tire of learning and I'm always eager to share what I've learnt with others. Now I am eighty-four years old, and I still take great pleasure in learning. I never feel that I am too old to learn. I would like to use this precious opportunity to present you with what I have learned and understood. It is this: from ancient times to the present in both Chinese and Western history, the stability and happiness of a society have had their roots in "sacred teachings of religions."

Global Crises Arise from the Mind

Ever since we entered the 21st century, human and natural disasters have been constantly occurring: climate change, global warming, melting of icebergs in the Arctic and the Antarctic, rising sea level, increasing terrorist attacks, the Iraq war, the Indonesian tsunami, the Wenchuan earthquake, the global financial crisis, food crises, and so on. In particular, the occurrences of the Haiti earthquake, the volcano eruptions in Iceland, the Yushu earthquake in China, the H1N1 pandemic, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill—these types of event are increasing in frequency. They are what the ancients called "signs from heaven," a tolling bell to warn human beings of a pending major catastrophe.

Can we prevent these disasters from happening? Absolutely!

First of all, we have to understand the root of the disasters. As stated in the Buddhist Mahayana sutras: (1) “All phenomena are manifested by the mind.” (2) “Appearances are created by our minds.” (3) “Circumstances are changed by our minds.” Circumstances are the environment around us. Everything, from human affairs to the mountains, rivers, the earth, trees, grass, and flowers, all are transformed by nothing other than our minds. Whose minds? My own mind! The Buddha clearly explained in the Surangama Sutra that increasing greed causes floods; anger causes fire, such as volcanic eruptions and the rise in temperature; ignorance causes disasters from the wind; and arrogance causes earthquakes. Greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance are the roots of the four natural disasters.

On the other hand, where do human disasters, such as conflicts and wars, come from? They are actually caused by our thoughts of confrontation, conflict, and contradiction. When faced with the possibility of gain, do we first have an egoistic idea or altruistic idea? If we first think of benefiting ourselves, it is easy to have a conflict of interest with others. If everyone thinks only of benefitting themselves, how can this world not be chaotic? But if instead, everyone thinks of benefitting others, how could the world not be at peace?

Ancient cultures believed that the connection between how nature works every day and the inner universe in our consciousness is strongly related. The occurrence of devastating storms and weather conditions in a particular area is actually related to the turmoil and unrest in the minds of the local people. The change in human’s belief can slow down or even end a massive earthquake, life-threatening storms, and diseases.

One’s own life is closely related to the earth, not separated from it. All the imbalances of natural phenomenon in the world are the result of inner imbalances within human beings. The minds of human beings have changed and gone against nature. This leads to volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and climate anomalies. If human beings can turn around and embrace forgiveness, compassion, and peace, then our physical environment will improve. There will be fair weather, normal wind and rain, good fortune instead of disasters, peace among countries, and a world filled with happiness and beauty.

Therefore, the root of global crises is in our thoughts. As long as we have a pure, kind, sincere, compassionate minds, then there will be world peace, and the surrounding environment will become beautiful. But if we have impure minds, with thoughts of benefiting ourselves while harming others, and if we have many ill thoughts of greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance, we will bring forth many disasters, as what is happening in the world right now. In other words, we reap exactly what we sow. In the chapter “The Instruction of Yi” in the Book of History, it states, “Do good, one-hundred auspiciousnesses will befall; do bad, disasters will befall.” The Koran states, “And whatever of misfortune befalls you, it is because of what your hands have earned.” (42:30, Noble Quran) The Bible states, “Is it not calamity to the unrighteous, And disaster to the workers of iniquity?” (Job 31:3 ASV)

Mind and Matter are One; Everything is Nothing But Our Consciousness

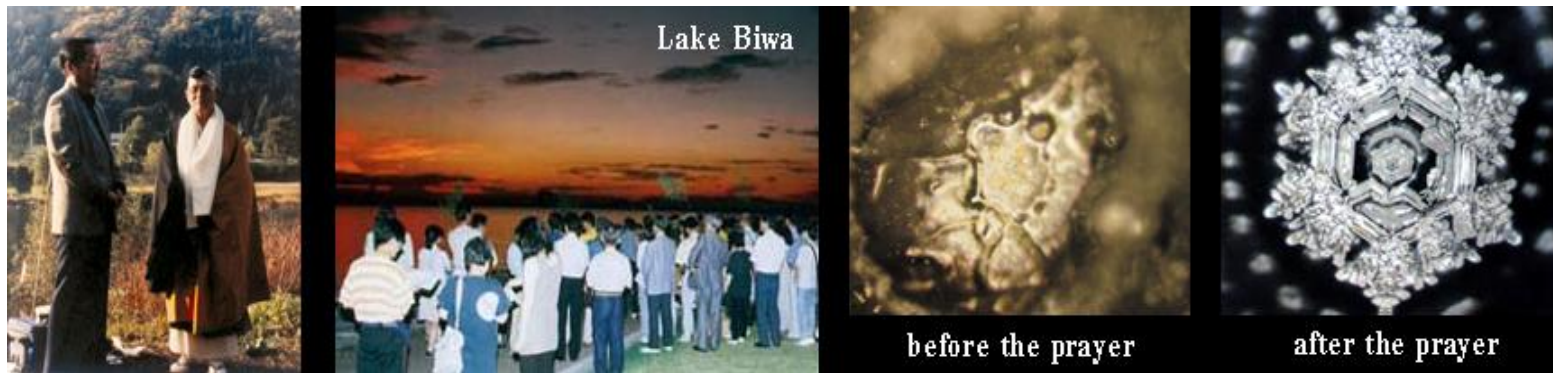
Many scientists now believe that everything in this world is composed of elementary particles such as electrons and quarks, and that they are all actually tiny quantum particles (photons) vibrating at different frequencies. Those quanta that vibrate very slowly form rocks and minerals. Those vibrating faster form animals, plants, and human beings. Those vibrating even faster become television and radio signals. Everything in this universe is made up of quanta that are generated intensively and continuously, and these quanta originate and die at a speed faster than we can imagine.

The noted German physicist, Max Planck, once said, “I can tell you as a result of my research about atoms this much: There is no matter as such. All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together. We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter. (http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Max_Planck).”

Therefore, matter is accumulated from units of consciousness, (the rapid arising and ceasing of thoughts). There is no matter that goes without consciousness. This is what we call “Mind and matter are One; Everything is Nothing But Our Consciousness.” As Maitreya Buddha told us in the Bodhisattva in the Womb Sutra: “Within one snap of a finger, 32 trillion thoughts are developed. Each thought takes a form, and all forms have consciousness.” A form is a physical phenomenon, and consciousness is a mental phenomenon. In reality, both physical and mental phenomena derive from our thoughts. Once our thought arises, various phenomena in the universe appear. Once our thought ceases, the universe disappears and at the same time our true nature instantly emerges.

Our true nature is neither physical nor spiritual. It is true purity, true goodness, compassion, impartiality, and universal love. True nature neither arises nor ceases. It is all-knowing and able to create everything without confrontation. In various religions, people refer to this as the true creator of the universe, the true God.

The bestseller *The Isaiah Effect: Decoding the Lost Science of Prayer and Prophecy* recounts a true story. The story tells of a woman suffering from a tumor. Three doctors sent thoughts to have the tumor disappear. Amazingly, the three-inch tumor totally disappeared in two minutes and forty seconds. Not even a scar remained. This proves how incredible the energy of thought is.



Japanese scientist, Dr. Masaru Emoto, once recruited more than 100 people to conduct a one-hour prayer session at a bay of Lake Biwa, where the water was seriously polluted. All the participants in the session put aside all wandering thoughts and collectively bore only one thought—a message of love and gratitude. After one month, the long-polluted water cleared up and remained clean for half a year. Dr. Emoto took water samples before and after the prayer session, and found that water crystals from the former were deformed, while the latter were very beautiful. When the press in Japan reported the event, the general public were amazed by the results. This illustrates that the power of prayer can indeed change our environment.

Thus, we call on leaders of all faiths and religions to lead their followers to sincerely pray every day for world peace, a stable environment, and no disasters and plagues. We believe that sincere prayers can produce miracles and resolve catastrophes.

**All Religions are One Family;
A Garden of Various Magnificent Flowers**

In 2005, I had the chance to meet the former prime minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad. He asked me if the world would ever be peaceful. I replied, “There will be world peace if we can fulfill four relationships: first, the relationships among countries (big vs. small, rich vs. poor countries, etc); second, the relationships among political factions; third, the relationships among ethnic groups; and fourth, the relationships among religions. If we can achieve equal treatment and harmonious coexistence in these relationships, then world peace can be achieved. Though these four relationships are difficult undertakings, the one among religions seems relatively easier to fulfill.” Dr. Mahathir was very pleased with my answer. The next day he invited me to the Perdana Global Peace Forum, which he hosted at the end of 2005 in Kuala Lumpur and where he treated me with great courtesy.

In fact, all of the religions in the world, however diverse, are of one family and in harmony with each other. As the name of the Avatamsaka Sutra suggests, various species of magnificent flowers in a garden, each giving forth a beautiful fragrance, together create a beautiful scene. But if the garden is limited to only one species, the scene will be boring.

In ancient times, travel was inconvenient and communication among different groups was rare. So the true God used different appearances. Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-Tzu all had features of the respective people in different areas. Looking like everybody else, they were able to pass down their sacred teachings.

From this we can tell that all religions are the teachings of one true God, and their core is the teaching of love. The Bible tells us, "For God so loved the world . . ." [John 3:16, NIV] The chapters in the Koran all begin with "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." [Yusif Ali] The Buddha taught us, "Compassion is the essence, and expediency is the means." Confucius said: "The benevolent man loves others," and Lao-Tzu said: "I have three treasures which I cherish and prize. The first is called compassion." [Dao De Jing, Susuki]

Today, travel and communication are convenient. Instead of avoiding one another, religions should cooperate and learn from each other. We have to understand the teachings given by the true God to different people, and we have to deepen our understanding of our own religious texts. We have to bring ourselves closer to the true God, and most importantly, religious believers have to express the love of God through their actions, propagate it to people of the world, and, finally, save this world.

Today's world emphasizes multiculturalism and seeks cooperation among different religions, ethnic groups, and countries. We are one entity. We need to respect, love, care about, care for, and cooperate with each other. We need to pursue harmony. How? Harmony begins within ourselves. Instead of asking others to respect and get along with us, we ourselves need to respect and get along with others first. It does not matter whether others pay equal respect to us or try to get along with us. Eventually we will move them and influence them if we persevere in respecting them.

If I have the merest thought of demanding that others first get along with me, harmony can never truly be achieved. It is because I place myself in a conflicting position with the thought of demanding, dominating, and possessing others. So I do my utmost to love other people, care about and for them, and help them wholeheartedly. I do all this without asking anything in return because I know that we are one and that this universe is one living entity.

Religious Education is the Fundamental Solution

As I have just mentioned, religious prayers are a good way to temporarily reduce looming disasters. But they can only treat the symptoms, not the root cause of the problem. A fundamental solution should be able to transform people's minds into virtuous ones. If we want everlasting harmony, we need to seek solutions at both the temporary and permanent levels.

Throughout China's 5000 years of history, the Chinese have maintained the unity of the country and the stability of society not by means of military prowess, economics, or technology, but by means of education. In the chapter

called “Record on the Subject of Education” in The Book of Rites, we read, “Education is essential in building a country and in guiding its people.”

Religions are sacred teachings on loving-kindness and universal love. The term religion, zhong jiao in Mandarin, carries significant implications. Zhong means major, important, and esteemed. Jiao means education. Put together, zhong jiao means major, important, and esteemed education. Religious education includes the following five categories: morality, ethics, causality, philosophy, and science. If all religions can cooperate and work together to promote sacred teachings to the world, we can definitely achieve world peace. This is the fundamental approach to long-lasting social stability and peace in both the East and the West.

A proof of this is that all the great saints and sages of every religion, by their examples, showed that the way of teaching is the only approach to peace and harmony. For example, Jesus taught for three years, Confucius for five years, the Prophet Muhammad for twenty-seven years, and the Buddha for forty-nine years. They all set good examples for us.

At the end of 2005, we began a three-year experiment in the town of Tangchi in Lujiang County, Anhui Province, China. We built The Lujiang Centre of Cultural Education and implemented teachings of morality and ethics for local people. We brought a great change to this small town of 48,000 people, and significantly improved their way of life and thinking. We successfully proved that human beings are originally good in nature and that people can be taught to be good. The experiment showed that traditional moral education, as advocated by the ancient saints and sages, still works in the building of a harmonious society.

In October, 2006, the achievements of the project were exhibited for three days at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. The attendees, who were devoted to the promotion of world peace, were greatly motivated.

The Pure Land Learning College Association, Inc. (PLLCA) invited ten religious leaders from Singapore and Australia to pray for world peace at UNESCO, demonstrating that cooperation among religions is possible.

At UNESCO conferences, I made several suggestions that on the basis of religious cooperation in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Australia, a university of religion could be established. We can first set up a graduate school of religion to train teachers and then go on to set up a multi-faith university. A curriculum of morality, ethics, causality, philosophy, and science can be designed to train administrators and advanced teachers of each religion to propagate their own teachings. Every religion would have their own individual colleges, and each college would have both core curriculum courses and specialized courses.

Students would need to build a foundation first in core curriculum courses on morality, ethics, and causality. They would explore in depth the sacred texts of their own religions while humbly studying the teachings of other religions. They can learn as they teach and deliver their teachings via the Internet and satellite television. After

graduation from the university, when the students start propagating their religions, they will also naturally teach their followers to treat other religions with equality and to live in harmony with all.

When I was accepting the honorary doctorate from Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, Indonesia, a student asked after the ceremony, “How can different religions cooperate?” I used my hand as an analogy: the five fingers represent the five religions in Indonesia. When we look at the fingers, we see their own unique characteristics; however, if we look down a little bit and look at the palm, we will awaken to the fact that all religions originate from the same source. There is no need for practitioners to change to other religions: as long as we specialize in our own religion and immerse ourselves in it for a long time, we will finally thoroughly understand the teachings of all religions.

Ancient sages and saints taught us that in everything we do, we need to begin with ourselves. Therefore, the PLLCA is preparing for a harmony center, and we have invited Muslim elder, Mr. Muhammad Hanif Abdul Razak from Singapore to lecture on the Koran and the Hadith, and Christian elder Mr. Peter Hennesey from Australia to talk about the Bible. We plan to invite more religious elders, including those from Judaism and Hinduism, to give lectures next year.

The British historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee said that ancient Chinese open-mindedly welcomed Buddhism even though it came from another country, India. They accepted and assimilated the all-embracing teachings. When Buddhism entered China, the Chinese were able to absorb the essence of this teaching, enriched their own traditional culture, and enhanced the level of Chinese culture. Now we wish to study in depth the sacred texts and teachings of different religions, absorb their essence, and enrich our own knowledge and cultivation. Guidelines For Being a Good Person (Di Zi Gui) teaches us to “love all beings and to be close to kind, virtuous people.” We have to ask the advice and learn from prophets, elders, and virtuous leaders of every religion. This is “being close to kind, virtuous people.”

We hope that the PLLCA can serve as a place for this experiment. This will be a place where people can learn the teachings of diversified religions; love and respect people of different faiths with sincerity, purity and impartiality; and live harmoniously with one another. We hope that we will be able to set an example, encourage others to take our endeavors as a reference, and participate in the undertaking. This would be like The Lujiang Centre of Cultural Education where the teachers set a good example and created a pattern of effective teaching within a short time. Now Lujiang’s example is widely duplicated by many people. If the PLLCA can succeed in the project of encouraging people to learn diversified religions, then all the benevolent, virtuous guests here are more than welcome to visit us. Please give us your valuable opinions.

I deeply believe that religious teachings on causality, morality, and ethics will definitely turn bad in us humans to good, pollution to purity, and delusion to enlightenment. This is the only correct solution to various kinds of conflicts and human and natural disasters. If the followers of diverse faiths and religions can sincerely cooperate;

observe the rules; cultivate themselves; practice the teachings and influence others; learn from one another; respect one another; love, care about, and cooperate with one another; then society and the world will be harmonious.

I sincerely hope that the sacred teachings of religions can flourish around the world so that proper teachings will be venerated, evils will naturally disappear, society will be stable, and the world harmonious!

To all respected participants, I thank you for listening to my humble opinions and welcome your comments.

May the conference be a success! I wish you good fortune and much happiness!

Shi Chin Kung

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