

**PERSPECTIVE: The Unsinkable Titanic**  
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**The new movie makes it clear that each moment in life is extremely important and has profound effects on our future.**

Since Hollywood and the country are abuzz about *Titanic*, I went to see the movie. Placing romance against a backdrop of disaster, *Titanic* is of mythical proportions, yet based on anything but myth.

The *Titanic* was a technological marvel of its era. Walter Lord, in his book *A Night To Remember*, catalogues the ship's truly titanic size: "Her weight — 46,328 gross tons...66,000 tons displacement. Her dimensions — 882.5 feet long...92.5 feet wide...60.5 feet from waterline to Boat Deck, or 175 feet from keel to the top of her four huge funnels. She was, in short, 11 stories high and four city blocks long...her most arresting feature was her watertight construction." The liner was considered unsinkable because of its double hull and watertight steel bulkheads. This may have been one reason why it had a mere 20 lifeboats, enough to save only half of the passengers.

On April 10, 1912, the *Titanic* set sail with a cargo of the rich and famous; 337 first-class passengers, many with entourages of servants, brought all the comforts for a trip abroad: dishes, silverware, brandies and finery. Names like Guggenheim and Astor dotted the first-class list. There were 271 second-class passengers and 712 in third class. The crew totaled 915. In all, 2,235 people.

The atmosphere was festive — until the fourth night of the voyage. As Mr. Lord wrote: "The wind whistled through the rigging as the *Titanic* raced across the calm, black sea at 22.5 knots. It was almost 11:40 p.m. on Sunday, the 14th of April, 1912. Suddenly Fleet [Frederick Fleet, one of six lookouts] saw something directly ahead, even darker than the darkness. At first it was small (about the size, he thought, of two tables put together), but every second it grew larger and closer.... For the next 37 seconds, Fleet and Law [another lookout] stood quietly side by side, watching the ice draw nearer. Iceberg right ahead."

The ship veered but not enough. Captain Edward J. Smith and the ship's architect, Thomas Andrews, calculated that the berg had cut a 300-foot gash in the ship, flooding the first five compartments. The ship was going down.

On April 14, 1912, at 2:20 a.m., the *Titanic* slipped into the depths of the icy Atlantic. The death toll was 1,522. Only 713 survived.

In 1987, SGI President Ikeda used the *Titanic* as an example in one of his speeches. He talked about the atmosphere aboard the lifeboats as the ship sank:

Confusion and misery prevailed on the lifeboats. These boats were poorly equipped and the direction given to each boat was so confusing that some hastily left without many passengers. Many people [who were not in the lifeboats] but succeeded in getting off the ship drowned. Except for lifeboat number 14, the rest ignored those who were drowning in the icy waters. There was even a case in which somebody on a lifeboat hit a drowning person who was desperately trying to climb into their lifeboat. There were many other ugly sights. Indeed, it was a hell that unfolded in the ocean.

The human mind changes from moment to moment. It can become endlessly ugly and mean when it is confronted with a life-or-death situation. When I think of the hellish picture of the sinking *Titanic*, I wish there could have been someone who chanted daimoku on board. At any rate, I cannot help but pray for the peace and happiness of those who were killed in the accident.

Survivors were rescued by the British liner *Carpathia*, which arrived on the scene at 4:40 a.m. After the disaster, acts of heroism and cowardice were recounted by the press and at hearings. Many survivors were branded with shame and regret, while medals were pinned on the brave. The lives of those who had survived were profoundly altered by their actions during the calamity.

Looking at the *Titanic* disaster from a Buddhist perspective makes one realize that each moment of life is extremely important, and what we do now will affect the future.

A friend of mine was talking about the movie *Titanic* to her 13-year-old son. She said, “And at the end, when the *Titanic* sinks....”

“Mom!” her son interrupted. “By telling me the end you’ve ruined the movie for me.”

I don’t think she ruined the movie — the sinking isn’t the story; it’s how people responded to the crisis.

The *Titanic* went down, yes, but the lessons we can learn from its sinking are unsinkable.

**WT**