

## Annual Candlelight Reflection

By Benjamin Wong



Since the opening of the I-Kuan Tao Foundation of America in San Francisco, we continued to fulfill the vows of our Great Master Chang and Great Mistress Sun to spread the Tao. As part of our sincerity in spreading and cultivating the Tao, we conduct an annual night of group self awareness named the Candlelight Reflection where we all come together and reflect on the past and how we may improve for the future. We held our third annual Candlelight Reflection during this past December under the theme of "Peace". The hard work by the planners and the earnest anticipation of the attendees made it truly a great spiritual success.

We started the evening with a welcome reception and refreshment hour and it was a wonderful opportunity to get to know other Tao members better. We

felt warm in each other's company as spiritual fellowship blended into our souls. The beauty of the artfully prepared tasty little snacks presented on the serving table brought joy to our senses.

Next, we went upstairs to the Hall of God temple room and performed the Evening Ceremony. Before the ceremony, a



Tao member provided a detailed explanation of the holy altar settings and the meaning of ceremony for the benefit of new Tao members and guests. During the ceremony, the sacred expression of devotion was evident in each of the Tao participants as the love of God surfaced from the deepest part of each person's heart. We cried happily in silence as the ceremony continued to its holy ending.

We then went to the banquet room for the vegetarian dinner and listened to Master Lee's opening message on our theme for "Peace". Her message went to

the heart of our concerns for the world.

"We all hope and expect to see a more peaceful time to come. However, as the Dali Lama said at the beginning of this year that as we enter into the year, things will be the same and there will be nothing unusual. But if we really want the year to be happier, more peaceful, and more harmonious for all of humankind, we will have to make the effort to do this." Each and every one of us can make a big difference. We all do not like to see violence. We cannot stand to see many human beings killed by others every day. We do not like to see people fighting with each other just because they have different beliefs. Everyone should open their hearts and minds to accept any differences in opinions. We all here can help others to accept the different situations that result from the differences in races and cultures. Each and every one of us can help make the world a better place to live."

The vegetarian meal was extremely wonderful and very well prepared by Tao members. Our meal was a memorable inspiring feast and one that truly strengthen our bodies. We believe that your physical well being and spiritual well being are equally important.

After the meal, we performed a simple group exercise to express how we



can make world peace. The steps and procedures for getting to the point of creating the solutions were somewhat uneasy as we followed the instructions. Our simple group exercise was actually a micro representation of typical human behavior seen in all world political actions today in that the steps toward world peace are not always easy. We had some problems in the group exercise for reaching the point to provide the solutions but once we got there, the answers were all readily evident. The lesson learned was that all we have to do is make the effort to take these steps and once completed, we naturally have the answers to how world peace can be achieved. It is not a matter of how to create world peace because our souls already know the solutions but instead that we all make the effort to do so and overcome any barriers on the way.

The group exercise then led us into the sharing of thoughts by individual Tao members. One temple member expressed

her thoughts on the Heart of Tao and how she was deeply touched by the spirituality of other Tao members. She urged us to continue to spend time in the Tao and help the Tao community so that we may grow and become stronger in our connection with our True Self. Another Tao member talked about his experience with I-Kuan Tao and how it changed his life. He explained that in the Tao, we have everything that we need and all we need to do is step back and see it that way. These guiding thoughts are all valuable for our achievement of inner peace. One temple member expressed it very well when she stated, "World peace starts with each one of us first having inner peace."

The spoken words during the event were important but the unspoken thoughts were also equally important as they spiritually united the attendees as the evening progressed. The accumulation of our unity was at its peak when we gathered in a circle and each one of us wrote things from the past year we wished repentance for on a slip of paper and burned them in a vase in the center of a huge heart shaped symbol of peace. Small candles bordered the edge of the heart; each was lit by a Tao member. At the moment that each Tao member lit one of the many little candles, surely, the

spirit of our spoken and unspoken holy thoughts covered the world with the most tender loving care. After the small candles were lit, we then stood around the "Heart of Peace" holding each other's hands in loving observation and happily ended the evening by singing a joyful group song expressing our love for a peaceful world. We are One!

Master Lee later expressed her great appreciation to all the voluntee:

"We together made the Candlelight night a truly blessed evening. You all had very busy schedules from your daily routines, but you still devoted so much extra time in giving your heart to this event. You committed to do the best you can even though you were already tired. You were so self-motivated for full responsibilities on the tasks that you were taking, and also helped each other spontaneously. I am very touched by you and want to give my deepest appreciation to you all."

