

Fostering the Culture of Studying Other Scriptures to Achieve Religious Peace and Roles of Religious Leaders

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Hello, it is an honor to give an address at the International Religious Leaders' Conference of the 9th Anniversary of the September 18th HWPL World Peace Summit, which resumed offline after a long COVID-19 pandemic. I am Phra Sitawatchamethi, and in July of this year, I gave lectures on Theravada Buddhism at the International Religious Peace Academy, or "IRPA" for short, on behalf of the Vice-Rector for the Administration of MCU, Phra Theppawaramethi. I have participated the International Religious Peace Academy, a new platform of HWPL, and gained a profound understanding of peace and the importance of cooperation with various religious leaders. It is a great pleasure to be here today to share this valuable experience.

At MCU, a leading Buddhist university in Thailand, we are conducting interfaith cultural exchange programs, which is similar to the International Religious Peace Academy, to promote understanding and harmony among different religions. However, I find it remarkable that the IRPA platform, which gathered almost 1400 participants, has expanded the scope of religious exchange. The IRPA, which brings five different religions at one place, sharing teachings under the same topic based on their respective scriptures is like a World Expo for religions. Through this platform, we were able to more clearly understand the commonalities and differences among the different faiths.

In addition, through the IRPA, I gained a new perspective on how individuals from different religions and cultures can peacefully coexist and cooperate. Also, through this experience, I was able to confirm once again that we are connected through the study of the scriptures. Based on this connection, I believe the time has come for us to strive towards building a peaceful world. This is because we can deeply exchange each other's fundamental values and understand beyond just collaborating and communicating at a surface level with people from diverse religious backgrounds.

Delivering two lectures on Buddhism during the IRPA event was not an easy task for me. While I greatly appreciate the curiosity of leaders from other faiths wanting to learn about Buddhism, there was a burden in my

role as the first to introduce Thai Theravada Buddhism in the first IRPA program at HWPL. I thought a lot about how to create a connection and foster deeper understanding among individuals from diverse backgrounds towards Thai Theravada Buddhism. Particularly challenging was explaining the intricate, complex concepts of Buddhism to those who aren't familiar with Buddhist teachings.

However, the religious leaders attending the IRPA were those who had worked together to understand each other's scriptures and resolve misunderstandings through years of interfaith collaboration at the WARP Offices and I have seen their dedication to promote academic exchange among different religions through their participation at the IRPA. These observations have encouraged me to engage in conversations about Thai Theravada Buddhism with them as well.

Furthermore, following the July sessions of the IRPA, MCU provided a Buddhist follow-up education program in August. We introduced a Q&A segment after the lectures, facilitated by the Buddhist lecturers. In particular, the audience I met in the Buddhist Experience Program following the IRPA, exhibited enthusiasm, positivity, and an unwavering interest in the Buddhist lectures. I firmly believe that it is very important to hold deeper understanding through questions. By creating an environment where participants can freely ask questions and express doubts, we can support a more profound comprehension of Buddhist teachings and their practical application in everyday life.

As many are aware, the progress of humanity so far has been possible thanks to sharing of knowledge transcending time and space. Through this International Religious Peace Academy, sharing of knowledge based on scriptures will extend to understanding not only the respective religions but also cultures, ideologies, and life itself. And within this framework, we will find ourselves sharing genuine friendships. Furthermore, these efforts will lead to a broader religious integration and advancement of the religious world, going beyond the confines of religious issues.

Furthermore, to facilitate the expansion of platforms like the IRPA, I believe that myself and other religious leaders need to examine our own hearts, and try to open minds, and pay attention to religious knowledge. In Buddhism, there's a concept of the "mind vessel." In Buddhism, when the mind vessel is clean and pure, positive qualities and actions appear, which are believed to reduce real-life suffering and contribute to spiritual growth. The teachings of Buddhism imply that by training and maintaining the mind vessel, humans can attain wisdom and tranquility.

With many disciples under our guidance, if we, the spiritual leaders cultivate and refine our mind vessels, it can serve as a catalyst for learning religious knowledge and harmony, allowing us to achieve religious harmony with an open mind. Moreover, let's actively engage in academic exchanges with various religious institutions to spread the spirit of the International Religious Peace Academy and encourage widespread participation.

Based on the knowledge and insights gained from the International Religious Peace Academy, we can explore paths for a better future and work towards making a peaceful world a reality. Moving forward, through collaboration with HWPL, we aim to plant the seeds of harmony as diverse religions and cultures interact across the globe, acting as the engine of peace. By joining hands in this manner, I believe that our efforts, as religious leaders, to realize peace, will be remembered in the future.

Thank you. We are one!

