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Be Mindful in Every Moment

In this world, we hear many different sounds. If we listen well, each sound is teaching us the Dharma.

When we hear praise, we learn not to become filled with pride and arrogance. Thus, ignorance will not flourish in our minds and afflictions will not multiply.

When we are wounded by harsh words, we learn not to hold on to them and damage our wisdom-life. Thus, we will not sever our roots of goodness nor obstruct our spiritual practice.

When our minds are at peace, we are pure and free of greed and will always be content and grateful. When our thoughts are clear, we broaden our minds to embrace and be understanding of everyone. This is how we can eliminate delusions and incorrect views and remain unaffected by conflicts.

Let us transform all sounds into purifying ones and negative karmic conditions into positive ones.

compiled into english by the dharma as water editorial team
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The Editorial Team sincerely thanks everyone who contributed to this issue and warmly welcomes articles, photographs, and comments. Please contact us at journal@us.tzuchi.org. Sign up for a free digital subscription at enews.us.tzuchi.org.

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On November 8, Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines and caused severe devastation throughout the central island of Leyte. In a moment, thousands of families lost their property and homes, and many also lost family members. As if thrown down from Heaven into Hell, the wealthy lost everything they owned, and happy families were shattered forever.

When Tzu Chi volunteers first stepped into Tacloban City, nothing was there but ruins and mountains of debris. All they could hear and see was the dismal devastation. Those with resources had fled from the disaster area to stay with relatives elsewhere; for those without any means, all that was left to do was to roam about where their home used to be, dazed, wordlessly asking the heavens, “Why?”

To encourage the disaster survivors to come out from their despair, Tzu Chi started a Cash-for-Work program. The participants were encouraged to join together to clean up the debris from their streets and neighborhoods; in nineteen days, the program provided more than 280,000 day shifts, and during the peak of the program over thirty thousand people participated each day. Every day, Tzu Chi provided each participant with five hundred pesos in relief cash; it was not a salary, but a symbol of the power of love—an encouragement to rise from the ruins and use their own strength to maintain a living for themselves and their families. While rebuilding their homes, they got to rebuild their own lives at the same time.

Of the images from Da Ai TV’s remote-controlled helicopter, the most spectacular sight was how hard everybody was working to clean up their neighborhoods—the streets, which were covered with debris from destroyed homes, uprooted trees, and broken furniture, were gradually restored until they were accessible again. At the same time, the participants themselves went from utter hopelessness to bright smiles.

The Tzu Chi volunteers gave of themselves with compassion, respect, and love, and used kind wisdom to guide the local residents. In only forty days, this lifeless disaster area was revived, and once crestfallen faces were again
uplifted and smiling. The selfless service of the volunteers brought dignity to the disaster survivors’ bodies and souls, turning their depression into joy and gratitude.

The survivors learned how the money for the Cash-for-Work program, as well as the cash aid to help them rebuild their homes, came from individuals’ small donations, how Tzu Chi was raising funds and inspiring love all over the world. Many wanted to contribute a drop of water into this ocean of virtue and blessings, so they started saving coins in plastic bottles that they brought back to Tzu Chi. There were even some who worked pieces of bamboo into “bamboo banks,” and carved the words “I wish to dedicate myself and work for Tzu Chi” on top!

This all demonstrates the goodness and purity of human nature. Tzu Chi volunteers give of themselves with both compassion and wisdom; they do not only give material aid, they also inspire intangible spiritual wealth, helping people feel at peace in body and mind, arousing hope and pointing out a direction in life. With comforted spirits, the survivors can stand up again and steadfastly move forward.

As Christmas drew near, Tzu Chi completed the large-scale relief cash distributions to forty-four thousand families. The emergency relief phase, including Cash-for-Work, free clinics, and distributions of relief cash and other material aid, as well as the building of temporary classrooms, is already at its end; after this, we will progress with our mid- and long-term relief plans.

At the end of 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers had been staying at the disaster area for over a month, and needed to go back home, but they were reluctant to leave; the locals were also sad to see them go, and many told the volunteers “The money we have received will be used up, but the love you have given us will always stay in our hearts!”

Life is impermanent and full of unfortunate events, but it can also contain such long-lasting Great Love. After creating such a lasting and deep affinity, we hope that this beautiful bond will stay in their hearts, and that they will forever remember how Tzu Chi brought them this power of joy and happiness.
TZU CHI’S BAMBOO BANK SPIRIT

When Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded Tzu Chi in 1966, she fashioned coin banks from bamboo and asked her lay followers—thirty housewives—to save NT$0.50 (about US$0.02) from their grocery money every day to help the poor.

One follower asked, “Can’t I just donate NT$15 each month?” But Master refused. She explained that though the amount was the same, it was important to give rise to a kind thought each and every day.

From these humble beginnings forty-seven years ago, Tzu Chi has grown into a global NGO with ten million volunteers and donors in over fifty countries, because it collects not only donations, but also kind hearts.

Download eBamboo-Bank app for iPhone and iPad. Available soon on other platforms.

Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation
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When Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines in November 2013, I was struck by just how quickly we were seeing another major disaster. After all, it had only been a year since Hurricane Sandy had devastated the Northeast. It seems to me that epic disasters are circling the globe as we all just wait in fear for the moment when it becomes our turn.

As these major disasters strike ever more frequently, we should ask ourselves: how did it get this way? Our actions contribute to global climate change, which fuels these major disasters, so we should seriously think about how we can change and find ways to simplify our lives, reduce our carbon emissions, and follow a vegetarian diet.

Soon after Typhoon Haiyan hit, Tzu Chi Philippines CEO Alfredo Li reported back to Dharma Master Cheng Yen on the extent of the storm’s damage. He described the many people he had seen sitting on the side of the road, just staring off into space. After losing everything, these people simply had no idea where to begin. But Master had a plan: Cash-for-Work. The point of Tzu Chi’s Cash-for-Work program was that local residents would receive cash relief in exchange for cleaning up their community, so that streets would be cleaned, money would start to flow back into the local economy, and most importantly, disaster survivors would be empowered with active involvement in achieving their own communities’ recovery.

Mobilizing a community of people that have lost everything is not an easy task, but this is exactly what was accomplished. Due to his experience after Hurricane Sandy, Tzu Chi Northeast Regional Director George Chang was asked to participate in Typhoon Haiyan relief, so he witnessed this change firsthand. When he first arrived in the Philippines, just days after the storm, he saw signs that said, “We need food and water.” When he left a couple weeks later, the signs now read, “We will rise again!” In such a short period of time, he saw hopelessness replaced with hope.

This change was clearly visible on the ground level as well. As the streets became cleaner and locals were both actively engaged and earning money, businesses, shops, and even banks began to open for business again. Prices that had skyrocketed after the storm started to come back down. It is too soon to say that things are completely “back to normal,” but this positive progress has infused storm survivors with hope and empowered them to revive their community.

I am deeply grateful to volunteers in the Philippines for giving several US volunteers the opportunity to participate in this relief effort and gain from this wondrous new experience of quickly reviving a community by actively engaging local community members and working with them side by side. I would also like to thank all of our donating members in the United States for their contributions that allowed us to provide relief to Typhoon Haiyan survivors, just as we did for Hurricane Sandy survivors one year earlier. In fact, we even received a contribution from a prison inmate, a truly moving contribution which demonstrates that each of us has the capacity to make a difference, regardless of our circumstances. When we each contribute a little, we not only fill with the world with hope, we can also mitigate disasters.
On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) struck the central Philippines as the strongest tropical storm ever to make landfall. In its wake, more than six thousand were killed and millions more left trying to figure out how to pick up the pieces of their devastated community.

With funds raised in more than forty countries, Tzu Chi volunteers personally delivered emergency cash relief to over 64,000 families, medical services to 8,700 patients, and 428,000 hot meals. With wisdom and compassion, they led tens of thousands of storm survivors to clean their communities of debris and rediscover hope where there had been only despair.
Cash-for-Work participants thank Tzu Chi with signs in English, Chinese, and Tagalog. Photo: Johan Alwall
The Great Things
Love Can Achieve

Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team
Based on Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s conversations with visitors in Chinese

To make a long-term impact, it is not enough to relieve survivors’ bodies—minds and spirits must be cared for as well.

The Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) disaster in the Philippines was truly a world-shocking calamity. In intensity, it was the most powerful typhoon in history ever to make landfall. But, it was also massive in size. Given such intensity and size, it was tremendously destructive.

Just that morning, the people on those affected Philippine islands were still going about their lives full of dreams and hopes, making big, ambitious plans. With the typhoon’s landfall in the early afternoon, however, suddenly the violent winds, pounding rain, and storm surge with waves several meters high devastated everything in their path. Within moments, all dreams and plans became nothing; thousands lost their lives and millions struggled to survive without power, water, or food. Just the coming of the storm changed everything. In an instant, all that people had was reduced to nothing and their future became bleak.

To be there for people in need

In Cebu, our local volunteers quickly went to the affected areas that they could reach and provided cash assistance and medical service to the survivors because they were closest to the disaster area. On the fourth day after the disaster, Tzu Chi volunteers from the Tzu Chi Philippines main office in Metro Manila arrived in the heaviest-hit disaster areas on Leyte Island to begin disaster assessment and aid distribution including free medical clinics. With transportation systems destroyed and poor weather conditions exacerbating the problem, reaching the disaster area was truly a major challenge. The normally two-hour trip by direct flight turned into a more than twenty-hour journey via plane, bus, and boat.

Arriving there, the volunteers found massive destruction. Everything was reduced to debris. It was like a wasteland; looking around, there were bodies, mud, garbage, and debris everywhere, all made worse by the continued...
falling rain. With the severe damage, at one point, the city of Tacloban seemed as if it would be abandoned altogether as many survivors left the area to stay with relatives or friends or to move altogether to start anew elsewhere.

But while those with means could leave, where could the poor go? They have no option but to stay and try to survive right there amidst the devastation. The only way for them to recover is to start over right where they are, but they have been traumatized and debilitated by the super typhoon and the massive destruction it brought. We could see that they needed to believe in the future in order to dig themselves out of the debris and move forward in the recovery work. Knowing this, our Tzu Chi volunteers resolved to be there with the survivors in their time of greatest need and help them with recovery. One group after another, Tzu Chi volunteers from various countries joined our local volunteers in the Philippines to bring aid.

To relieve suffering

How could we help? The survivors were in a state of deep grief and helplessness. Feeling deeply for their pain, Tzu Chi volunteers could not bear for them to continue in such a state. But turning their situation around really requires the timely application of compassion and wisdom—action has to be coupled with compassion and wisdom in order to achieve positive and lasting influence.

Therefore, the volunteers not only comforted the survivors with loving care. Given the enormous grief the survivors were grappling with, we knew it would not be easy for them to set aside their pain to engage in constructive action. We had to find a way to lift their spirits and empower them. That is why, instead of simply distributing cash aid, we launched a cleanup drive inviting survivors to clean up their community, and gave them a cash gift at the end of the day for their contribution. We
wanted to help the survivors see that rebuilding is within their reach if everyone contributes and works together.

Since this program was an alternative form of relief aid, we wanted to make sure that the daily cash gift—in essence emergency cash—would be enough to be a real help to the survivors. As the price of many goods rose after the disaster, making them even less affordable for survivors who were already in hard straits, we set the daily cash gift at 500 pesos (roughly US$12), twice the minimum daily wage. These were not normal times and survivors, having lost everything including their job and source of income, were in a particularly difficult time. They really needed this emergency cash.

Because we were not there to hire workers, but to help the survivors rise above their sense of debilitation, recover from trauma, and stand up again, our volunteers carried out the program in a very warm, caring, and respectful way. Before the cleanup, our volunteers first made announcements so people could come voluntarily. As the residents congregated, our volunteers guided them to organize themselves in lines and sit down on the ground peacefully. Speaking to them in a very gentle, respectful, and caring manner, the volunteers shared how they were bringing with them love and care from Tzu Chi volunteers across the world who were standing out on the streets, braving the winter cold and enduring the scorching heat of summer, to gather donations and pool together countless tiny contributions to aid the survivors. Our volunteers wanted the people to know that everyone is working to help them, not only the volunteers in the disaster area.

Then, our volunteers held a prayer and asked everyone to pray sincerely for their family and for all affected by this devastating disaster. With everyone concentrating their good thoughts through the prayer, the environment of peace and harmony brought a great deal of comfort to the survivors. Then, our volunteers rallied all present to work together: "Hope is right there in front of us. Let us all stand up and clean up the community together. We can rebuild our community!" Using methods like these, the volunteers mobilized everyone in body and spirit. Knowing that relief aid, including the emergency cash, came from countless people around the world, people who were total strangers and yet gave of themselves compassionately, the survivors were able to set aside their pain and bring forth their energy to contribute their efforts to the cleanup and recovery.

To revitalize the people and their city

On the first day, around 600 people participated in the cleanup. The second day, there were around 2,700 people taking part. On the third, more than 9,000 came, and by the fourth, it was close to 10,000 people. After that, it was more than 20,000 people every day, then over 30,000. What a scene, to have over 30,000 people working together at the same time to clean up the city! By the end of nineteen days of the cleanup, the survivors had carried out more than 280,000 cleanup shifts, with sixteen barangays, or city districts, cleaned and restored.

With every day’s efforts and progress, the city started to recover, with traffic flowing on reopened roads and stores opening for business. From aerial footage of the area, we could see parts of the city starting to come back to life as soon as the roads were cleared. Actually, by the second day after we began the cleanup drive, already street vendors started appearing on the cleared streets to resume their business. Considering that just weeks earlier, with the massive devastation, many had felt Tacloban would become a dead city with no hope for recovery—what a miraculous transformation has been brought about through the collective efforts of the survivors. Seeing the city and
its people beginning to regain their vitality and sorrowful faces transforming into bright, hopeful ones—how moving this is.

From this radical change in the city and the people, we witness how the power of love can bring truly touching results. Though clearing the debris was hard work, the survivors dedicated themselves willingly and with vigor. They weren’t just motivated by the cash assistance of five hundred pesos we gave them. It was the sincere love and care the Tzu Chi volunteers showed them in every detail of the program which touched and opened their hearts. Living in the disaster area, the volunteers had to cope with the same shortages of daily necessities as the survivors. But they stayed on, just to help with disaster relief. Such selfless love really moved the survivors and made them bring out even more love and energy to work hard in cleaning up their own home and community.

Some of the participants even returned the cash aid Tzu Chi volunteers gave them and started coming every day as volunteers. They said that seeing how Tzu Chi volunteers were not local yet were doing so much to help with the recovery, they wanted to lend their efforts without getting anything for it because this was their own community. Some of them also willingly took on the responsibility of being team leaders to help with organizing the cleanup and mobilizing their neighbors.

To rebuild better with love and hope

Within a month, the city that had once been described as a hopeless wasteland had shops reopening, commerce resuming, traffic and flow of people moving once more, and newly rebuilt homes emerging. It is very moving to see the local survivors’ suffering alleviated as they move on and focus on rebuilding. Many residents told us that they had used our cash aid to buy sidings and roof coverings to rebuild their homes. We saw them going from a broken life to a life renewed with hope and bustling activity. Such a transformation was possible because living bodhisattvas had gone there to help, while in over forty countries across six continents, many volunteers worked to support the relief effort by raising funds and sending prayers and well-wishes.

In the month after the typhoon made landfall, we seized that window of time to change the survivors’ outlook from despairing to bright and hopeful, to clean up their community, and then to distribute aid money in their time of most urgent need. We sincerely hope that the disaster can quickly pass and that the sorrow and trauma will leave no trace in the survivors’ hearts. This is all Tzu Chi volunteers hope for. In giving, we seek nothing—we only hope to see them revitalized and empowered to rebuild their lives. We really see this beginning to happen in the Philippines now.

After one of the strongest typhoons in history brought massive catastrophe, we see that when people bring out the wisdom and compassion of a bodhisattva—to feel others’ suffering as their own and work hard to relieve it—such sincere love will set off endless cycles of kindness. As everyone brings out their love and unites in collective effort, recovery is possible even after the worst of disasters, and in fact, the community can be rebuilt even better with survivors receiving and reciprocating abundant love. Such pure, enlightened love is the seed that can give rise to boundless fruits and further seeds.
As Tzu Chi volunteers carried out relief efforts to support survivors of Typhoon Haiyan, their compassionate actions were frequently highlighted on the pages and screens of media outlets in the Philippines and abroad.

When the Haiyan relief effort began in November 2013, ABC aired a news piece highlighting the work of several charity groups in Northern California. Austin Tsao, Tzu Chi Director of Charity Development, explained on air the meaning behind Tzu Chi’s charity work: “We need to treat people like family members. When your family member suffers, you want to help them, so we have the same attitude to help people who are in need.”

On January 7, 2014, Marvin Tort wrote of Tzu Chi’s Cash-for-Work program in BusinessWorld, a daily Philippines newspaper: “This is precisely the kind of assistance that disaster victims require, the type that changes mind-sets and prompts people to stop feeling sorry for themselves and to start looking for solutions to their problems. Groups like Tzu Chi merely provide the catalyst to prompt volunteerism, and then encourage the disaster victims themselves to rebuild their own communities.”

In the Christian Science Monitor on January 8, Simon Roughneen noted the apparent contradiction that, “despite the overt Christianity that the Philippines is known for, a foreign Buddhist charity is winning most of the local plaudits.” He quoted local participants and clergy who explained that “Tzu Chi Foundation’s daily payment, which at 500 pesos paid twice as much as the government’s own cash-for-work program,” had “benefited Tacloban’s shattered economy after the storm.”

In a January 29 article highlighting the modern trend of “humanistic Buddhism” that puts a “strong emphasis on helping society,” BBC News reporter Cindy Sui commented that “Tzu Chi, for example, has provided post-disaster relief in more than 84 countries, including in the Philippines, where it recently paid 50,000 households to rebuild homes destroyed by Typhoon Haiyan.”

From November 13 to December 4, 2013, Panda Restaurant Group collected donations in its 1,650 Panda Express, Panda Inn, and Hibachi-San locations. After matching all funds collected, Panda donated $645,000 to Tzu Chi and the Red Cross. In a statement, co-chairman Peggy Cherng noted, “We are honored to support the relief efforts and assist the American Red Cross and the Tzu Chi Foundation in rebuilding and aiding those that were affected by the typhoon.”

Words of thanks (Tagalog: Salamat, Chinese: 感恩) from care recipients mean the most.

Photos provided by Johan Alwall & Marvin Tan

Photo: Xiaozhe Huang
I was in a cab at around three in the morning heading for the Guandu Tzu Chi office. Taipei nights are always bustling, and in this city that never sleeps, the cars just sped along. Traffic lights and the glow of storefront signs radiantly reflected off one another. But my feelings were mixed. I couldn't appreciate the nightscape, for I was only thinking about all the people across the Bashi Channel in the Philippines devastated by Typhoon Haiyan.

Just before our disaster relief team set off for initial assessment of the storm's damage, Master Cheng Yen held a briefing to remind us of several important matters. First, as no two cultures are alike, we needed to keep a humble, open mind and remember to always be patient. Second, we needed to thoroughly consider all aspects of Tzu Chi's Cash-for-Work program. Later, we would come to clearly understand Master Cheng Yen's love and the urgency of these reminders, and how fortunate we are to have Master to guide us. On this occasion I felt truly moved.

On November 18, 2013, thirteen members of the disaster relief team traveled from Taipei to Manila and then on to Cebu. The team then split into two groups. One group of six traveled by boat to Ormoc, the second-hardest-hit area. I was part of the group of seven who flew on a small aircraft to Tacloban, the area most devastated by the storm.

As soon as we arrived in Tacloban, we were shocked by the horrifying extent of the storm's destruction. The roads were littered with overturned cars. Even worse, nearby homes appeared to have been completely flattened! As we approached the city, all we could see was an endless pile of rubble, as over ninety percent of the buildings had been completely destroyed. The streets were lined with the remains of the deceased. Dog and pig carcasses lay among the trash and debris. The stench of rotting corpses filled the air. Survivors stared hopelessly, not knowing where to begin. We felt their despair. I was gripped with pain, not knowing how many people had lost their lives and how many others were still suffering.

**Cash-for-Work Brings Forth Hope**

The next afternoon, we entered Tacloban to survey the damage. Because material aid was already arriving from all over the world, the government was able to provide canned goods and two servings of rice a day, which allowed survivors to get by. However, sanitary conditions were extremely poor. The extreme heat compounded the problem, and we feared that these conditions would result in outbreaks of infectious diseases. We immediately recalled something Master Cheng Yen had said during our briefing: instead of making people wait for assistance, we should allow them to take part in the cleanup.

In the Philippines, the “barangay” is the most basic administrative division: a rural village or urban neighborhood. We immediately met with the heads of each local barangay to discuss and promote the Cash-for-Work program. The first day the program had 620 participants; the second, the number grew to 2,700; and it grew exponentially from there. By December 8, the total number of shifts worked exceeded 280,000. With these numbers, we knew the hard-hit coastal regions would be completely cleaned up and sanitary conditions improved.
A local professor told a Tzu Chi volunteer, as she saluted with her palms held together, “You’ve united everyone. There will be no more sorrow. We won’t quarrel anymore. We will no longer fight over trivial matters.” A couple whose home was in a state of disrepair and full of leaks felt so moved by the Cash-for-Work program that by their second day of participation they no longer accepted compensation, even though they took the initiative to help with on-site registration. Other villagers also donated the money they received so that they could help those in even greater need through Tzu Chi.

Supported by continuous fundraising by Tzu Chi volunteers in over forty countries, in less than half a month Tzu Chi had already provided the cities of Ormoc and Tacloban with Cash-for-Work compensation and emergency assistance funds that surpassed three hundred million pesos (roughly seven million dollars). Before long, banks and businesses reopened. Vendors returned to their stalls at the vegetable markets. The police returned to work and public security improved. Government officials also returned to their posts, and the government was able to move forward. Less than a month after the storm, the city had come back to life.

Cash-for-Work represents a new era in disaster relief, and through it, we feel Master Cheng Yen’s compassion and wisdom.

Part of the Local Community

When we first arrived in Tacloban, the area was still without power, but there was a local hospital in Tacloban with a generator that generously offered shelter to international relief groups. Shortly into our stay, the hospital’s vice superintendent invited visiting medical teams to a meeting by the hospital’s main gate. I heard seventeen representatives from multinational organizations list out their complaints: “We were invited here by the government, but when we arrived in the disaster areas there was no one to tend to us. We have to visit every disaster area on our own, and we see many patients who all require medical treatment. Some even need surgery. You are the only hospital that can mobilize its staff. Please help us.”

For more than a week, from the storm until November 19, these international organizations had roughly one thousand physicians come and go, but more than half of them were unable to find a place to offer their services, so they had to resort to “guerilla tactics” and request permission from smaller camps to let them come in and join their medical clinics.

I told everyone that Tzu Chi had sixty or seventy medical professionals, and they were very surprised that there was a Buddhist organization able to mobilize so many physicians. When they heard that Tzu Chi had even mobilized local volunteers, they all wished to work with us. At that moment, I deeply understood that the biggest difference between Tzu Chi and many other international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is that we have “localized” teams. Whenever a disaster occurs, local

An ad hoc assembly line speeds debris clearing. Photo: Jinde Zhan
volunteers can quickly mobilize and meet with victims face-to-face; they can provide firsthand information to barangay residents and barangay leaders, and they can find places to provide medical treatment in affected areas.

**Seeing Goodness Everywhere**

On November 23, the disaster relief team rushed some personnel to another disaster area in Ormoc to support five relief distributions held over two days, in which relief funds, secondhand clothing, and eco-friendly blankets were distributed to over twelve thousand residents. Everyone was orderly and waited in line. Twice, the distribution of these items continued well into the night. Working in the dark worried us, but truck headlights and cell phones helped to illuminate the site. As the harmony of the song “One Family” filled the air, over sixty million pesos were successfully distributed.

The mayor and a city council member from opposing political parties came to the distribution site. Normally these two do not speak to or even acknowledge one another. But the two leaders, driven by Tzu Chi, worked together to hand out relief items. Afterwards, the two politicians shook hands and hugged. Their reconciliation received cheers from the bystanders. The mayor’s wife told us that she would donate ten thousand pesos a month to Tzu Chi and become a member of the organization. She also proposed that Tzu Chi use space at her school to build temporary classrooms, and she ordered four large dump trucks and two Bobcat shovel trucks to assist with the clean-up.

Love can resolve conflicts. In times of suffering, we grow.

Two police officers at the distribution site said that they were also victims of the storm and asked if they could accept emergency cash relief. This inspired us to provide for all police and city employees in Ormoc. We hoped that with our help they could regain some stability in their lives and return to work as soon as possible. We assisted nearly thirteen hundred families from a list provided by the city government.
As the program drew to a close, two hundred temporary workers expressed their need for cash assistance. Using the most respectful manner possible, Tzu Chi volunteers explained to them that because they were temporary workers who were not on our list, we were unable to provide them with financial assistance. We could only offer each family a blanket. Everyone listened and unexpectedly stood up and applauded for Tzu Chi. There were no police at the event, yet there was no commotion, which both shocked and moved me. Tzu Chi’s efforts inspired goodness and unity.

As we were in the airport about to depart, I went to the ticket counter to check-in the group’s fifty-four pieces of luggage. According to the airport’s regulations, a fee of one dollar is required for each piece of luggage; however, those who volunteered in disaster relief efforts only had to pay fifty cents. So our total was twenty-seven dollars. I took out a hundred dollar bill, presented it to the airport employee, and waited for him to return my change. About fifteen minutes later, a director brought two vice directors over to apologize to me. The informed us that they had learned about the work Tzu Chi had done in the disaster areas and wanted to refund our baggage fee. The director said, “Allow us to do this, so we can do a little something for the victims. Other international NGOs must pay half of the fee, but we won’t accept a penny from Tzu Chi. This is our tribute to Tzu Chi.”

Since 2007, I have participated in disaster relief efforts in the US, Bolivia, Peru, China, Haiti, Chile, Honduras, and other countries—a total of over twenty disasters. Each disaster has been bigger than the last, which makes me wonder, “Are typhoons really natural disasters or are they man-made?” The Philippines was already prone and susceptible to typhoons, but climate change makes them even more damaging. For the destruction caused by Typhoon Haiyan, we all need to share responsibility.
Disaster, Love, and Gratitude in Tacloban

Johan Alwall
The Cash-for-Work program strengthened the community and put smiles back on faces.

When I left for the Philippines to help in the disaster relief after Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda), my heart was filled with conflicting emotions—I was looking forward to this opportunity to help victims of the disaster, but at the same time scared of what I was about to see. Haiyan was more than a regular typhoon; it was the most powerful cyclone ever to make landfall, with wind speeds like that of an EF-4 tornado, and a storm surge over fifteen feet high—more like a tsunami than a regular hurricane wave. This combination of tornado and tsunami brought devastation beyond anything previously experienced in this island nation; hundreds of thousands of homes were wiped clean off their foundations. After the storm passed, streets and yards lay covered by layer after layer of debris, up to a story high. Over six thousand people had lost their lives in the chaos of wind and water.

What can be done in such a situation? The residents in the coastal city of Tacloban had lost everything—their homes, their belongings, their clothes, their jobs, and many had lost family members or close friends. No wonder that, when Tzu Chi volunteers first arrived in Tacloban a week after the disaster, hope was nowhere to be seen. Residents were stunned, paralyzed by their losses and the enormity of the cleanup and rebuilding tasks lying ahead. Just as they did four years earlier in Marikina City after Typhoon Ketsana (Ondoy), Tzu Chi volunteers, with the advice and blessings of Master Cheng Yen, decided to launch a large-scale Cash-for-Work program to activate and motivate the residents, clean out the debris, and put cash in the hands of those who needed it the most.

The program was an overwhelming success. After a modest start with six hundred participants the first day, the program quickly grew to over fifteen thousand per day after only a few days. The first Cash-for-Work site, in Anibong in northern Tacloban, was closed after just a week because the area was already almost completely free from debris. With the support of a fleet of trucks and loaders, partially rented but mostly lent for free to Tzu Chi, the garbage was quickly moved from the streets to dump sites around the city. As areas were cleaned out, volunteers opened new sites and continued the program until the entire city was clean. At its peak, Tzu Chi’s Cash-for-Work program had over thirty thousand participants each and every day. As the program closed on December 8, after only nineteen days, nearly three hundred thousand day-shifts had been accomplished.
When I arrived on November 29, halfway into the Cash-for-Work program, I was both shocked and astonished. I was shocked at the devastation in the coastal areas that had not yet been cleaned—the destruction was no less complete than that which I had seen in Haiti after the earthquake in January 2010—but astonished at the scenes during the Cash-for-Work gatherings every morning and afternoon. In the morning when the participants arrived to receive their registration cards, they were divided into groups of ten, with one group leader that was responsible for the registration and for the group’s work. The volunteers had invented an exceptionally efficient system where these groups were, in turn, given numbers in larger groups—such as A1-1, A1-2, and all the way up to A10-10—allowing coordinators to direct groups of one hundred (A1) or one thousand (the whole A group) participants to a given area that needed cleaning. Participants had quickly learned to order themselves according to their group numbers, so the distribution of registration cards in the morning and cash in the afternoon went very smoothly.

But the morning and afternoon gatherings were much more than just simple distributions of registration cards and cash. During the hour-long gatherings, Tzu Chi volunteers educated participants about Tzu Chi, shared with them important life values, and explained how the money they were receiving came from individual donations from people all over the world and represented the love and blessings of hundreds of thousands of donors. Volunteers admonished recipients to use the money with care, in particular not to use it for alcohol, cigarettes, or gambling. At each

Gatherings before and after Cash-for-Work raise spirits. Photo: Shusi Jian
site, the interaction between volunteers and participants was more like that between an older sister or brother and their siblings than that of a benefactor with recipients. The warmth and love radiating between the volunteers and the participants was tangible.

During the months after the passing of my wife Grace in March 2013, I strongly experienced the power of smiles. A sincere smile, even from a stranger, can bring comfort to a heart in shock and pain. More than that, I realized that when I smile myself, even if in sorrow and pain, my feelings somehow start resonating with the smile, to the point that I feel surprisingly happy. I therefore made it a habit to smile at everyone, a habit that proved exceptionally powerful in Tacloban. As I, one of several volunteers, was helping the Cash-for-Work organizers with performing sign-language songs and distributing cash, I would smile at every person I made eye contact with. The result was overwhelming. Quickly, I started to feel like the participants were more than relief recipients—they were close friends. After a few sessions, I started helping with motivating the participants, doing rhymes and slogans with them—“I say ‘go go go’, you say ‘Tzu Chi Tzu Chi Tzu Chi’” and “I say ‘Tindog’ (rise again), you say ‘Tacloban’”—and singing the Tzu Chi song “One Family” in Tagalog together with the participants. It was an amazing experience, having several thousand people happily follow along with the sign language, respond to the rhymes, and laugh heartily whenever I sang the wrong lyrics. Our relationship deepened—I started to feel like each and every one of them was my brother or sister, and from the response I could tell that they felt the same.

On the last day of the Cash-for-Work program at the Santo Niño site, hundreds of the participants brought thank-you letters to Tzu Chi and to Master Cheng Yen, and many, both young and old, came to take souvenir photos with us volunteers or ask for our autographs, which they wanted written on their shirts or bags. Many also brought plastic bottles filled with coins—instead of coin banks made of bamboo—to contribute in their turn and pass on the love from Tzu Chi to others in need. Many asked how they could sign up as volunteers—after seeing us and how we give of ourselves with so much love to help others, they wanted to do the same.

The same scenes occurred in every Cash-for-Work location. Three days before the close of the program, we decided to enter San Jose, the southernmost part of Tacloban and one of the hardest-hit areas. We had previously avoided it to avoid overlapping with other organizations, but the need there remained desperate. When we went to the San Jose Elementary School on Friday morning, December 5, we found people already waiting for us at the gate. Although we
had not yet made any announcements, they had been waiting there several days in the faint hope that we might be coming. On that first day, the new site gathered twenty-seven hundred people, a large but manageable number. Little did we expect that the next day the large school field would be filled with over twelve thousand prospective participants. We were overwhelmed but also overjoyed—with so many participants, our three-day cleanup drive would be able to make a real difference for the community! On the third and last day, many of the teams had made large signs expressing their gratitude to Tzu Chi. One team even went to the trouble of asking me how to write “thank you” in Chinese so they could make a special sign for all the Chinese-speaking volunteers!

When asked if they would like to join as volunteers if Tzu Chi started an office in Tacloban, the response was overwhelming. Thousands of people expressed their eagerness to volunteer with Tzu Chi, to work as living bodhisattvas by helping their community, their neighbors, and the environment while asking for nothing in return apart from the satisfaction of a job well done. When we return to Tacloban next time, we hope to start widespread volunteer trainings for the many residents who have already expressed their determination to become volunteers. Tacloban is already a city filled with gratitude for Tzu Chi—we hope and believe that, with time, it will become a city full of love, where anyone in need will receive timely help and where disasters will never strike again!

Quickly, I started to feel like the participants were more than relief recipients—they were close friends.

For the person in the mirror to smile, the person looking in the mirror must smile first.

— Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Coffee of Love from Prison

Audrey Cheng & Amelia Tsai | Translated by Jeff Steward

Help for Typhoon Haiyan survivors came from all around the world, even from prison.

In prison everything is difficult to handle. Could I ask that you please help me sell these and donate the proceeds to the Philippines? Thank you all.”

On December 11, 2013, Tzu Chi USA Headquarters received a heavy package with a prison’s name and address on the return address label. It had people wondering, “What on earth could be in here?” Upon opening the package, they found twenty-one small and one large unopened coffee cans, four sheets of postage stamps, a brief letter written in Chinese, and a completed donation form taken from Tzu Chi World U.S.A.

Unable to mail cash, this inmate still wanted to find a way to make a donation, so he purchased coffee and stamps from the prison store and mailed them to Tzu Chi. Even though he is in prison, his intention to do good deeds is still strong!

During lunch on the day the package arrived, volunteers immediately sold the coffee and stamps to raise relief funds. Once other volunteers heard of the compassion behind this donation that had arrived from prison, they were extremely moved. People began to donate one after the other. Many purchased coffee cans only to immediately donate them back, so goods which were originally worth $213.40 quickly turned into $335.50 worth of donations for Typhoon Haiyan disaster relief efforts.

The effect of this love continued to spread.

Volunteer Lusha Lee sent out an email to share this moving story with more volunteers. Andy Kaoh, who has donated tens of thousands of copies of Jing Si Aphorisms to be given to hotels and prisons, heard the story and immediately responded, “This is the transformative power of the work of Master and Tzu Chi volunteers. Can I buy it for $1,000?”

Stuart Huang was on his way with his wife to a wedding in Northern California when he saw the email. He too was very moved and quickly replied, “Thank goodness for advanced technology, which lets me be a part of this compassionate effort even as we are on the road. If I still have the opportunity, I would like to buy any remaining items with the $2,000 I was originally planning to give the new bride as a wedding gift; I also suggest that everyone come together and challenge each other to donate. . . This inmate has truly demonstrated the compassionate vow of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva—how touching!”
Martin Kuo, who had just returned to the United States from a disaster relief trip to the Philippines, also sent a reply: “This act of willpower has really touched me as well. Let’s all work together to spread this uplifting story! . . . Giving is the privilege of the sincere. I’d like to respond to Stuart’s challenge. Can I give $3,000?”

The donations were flowing in, but the coffee stayed at the headquarters, and the fragrance of this special coffee continued to spread. At various events there, Lusha Lee and other volunteers worked hard to share the message of the coffee of love, and the contributions continued to rise. During a year-end celebration on December 22, nearly one thousand volunteers, family members, and community members warmly responded by adding their donations. Lusha sent this story to Tzu Chi locations around the United States, and the ripple effect continued to grow. By the end of January 2014, this kind donation had already inspired more than $90,000 in additional donations!

Volunteers at Tzu Chi USA Headquarters wrote a letter to the inmate informing him of the amazing amount of love that had arisen from his single act of compassion: “I’m sure you could never have guessed how many people would be moved by your compassionate action. Your stamps and coffee have generated such a great response! . . . Master Cheng Yen says, ‘Don’t underestimate yourself, for human beings have unlimited potential!’ . . . We’d like to express our sincere and boundless gratitude and respect for what you have done. Even though you are in prison, your good heart and good actions have had the most amazing impact. Your single act of compassion has already started a ripple effect that continues to spread, and the end result cannot be measured.”

In early January 2014, the inmate sent a reply. His words showed that he had clearly studied Buddhism before and was at peace with his situation. “Thank you for your help. This is all for survivors of Typhoon Haiyan, and I am thankful for the existence of your group and for you giving donors a field of merit where they can plant their good seeds. Within my family there are many who are members of Tzu Chi, and in 2010 I received a Tzu Chi publication by way of my sister. I hope that you could send an English publication here, so that I can spread the seeds of Tzu Chi’s Great Love here in prison. Cultivating all good deeds begins with giving. Within a loving heart there is no self, no other, no distinction between living beings. Compassion is the cause to activate love.”

Compassion is the cause to activate love.

Tender loving care is found in all corners of the world. Everyone can be a Bodhisattva to help those in need. — Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Peter Chen grew up in a poor family in Indonesia with fifteen siblings. When he was seventeen, his mother became gravely ill, but his family could not afford the medical service she needed. Thankfully, just in time, a German physician offered his help and even continued to follow up after she was released from the hospital.

Wanting to gain a better understanding of his mother’s condition, Peter asked to see the physician. But a nurse rebuffed his request, telling him that the patient’s family has no business bothering the very busy doctor. The nurse’s snub jabbed like a sharp needle deeply into his heart. At that very moment, Peter made a vow: he would return someday as a physician.

One morning, well before dawn, Peter waited outside the physician’s home and finally met the kindhearted doctor, who encouraged him to pursue his medical studies and leave his mother’s wellbeing in his hands.

“In the end, she lived well into her eighties. I cannot even fathom how much medical expenses that doctor has helped my family with. However, he always comforted me and told me not to worry about my mother’s medical costs. He just encouraged me to study medicine, so I could someday save people’s lives.”

With a scholarship and financial aid, Peter Chen graduated from the National Defense Medical Center in Taipei and served his residency at Taipei Veterans General Hospital, where he met his future wife. After the two married and started their family, they immigrated to the United States, where Dr. Peter Chen became a surgeon and a gastrointestinal specialist.

As his financial situation improved, Dr. Chen often searched for the German physician who had saved his mother’s life, wishing to express his gratitude in person, but he never had a chance. “The only way I could repay this debt was to follow his spirit and give myself to charity work.” In 1997, he established a scholarship program at his hospital in order to pass on the compassionate love he was shown four decades earlier.

While Dr. Chen was practicing medicine in Cleveland, Ohio, his wife was invited by a friend to attend a local Tzu Chi event. She found herself profoundly moved by a lecture on “The True Value of Life” by Stephen Huang, then-CEO of Tzu Chi USA. She began volunteering with Tzu Chi and would often share details of her volunteer activities and Tzu Chi ideals with her husband when she returned home.
Later, Dr. Chen was invited to give a lecture on breast cancer as part of the Cleveland office’s free community health education program. While there, Dr. Chen learned more about Tzu Chi’s mission, which encourages volunteers to go wherever they can to relieve suffering. It was the same ideal he held for his medical practice. Gradually, he began to participate in more and more Tzu Chi activities. In 2005, Dr. Chen officially joined Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) as a volunteer physician.

After Bolivia suffered major flooding in 2007, many people were too poor to receive the medical attention they needed. As Dr. Chen pondered how he could help them, he received an invitation from Tzu Chi USA Headquarters, inviting him to join a relief assessment mission there. This turned out to be the decisive moment when Dr. Chen, a complete novice in international disaster relief, began his metamorphosis into a seasoned, globe-trotting veteran of international medical outreaches. Since then, Dr. Chen has volunteered in mainland China, six times in Haiti, and five times in Bolivia. Along the way he has developed a profound bond in medical volunteerism with volunteers from all around the world.

In November 2013, Dr. Chen happened to be in Hualien as news of Typhoon Haiyan broke. Tzu Chi Global Headquarters quickly convened disaster survey teams to head to the Philippines, and Dr. Chen seized the opportunity to join the second team to visit the disaster area.

Arriving in the Philippines, Dr. Chen became overwhelmed with emotions from what he witnessed. “The people of the Philippines are so upbeat and optimistic. Even though they just went through an unprecedented natural disaster, and most people have nothing left to their name, everyone is still so encouraging to one another. Whenever they see Tzu Chi volunteers, they holler ‘Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!’ and sign ‘Thank You.’”

What moved Dr. Chen the most were the inspirational ceremonies organized by Tzu Chi volunteers at the end of the Cash-for-Work program each day, when participants returned after a day of cleaning up their community to collect their aid money. At first, local Tzu Chi volunteers would describe in Tagalog the origin of Tzu Chi, why Tzu Chi volunteers were there, and the story of Tzu Chi’s Bamboo Bank Era, and explain that the donations supporting survivors had come from the love of donors all around the world. Then, volunteers encouraged the survivors with cheers of “Go! Go! Go!”

Amidst the cheers of encouragement, Dr. Chen and the other volunteer doctors from TIMA walked around the crowd with bamboo banks in their hands as survivors eagerly emptied whatever few coins they still had in their pockets to deposit into the coin banks. Bamboo bank in hand, Dr. Chen repeatedly bowed and thanked them in the local dialect: “Salamat! Salamat!” As the coin bank became increasingly heavy, tears began filling Dr. Chen’s eyes. He began hearing “Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi! Go! Go! Go!” all around him, cheering him on. He never expected to be the one cheered on by the survivors! He realized that though these survivors were materially poor, they were clearly very rich in spirit! Unable to hold back his emotions, Dr. Chen couldn’t help but tell them, “Mahal kita (I love you)!”

In the evening after the relief distributions, the medical relief team was brought to their sleeping quarters: the floor of a closed medical center. They had heard from the previous team that the roof had holes and the floor would get wet when it rained. Thankfully it did not rain that evening, so they just cleaned the floor, stretched out their straw mats and mosquito nets, and called it a night. Dr. Chen was given a spot next to the entrance, whereas Director Chang of Taichung Tzu Chi Hospital Preventive Medicine Center had a spot farther inside. Dr. Chang walked over to Dr. Chen and said,
“You’re my elder, why don’t we switch places. It’s warmer inside.” That night, Dr. Chen fell asleep with a burning warmth in his heart. “I don’t recall what I dreamt that night, I just remember I woke up in the morning with tears in my eyes.” As he shared this recollection, Dr. Chen dried his tears with his sleeve, still moved by the compassionate kinship shown to him by fellow Tzu Chi volunteers.

Even after returning to the United States, Dr. Chen still keeps the Typhoon Haiyan survivors in his thoughts. In reflecting on his disaster relief trip there and all that he had experienced and felt, he wrote in his notebook:

I am grateful to Master Cheng Yen for giving me this rare opportunity to experience and realize the meaning of “realizing blessings by witnessing hardship”;

Seeing the disaster in the Philippines and the widespread devastation, the power of Mother Nature reminds us to remain ever more vigilant and pious. We must humble our desires. Only by being reverent, respectful, and loving towards our planet can we be blessed with safe and harmonious lives.

I witnessed the model example set by Tzu Chi volunteers in the Philippines and how they embraced the Buddhist Dharma in their hearts and in their actions, their seamless and harmonious teamwork that overcame many adversities. I was extremely impressed.

The survivors’ cheerful and passionate spirit, as well as optimistic and resilient nature, moved me deeply;

I bore witness to the Tzu Chi global family and how everyone cared and looked after one another, no different than the love and bond between family members;

Also, everyone arrived safely and returned safely.

Finally, I’m grateful for the grace of God who bestowed me with such abundant blessings. All in all, I’m infinitely grateful!
A single doctor traveling thousands of miles to a foreign country for a few days may save a dozen or so lives. But if the same doctor can train and lead fellow medical professionals, pass on skills, and impart humanitarian values; then it may cause a domino effect that will continue, endlessly through time, benefiting countless people in need. With this thought in mind, Dr. Chen has continuously helped volunteers in Bolivia and Haiti to establish TIMA chapters in both countries. He also personally accompanied Bolivian TIMA volunteers back to Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital for training in minimally invasive surgery and Tzu Chi’s humanitarian medical culture, as well as opportunities to participate in surgical simulations and laparoscopic operation demonstrations. He has also delivered countless materials to hospitals in Haiti, while encouraging Haitian doctors to learn English and accompanying them back to Hualien Tzu Chi General Hospital for further training.

Dr. Chen hopes that through the assistance of TIMA USA, doctors in Bolivia and Haiti can acquire advanced medical skills to help alleviate patients’ suffering, and that by undergoing training in the TIMA culture of gratitude and respect, they will help their countries to thrive as they become true “great healers” in saving lives.

From medical outreaches in the USA to clinics and disaster relief missions around the world, Dr. Chen has learned from every experience and gained a deeper understanding of the selfless giving of Tzu Chi volunteers who transform compassion into concrete actions and help spread Great Love that transcends boundaries of religion, race, and nationality. By participating with TIMA, he gains new knowledge and absorbs the essence of Tzu Chi culture, then brings them back to share with the community.

The seeds of blessings must be sowed whenever their fruits are harvested to ensure that the virtuous cycle continues indefinitely. — Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Volunteers make the best of what they have, turning a school into a medical clinic. Photo: Peter Chen
Dr. Marvin Tan was in the Sinai Hospital locker room in Baltimore, Maryland, when he first heard the news. As he changed out of his scrubs at the end of an exhausting day, an operating room colleague pulled up a news video on his smartphone and showed him the destruction wrought by Typhoon Haiyan. For many, it was just another in a long line of devastating storms that seem to strike more and more each year. But for Marvin, it was something different. This time, it was Tacloban. This time, it was home.

Marvin immediately tried to call his family to ensure they were alright, but it was no use. The cell towers were down; his family was unreachable. All he could do was wait, and as he waited day after day, he could think of nothing but the devastation on the news. Where was his family amidst all that rubble? Had they made it through? Were they hurt? Were they safe? Did they have any food to eat?

Amid all the uncertainty, all the doubt, all the worry, there was also guilt—inexplicable guilt. Marvin wondered what would have happened if he had heard the news before the storm hit, if he had heard the forecasts and seen that this storm was not the same as others. His family, and all the residents of Tacloban, were already used to typhoons. They experienced them each year. They expected them. They expected the rains, and they expected the flooding. But Haiyan’s storm surge was something new: a deadly wall of water nearly twenty feet high. It was the surge that deposited ships inland and shot through walls as though fired from a cannon. Maybe if he had known in advance, he could have warned them. They could have evacuated. But he did not know then, and he could not reach them now. And now, he could not keep himself from crying.

After two days of constant worrying, Marvin finally received news in the form of a Facebook message. His family was safe, but they had no way to communicate, only three minutes to contact family over the internet at city hall. It was a full week before he heard his brother’s voice. By then, the family had safely evacuated to Manila—five hundred miles to the northwest. For Marvin, the time to worry had ended; the time to act had arrived. With no doubt in his mind about how he would help, Marvin was
determined to join the Tzu Chi medical mission.

It would not be Marvin’s first foray into Tzu Chi medical relief in the Philippines—far from it in fact. He was there even on the first day for the first clinic way back in September 1997, as he and other volunteer doctors strove to reach individuals on smaller islands who otherwise had little or no access to medical care. Fewer than two hundred patients were served that first day, but by the time Marvin moved from the Philippines to Baltimore five years later, the great demand for care had led to larger and more frequent clinics. One had even reached seven thousand patients in Tacloban, his hometown, the place that now needed his help once again. Two weeks after the storm, Marvin arrived in Manila to reunite with his family. There, he awaited the call from Tzu Chi.

By the time Marvin arrived in Tacloban as part of a 150-person-strong medical mission on November 29, three weeks had passed after the storm. But even then, the scene they found when they landed was bleak. Looting had stopped, but the city remained apocalyptic: a faint landscape of rubble lit only by starlight. Services remained scarce. The medical team had chartered a plane just to get there, and they carried their own generator to power the hotel.

Tzu Chi volunteers had already been active in Tacloban for more than two weeks when Marvin arrived home. Though the city was still a fresh disaster zone, there were already signs that a change was coming. “You would think that Tzu Chi was running the government in Tacloban,” Marvin recounted later. Everywhere he looked, he saw the Tzu Chi logo—the lotus flower and Dharma ship. It adorned relief goods, tents, heavy machinery, everything. As the doctors rode a bus to the clinic site, pedestrians on the street immediately responded to their uniforms by greeting them with two thumbs of gratitude. Hearing their chants—Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!—Marvin was deeply touched.

For Marvin, it was something different. This time, it was Tacloban. This time it was home.

As Tzu Chi was already entering the third week of medical clinics, Marvin’s team was not met with the urgent needs of emergency care, but instead all the issues that slowly festered in the aftermath. The team cleaned previously-treated injuries that were beginning to heal, they guarded against tetanus, and they tended to untreated wounds that had already started to become infected. They saw some of the many children suffering in the harsh conditions of the flooded and toppled city, and they treated them for their coughs, colds, and infections. They dressed wounds and distributed antibiotics as needed. In all, the medical team served nearly a thousand patients at the San Jose Parish Church on their first day.

Even with the personal resonance of seeing his hometown wrecked by disaster, Tzu Chi medical clinics were familiar to Marvin, a return to his past. But on December 1, he also experienced something entirely new: a Tzu Chi relief distribution. After a half-day medical clinic, Marvin and the medical team made a two-hour trek westward to the town of Tunga. Thirty miles inland, Tunga had not been struck by the storm surge, but residents remained in great need of support after the heavy flooding brought on by the typhoon. Marvin’s team joined in to support the mid-afternoon distribution. It was the fourth such distribution of the day, on a day in which more than seventeen hundred families received toiletries, daily necessities, and emergency cash relief.

As hundreds of relief recipients filed into the distribution site, Marvin was struck by just how orderly everyone was. There was no pushing, no cutting. Volunteers greeted each recipient with broad smiles of compassion, and they saw their sentiment reciprocated in kind. As the pre-distribution ceremony began, volunteers, police officers, and even the town mayor joined together in prayer. The emcee explained that each person was invited to pray...
however they wished—to their own deity, in their own tradition—and Marvin watched heads bow and eyes begin to water as the opening strains of “Prayer” flowed through the speakers:

_In my heart, I feel deep gratefulness_  
_All my heart is filled with sincere prayer_  
_From all corners of the world_  
_Let us join our hearts and pray_  
_For a world of harmony and peace_

For Marvin, the tears of three weeks before had returned. But now they flowed for a different reason. They flowed as he watched individuals come together in a time of crisis—neighbors and strangers alike. They flowed as he witnessed people connect heart-to-heart, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, or religion. They flowed as he saw a change beginning to stir in a place that needed it now so desperately.

As the song’s lyrics played over the loudspeakers in Mandarin Chinese, the emcee translated their meaning into Tagalog. But as he watched the emotional crowd, Marvin knew that this prayer needed no explanation. The melody itself was moving, solemn, calming. Words or no, the meaning was clear, and everyone felt it deeply.

After a couple more days of medical relief and distributions, Marvin returned to Manila to care for his wheelchair-bound mother and his nieces and nephews, in order to give his brother the flexibility to remain in Tacloban and work on restoring the family’s home and business.

When Marvin returned to Tacloban two weeks later on December 18, he found a new scene awaiting him there: a city in the midst of a great rebirth. Visible signs of hardship remained—homes waiting to be rebuilt, blocks without power, litter on the streets—but the city was again filled with hope and vitality. Cars and bicycles packed the roads as police officers directed traffic. Businesses and restaurants were open once more, and food stalls lined the sidewalks. All around town, he found reminders of a major reason for this rebirth wherever he saw handwritten tarps and signs expressing locals’ sincere gratitude to Tzu Chi.

On this second visit to Tacloban, Marvin now traveled alone. His mission was to spread love via the three thousand dollars his operating
room colleagues in Baltimore had given him for the task. Assessing the needs of his neighbors, Marvin purchased toiletries, school supplies, and emergency lights, and distributed them to the organizations and individuals who needed them most, bringing some extra relief to those who needed it while helping to pump life into the recovering local economy.

Though Marvin no longer traveled with Tzu Chi, he could see its effects all around him: in the written signs of gratitude, in the temporary classroom that now replaced the toppled buildings of his old high school, and in the hope that once again filled his hometown.

— Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

When the unfortunate cannot find help, those who are blessed must go to them.

Though not far removed from devastating disaster, the interaction of volunteers and care recipients returns genuine smiles to faces. Photo: Marvin Tan

Tzu Chi volunteers present a check to the local parish priest to repair his church’s roof that was destroyed in the storm. Photo: Marvin Tan

Photo: Shusi Jian
Also known as Vesak, Buddha Day is an opportunity to pay respect to the Buddha. Each May, Tzu Chi celebrates Buddha Day together with Mother’s Day and Tzu Chi Day, creating an opportunity to give respect and gratitude to all who have paved the way for us: parents, teachers, and the Buddha. In 2013 alone, more than 300,000 people attended 355 ceremonies held in thirty-six countries and regions worldwide.
Buddha Day is a day of deep and sacred meaning. It is a day when we remember what the Buddha’s coming into the world brings to humanity and to our lives. Throughout the ages, many saints have appeared in the world to guide people and enable them to live a life of wisdom. Their teachings have become the world’s great religions. Just as there is Christmas to celebrate the birth of Jesus, on Buddha Day, we commemorate the birth of the Buddha.

Truly, if the Buddha had not come into our world, what would life be like? If we did not have Buddha’s wisdom guiding us, how would our lives be now?

Why do we need the Buddha’s teachings? In our world today, great advancements are being made in science and technology. On the surface, everything looks wonderful—humankind seems to be making great strides forward, achieving progress and creating prosperity. But in reality, behind all this development and progress lie the seeds of crisis. In the pursuit of economic development, we have destroyed our natural environment and Nature’s orderly system has become disrupted. Our land is increasingly fragile, and the climate is becoming more and more erratic. At the same time, in our modern, materialistic world, the hearts and minds of people are changing—moral values are weakening, honesty and goodness are thinning out, and people are increasingly selfish, greedy, and lacking in basic character. Yet few of us see this true state of affairs. Going about our normal lives as we do, how little we realize what we are in reality doing. We are blindly led around by our greed and desires, our anger and hatreds, and our ignorance and delusions.

That is why the Buddha came to teach us. He wanted us to understand that when we are driven by greed, anger, and delusion, we do many things that go against life’s principles and in doing this, we create negative karma. The law of cause and effect is a natural law; by creating negative karma, we will reap its retribution. This retribution is why we experience so many problems and so much suffering.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. If we can purify our heart and mind of greed, anger, and delusion and work on changing our wrong behavior, we can create a better life for ourselves, a life full of wisdom and blessings. Not only that, we can also help bring about a peaceful world where everyone lives in harmony with love and goodness in their hearts, and in wellbeing without disasters and man-made calamities. This is all possible if we can follow the Buddha’s teachings and use them to cleanse away our inner impurities, cultivate ourselves, and through our example, inspire others to join us in doing the same.

Everything begins within the mind, and by changing our mind and then our behavior we can turn many bad situations around. This is the truly precious teaching that the Buddha gave us. It opens up infinite possibilities for humankind.

On Buddha Day, with hearts of gratitude, we remember the wisdom that the Buddha has brought us. We renew our vows to practice his teachings—to lead a more enlightened life and do what good we can to contribute to the wellbeing of all. Then, our world of turmoil can be turned into a wonderful Pure Land. 🌿
As rituals go, Bathing Buddha is simple. You step up to a bowl filled with water and flower petals. You bow. You place your fingertips in the water. You bring your hands together and up to your forehead. You bow again. You pick up a petal from among those scattered around the bowl. You maneuver it between the fingertips of your hands as you press them together again.

What follows is Walking Meditation. You step into a moving queue, hands joined in prayer. You follow the person in front of you. Lines are taped onto the floor, so you cannot stray. But trust is still required: trust in the person in front of you, who has to the trust the person in front of him, and on and on to the very first person who is leading the walk.

A few minutes into Walking Meditation, stillness descends. Christina is chanting words I do not understand. Her deep voice slices through the stillness like a sword, setting a precise cadence for our steps. We walk with purpose, with intention, each of us cocooned in our own reverie. Deep breath in, long exhalation out. I try to count each breath, but I lose count as thoughts invade my mind. It is difficult to empty the mind. The harder you try, the harder it is.

"Stop fighting your thoughts," I say to myself. "Be present."

I focus my eyes on the lower back of the person in front of me. Christina's chanting fills me. My feet move as if on their own. The line snakes along the path marked in tape on the floor. We move as one.

We bathed Buddha. Now we are cleansing ourselves—of past words, thoughts, and actions that were hurtful; of missed opportunities to share responsibilities and serve; of spiteful attitudes—all manifestations of our ego that block the natural flow of Great Love from our hearts.

Time doesn't move, only our feet. Energy emanates from collective concentration. Thoughts still come and go, but I'm not able to grab any one of them to spin into a mental fantasy. I can walk forever. I feel vast space. And just like that, the walk ends.

That evening, I marvel at the experience of walking nowhere, only to find myself exactly where I am. I find myself laughing at everything and at nothing.
Buddha Bathing Around the World
The 80/20 Lifestyle

Be healthy: Reduce your meal portions to 80%
Be generous: Use your 20% savings to help the poor

Improve your health by reducing meal portions to 80% of your normal consumption. With the 20% you save on food, you can help the needy.
I can remember my initial phone conversation to join Tzu Chi as a volunteer. Shortly afterward I completed an online volunteer application and was quickly contacted by Tzu Chi volunteers about upcoming meetings and my first volunteer opportunities: two free medical clinics in October. The first was in Palmdale, California, and the second just two weeks later in Bakersfield.

When the date for the first free clinic arrived, I had already received directions and a job assignment. I was to be part of the triage—responsible for getting patients to the appropriate location, of which there were four: optometry, dentistry, medical including flu shots, and traditional Chinese medicine. I was nervous when I arrived because I had never participated in such an event. Upon boarding the bus, I took all of the directions to heart, trying my best to memorize the Chinese names of the other volunteers in case I needed their help.

Unfortunately, the bus ride to Palmdale did not go as smoothly as hoped. The bus broke down midway, so the driver stayed to wait for mechanics while the senior Tzu Chi volunteers contacted the headquarters to alert them of our plight. In seemingly no time at all, vans arrived, the medical supplies were repacked in vans and car trunks, and the nurses, doctor, and triage team, me included, sped off to complete the journey as soon as possible.

When we arrived, fifteen minutes after the official start time, we quickly unloaded, set everything up inside the school gymnasium, and immediately began registering the two hundred patients already lined up and waiting. Having never seen a line so long for anything before in person, it was overwhelming for me, yet reassuring since I knew I would be able to assist them.

The most memorable experience came when a young patient approached me and asked how she could volunteer with Tzu Chi.
Given the delay and the high numbers of patients—in a line which continued to grow—I had no time to be briefed, so I took directions on the fly as I soon found myself with medical folders.

With three of us working in concert, we managed to get the numbers down and move the line along. I helped anxious patients waiting for the dentist and told them with sincerity that everyone, even other dentists, are afraid of seeing the dentist. I told them not to worry, Tzu Chi practices everything with compassion and that I did not know of anyone who had ever complained of pain after seeing a dentist at these free clinics.

Once the bulk of the intake had been completed I began working with files, two or three at a time to handle the volume. As everyone navigated the clinic, we also dealt with the tricky task of keeping entire families together, sometimes including three or more children, since the law requires minors to be near their parents or legal guardians while they are receiving medical care.

The workload caused the day to go by quickly. Indeed, the most memorable experience came when a young patient approached me and asked how she could volunteer with Tzu Chi. The idea that other people were interested in joining had never occurred to me, but it certainly has grown on me since then. I can say now that I saw firsthand the power of Tzu Chi to affect people and to give them the same sense of purpose that everyone who volunteers with Tzu Chi, including the founder Master Cheng Yen, has: to assist others with love and compassion. I consider that the highlight of my day. Though I did not get to see it happen at the next free clinic, I was still delighted in other ways when the date of the next medical outreach arrived two weeks later.

On October 20, my second medical outreach took place in Bakersfield at a high school cafeteria. When we arrived, hundreds of people were waiting for Tzu Chi volunteers to begin providing medical aid. Once again, I
would be working in triage, but this time I had some experience, which made it easier and less nerve-wracking. I was even able to help a first-time volunteer, a young man. We set up tents and cots to accommodate the patients.

During this outreach, I was occasionally called on to translate from Spanish to Mandarin and Mandarin to Spanish—this was a challenge for me since they are both languages I learned, neither is my native language. Overall, the day was busy, but very rewarding. I enjoyed getting to talk to the other volunteers whenever I had a chance. All of them were very interesting individuals and very approachable.

After closing this second clinic, we cleaned the inside as thoroughly as we could and also made an effort to beautify the parking lot, where many had camped out the night before just for the opportunity to see a doctor or dentist. I will never forget the look of relief and gratitude on the faces of the two exhausted school employees who had thought they would have extra cleanup work to do to tidy up all the mess from the clinic. They had not realized that Tzu Chi volunteers share the philosophy of “first to arrive, last to leave.” We worked hard together to leave the facility as clean as possible and looking as if the free clinic had never even taken place.

All told, I found these free clinics very rewarding. Tzu Chi is willing to help all people, not concerning itself with anything related to the patients at all, including their income levels or immigration status, but instead seeing them simply as people who need help. With open hands and large hearts, the dozens of volunteers at each clinic gave the patients much needed access to doctors, dentists, and traditional Chinese medicine doctors, while also providing free flu shots and dispensing needed medication at no charge.

Getting to be a part of these clinics made me feel like a better person. At the end of each clinic, not only did I experience the reward of feeling that I had done a good deed by assisting others, something even better happened to me: I got to know many wonderful people who are also volunteers. I not only felt united with them in Tzu Chi’s mission to provide immediate and compassionate service to those in need, but I also bonded personally with them as well. The volunteers were of such different ages and represented so many different occupations and outside hobbies, but these differences were all irrelevant; never had I felt so close to people that I had never met before as I did when I rode on the bus to and from these free clinics, and since then, our friendship has only grown.

Acts of generosity are perceived as helping others when we ourselves are the true beneficiaries. — Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Teaching the topic of contentment can be challenging in a preschool classroom. In fact, many adults struggle with this concept as well. With technology giving us everything at our fingertips and all the latest and greatest new gadgets designed to make our lives easier, it becomes harder and harder to find contentment in our hearts.

For some families, dinner conversation and quality family time have been replaced by staring at television, computer, tablet, and smartphone screens. We are often blinded by the idea that if we could just have a new car, make more money at work, or have a bigger house, we would be happy. Some people chase this idea for their whole lives and never achieve true happiness. Once we take off these blinders, we see how truly blessed we really are. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves, “Is my cup half full or half empty?” It’s all in how we look at the situation at hand. Our cars may be old, but they get us to work every day. We may not always agree with our boss, but we have a job and bring home money to provide for our families. We may not have the nicest house on the block, but we have a warm place to lay our heads and rest safely at night.

Often it takes something much greater, something life-changing, to truly understand the full meaning of contentment. The sudden loss of home, income, or health can force us to reexamine our own lives and lead us to truly reconsider our needs versus our wants.

My family and I went through several life-changing events during the span of just one year. We were forced to reexamine our lifestyle; we could no longer continue living as we had been. Our spending, eating habits, and weekend activities all had to change without delay. Instead of being able to help others as we had done for years, we had to humble ourselves and allow others to help us. In the midst of our family tribulations, work gave me a sense of stability; it became a sanctuary where I could temporarily forget about all the difficulties my family and I were facing.

As the months went by, I started to transform my weekly lessons in character education and everything I taught took on a deeper meaning for me. As I prepared for the theme of “contentment,” I knew it would not be an easy lesson to instill in the children. A Jing Si Aphorism we displayed in our classroom during the contentment lesson was “Desire Less; Love Earth More.” We used Master Cheng Yen’s aphorism to explore how reducing our desires can affect our everyday lives. By desiring less, we create less waste. By reducing the waste we create every day, reusing old items, donating to local charities, and recycling, we all can play a role in helping our environment. Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle plays a big role in contentment.
During one of our small group lessons we were discussing the topic of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle with the children. We began our discussion by exploring how we can reduce our waste, and we tried to find examples in our classroom. The children were full of ideas and found that we could do better in how we use drawing paper and take care of the library books. The following day I placed several recyclable items along with a few broken items in a box to share with the children, and we used them to open a dialogue of ideas about what we can do with these items at school as well as at home. Several of the children quickly raised their hands to share their ideas. Almost every child knew about placing the items in recycling containers, but when I showed them a ripped book and a broken teapot only a few children raised their hands with ideas about what to do with them.

One child said, “We could tape the book and be more careful next time,” while another added, “We have to throw the pot away now because it’s all broken.” Next I asked the class, “What can we do with this broken teapot instead of throwing it away?” Different ideas began to pour out, but as each idea was given there were a few children that realized why it would not work, so we had to keep thinking. As we ran out of time for this exercise, we decided to think about it some more and discuss it again the next day.

In the afternoon, we moved on to our science lesson. Since it was spring, we were learning about the garden and how plants grow. As we began pouring the soil that a parent had donated into our flower pots, we noticed that we had more seed packets than pots. The children asked what we would do with the extra seed packets, so I asked them if
they had any ideas. Several ideas were brought up, including asking their mothers if they could bring extra pots from home. All of a sudden, a very excited child began jumping up and down, calling my name, and saying, “The teapot!” Once all the children heard the idea, they began to smile and cheer: “The teapot! The teapot!” We walked back into the classroom together to retrieve the teapot, then the children carefully helped spoon soil into it. The most rewarding part about being a teacher comes in moments like this, when the children are able to discover things on their own and truly enjoy what they have learned.

In the weeks that followed, many parents began telling me that their children were stopping them from throwing away plastic food containers and other recyclable items and insisting that they instead bring them to school to reuse in our garden. The children also began bringing me books with small tears to be repaired and they also helped to remind each other to use every inch of their drawing paper before getting a new sheet. Wow, it didn’t take long for the children to begin to understand such a challenging concept! I started to think, if a child can think of ways to be content with what they have, then why can’t we adults do the same? These children also began bringing these concepts that they learned at school into their everyday lives at home, and that is what all teachers live for!

For some people, change comes slowly over time. For others, it is forced upon them like a train wreck—you can see it coming but there is nothing you can do to get out of its way. Either way it
happens, it is a time to reflect on the path that you have chosen and strive to learn from your past.

Before we begin to feel sorry for ourselves and fall into a depression, let’s take a deep breath and take a look around us. Can we see the man sleeping inside a cardboard box out in the rain or the single mother walking a mile and a half with her four very young children just to buy a gallon of milk? How much better do we have it right now?

Finding true contentment in our hearts is not easy, and neither is going through rough times, but a person with good character can learn from their trials to help others. If we never experience any type of hardships in our own lives, then how can we be prepared to help others, show them empathy, and serve them with compassion in our hearts?

As we travel down the road of life, what matters most is how we deal with the many bumps along the way. When we hit a bump in the road, do we lie down to die in the ditch or do we get back up to continue on our path lifting up others along the way? Which path will you choose? 🌍

Those who are content are never lacking.
— Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Photo: Ihsuan Tsai
The state of Pahang in Peninsular Malaysia suffered its worst flooding in years in December 2013, forcing thousands to evacuate their homes. On December 8, local volunteers delivered relief materials and warm loving care to those affected. Photo: Tinghui Ye

On November 24, 2013, volunteers in Myanmar held a joint gathering for the Medical and Education missions. Tzu Chi scholarship students and their families were invited as well as Tzu Chi patients. Many care recipients shared their love with Typhoon Haiyan survivors by donating what they could to support Tzu Chi’s relief mission there. Photo: Anmin Liu

On December 19, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers in South Africa delivered gifts and a very special Christmas celebration to underprivileged children in Primrose, on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Here, a volunteer hands a hot meal to a grateful child. Photo: Xianbin Zhou

In order to provide underprivileged locals with a happy holiday season, New Zealand Tzu Chi volunteers held a year-end distribution in Ōtara, a suburb of Auckland, on December 14, 2013. Photo: Ailin Zheng
On December 14, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers traveled to the town of San Agustín Acasaguastlán, Guatemala, to spend a joyful day together with local children at the community children’s center, which Tzu Chi rebuilt in 2003. Photo: Jialing Qiu

In the days before Christmas 2013, New England and Eastern Canada were struck by a severe ice storm that severed power for more than a million in the midst of subzero temperatures. On December 24, volunteers in Toronto, Canada, braved the cold to make house calls throughout their community, ensuring that individuals were safe and providing help as needed. Photo: Huachen Yu

Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia worked closely with local police to hold their first ever eye clinic on the island of Bali on December 21-22, 2013. During the clinic, they were able to perform cataract surgeries for patients who could not otherwise afford it. Photo: Metta Wulandari

Tzu Chi volunteers from the United States traveled to Honduras to help organize a volunteer training course on January 12, 2014. More than seven hundred volunteers and community members attended that day in Marcovia; volunteers hope that the seeds of love will continue to sprout and grow throughout Honduras. Here, attendees donate into a bamboo bank. Photo: Tina Lee
Tzu Chi volunteers in Japan held a blessing and thanksgiving event in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, on December 8, 2013. Survivors of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami were invited to celebrate another year safely completed. Here, a local shares the donations she has saved in her bamboo bank. Photo: Shuhui Qiu

On December 17, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers delivered warm blankets and hot meals to homeless individuals living in the pedestrian tunnels of Hong Kong. They hope that these items can provide warmth in the depths of winter. Photo: Cailing Qiu

On January 21, 2014, Tzu Chi volunteers in Mozambique delivered genuine love and care to the poor and ill in Maputo. Photo provided by Denise Tsai

Tzu Chi volunteers in Asunción, Paraguay, conducted their regular visit to a senior home on December 22, 2013. Here, a volunteer delivers a handmade vegetarian sandwich to an elderly resident. Photo: Yu Hong

Tzu Chi volunteers in Japan held a blessing and thanksgiving event in Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture, on December 8, 2013. Survivors of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami were invited to celebrate another year safely completed. Here, a local shares the donations she has saved in her bamboo bank. Photo: Shuhui Qiu
Blue & Red Bring Light to Darkness

Tzu Chi Volunteers | Compiled by Sabrina Chien
Translated by Mei-li Hamilton

When organizations and individuals partner together toward a common goal, together we’re stronger.

Top: In 2012, Mayor Rose Wolfe presents Tzu Chi Midwest Regional Director Amy Hsieh with the key to Jackson, Kentucky, in recognition of Tzu Chi’s flood and tornado relief. Photo: Bornain Chiu

Bottom: Tzu Chi and Red Cross wish a happy birthday to a Hurricane Katrina survivor in Houston, Texas, in September 2005. Photo: Allen Yeh
In 1859, Swiss banker Henry Dunant was passing through Lombardy, Italy, returning home to Switzerland, when he witnessed the horrors of the Austro-Sardinian War. He saw injured soldiers crying out for help in vain with no one there to care for them. Dunant decided that he had to do something, so he organized nearby residents to provide medical help, food, and water to survivors and to help bury the dead.

After Dunant returned to Switzerland, he published a memoir, A Memory of Solferino, describing what he had witnessed and the work he had done. In 1863, he joined with four humanitarians from Geneva to establish what would become the International Committee of the Red Cross, an organization which now has branches in 188 countries and more than 250 million members who perform humanitarian relief and social services around the world. The work of the Red Cross has saved countless victims of wars and natural disasters.

Over nearly half a century, Tzu Chi Foundation has expanded from charity to medicine, education, humanistic culture, international disaster relief, bone marrow donation, community volunteering, and environmental protection. From the remote corner of Hualien, Tzu Chi has extended its reach to forty-nine countries across six continents and now has more than ten million volunteers and donors. Tzu Chi has helped people in over seventy countries with a spirit of gratitude, respect, and love. They inspire people, purify hearts, and help make society more peaceful.

One hundred years later, a Buddhist nun named Dharma Master Cheng Yen saw a pool of blood on a hospital floor. She learned the blood came from a local aboriginal woman who had lost her child due to complications in childbirth. She had been refused treatment because she could not afford to pay the upfront deposit the hospital demanded. Following the Buddha's spirit of "having great kindness even to strangers and compassion to feel others' suffering as one's own," Master Cheng Yen decided to take action. With four disciples, she began collecting small amounts of money in bamboo banks. They raised money by selling baby shoes, candles, and other handmade goods. Soon they had thirty supporters, and their movement continued to grow. In 1966, Tzu Chi was formed to carry on charitable work with the poor.

Roadblocks to Disaster Relief

Red Cross and Tzu Chi are both charitable organizations that serve people regardless of nationality, religion, or race. When disasters occur in the United States, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for coordinating relief efforts by both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including Red Cross and Tzu Chi. No nongovernmental organization can enter a disaster area or evacuation center without permission, which often led to Tzu Chi volunteers being blocked from helping victims of disasters in the early days of Tzu Chi USA.

After the World Trade Center towers in New York City were destroyed on September 11, 2001, Tzu Chi volunteers from New York and New Jersey were prevented from entering...
the controlled zone around Ground Zero. However, Tzu Chi volunteer Huei-ju Lin, a New York dentist, was able to enter the area with her doctor’s credentials. Because of the fire and heat, the rescue crews needed water to drink. The Red Cross delivered all the bottled water they could find in Manhattan, but it still was not enough. Huei-ju Lin recognized the problem and promised the Red Cross that she would obtain more water. She immediately reached out to Tzu Chi members in the area, and they responded by bringing water to the site. Even though the fire fighters, police officers, and other first responders may not have heard about Tzu Chi before, they certainly remembered the refreshing drinks they received from the volunteers in blue shirts and white pants.

Austin Tsao, then-CEO of Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, met with then-New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and shared Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s saying, “Eliminate old karma with benevolent tolerance and plant seeds of good karma with contentment and gratitude.” He then discussed the question of holding relief distributions with Red Cross leaders, which led to the beginning of an ongoing partnership between Tzu Chi and the Red Cross. In the weeks after the tragedy, Tzu Chi volunteers staffed “family assistance centers” with the Salvation Army, helped provide translation for the Red Cross, and provided services to other groups. In addition, they provided relief materials and issued two million dollars in emergency assistance to more than three thousand households.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina swept across the Gulf Coast, causing massive destruction and nearly two thousand deaths. Over 88,000 square miles of land were flooded and 270,000 people lost their homes in the historic disaster. Individuals displaced were housed in several makeshift mega-shelters in various states, including Dallas Convention Center in Dallas, Texas. Local Tzu Chi volunteers immediately traveled to the center to offer help, but they were turned away at the door.

Local volunteers Y.L. Ling and Jason Yeh tried to speak with government officials and Red Cross staff, but they were told that Tzu Chi was not recognized by the government. They waited outside City Hall from 9 AM to 5 PM every day for a week, trying to meet the mayor. Finally, one coordinator recognized the volunteers’ blue and white uniforms and got them a meeting with the deputy mayor. After they spoke with the deputy mayor, they got permission to enter the shelter and were able to distribute supermarket gift certificates to evacuees.

In October 2003, multiple wildfires swept through Southern California, burning thousands of acres across San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura counties. Tzu Chi volunteers reached out to the incident commanders three times, hoping to participate in the relief effort, but their offers were rejected. The volunteers continued to persist and eventually were allowed to enter the San Bernardino County Joint Disaster Relief Center. In the end, the first large-scale emergency relief effort by Tzu Chi on the West Coast encountered repeated roadblocks, but volunteers were still able to help many individuals.

In October 2007, three Southern California counties—Riverside, Los Angeles, and Orange—once again experienced major wildfires, so Tzu Chi USA Headquarters immediately set up a Southern California Disaster Relief Coordination Center. Volunteers visited evacuation centers, but none of the centers allowed Tzu Chi to join the relief effort. The next day, volunteers visited the Escondido Evacuation Center and, once again, their offer of help was rejected.
by the manager in charge of the center, who claimed there was no shortage of supplies. But the volunteers persisted. They said that even if there was no need for more material relief, they could perform songs with sign language to help raise the spirits of survivors. The manager agreed, and starting the next day volunteers met with victims, sang and performed sign-language songs, listened to the victims' stories, and promoted recycling.

After many disasters, more and more relief organizations began to recognize Tzu Chi’s blue and white uniforms. In 2006, Tzu Chi became a member of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). The next year, Juliet Choi, then-Senior Director of the American Red Cross, began pushing the two organizations to work together. She had become familiar with Tzu Chi's organization and was impressed with its work. On June 18, 2008, the two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together. She had become familiar with Tzu Chi's organization and was impressed with its work. On June 18, 2008, the two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together to strengthen preparations for disaster relief, cooperate on rescue operations, and improve joint emergency assistance efforts.

Joining Hands for Disaster Relief

In June 2008, the Midwest experienced heavy rains and extensive flooding. Over thirty-eight thousand people were left homeless. More than one hundred Tzu Chi volunteers from all over the country came to the disaster area and participated in joint distribution efforts with the Red Cross. A local Iowa newspaper even covered the story under the headline: “Buddhists to give $2 million to C[edar] R[apids] flood victims.”

In the same year, wildfires once again struck Southern California, this time in Orange County. When Tzu Chi volunteers came to the disaster relief center in Rancho Bernardo, one of the Red Cross volunteers approached a Tzu Chi volunteer and said, “I saw you in Missouri.” The volunteer then generously offered to share half of their booth with the Tzu Chi volunteers. Since then, no matter where a disaster occurs, Tzu Chi volunteers work closely with the Red Cross whether in shelters or security-controlled areas, providing timely assistance to alleviate the urgent needs of disaster victims.

In September 2010, a high-pressure gas pipe exploded in the town of San Bruno, just a couple miles from San Francisco International Airport, leading the governor to declare a state of emergency. Tzu Chi was able to set up a booth in the disaster relief center because it was recognized from past performance as a trusted organization. Victims of the fire saw Tzu Chi volunteers like family members. Volunteers
helped sort recyclable and non-recyclable materials. The Red Cross staff was impressed and appreciative. Tzu Chi volunteers heard the encouraging words: “It’s great having Tzu Chi here!”

The next month, a four-story apartment building caught fire in San Francisco and quickly spread to two adjacent buildings. Residents displaced by the fire were placed in a temporary shelter. Tzu Chi volunteers delivered blankets, towels, instant rice, instant noodles, and household necessities to the victims. Red Cross staff were impressed with the quick and efficient response by Tzu Chi, and victims felt warmth, love, and genuine care from Tzu Chi volunteers.

On March 11, 2011, after the major earthquake off the northeastern coast of Japan, tsunamis struck across the Pacific Rim, even as far as Hawaii, leading local government agencies to establish a disaster assistance and recovery center. Tzu Chi Pacific Islands Region, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and twenty other organizations were all invited to help residents and boat owners affected by the tsunami.

A few days later, Pittsburgh was struck by a major thunderstorm punctuated by golf-ball-sized hail, as a tornado with winds over 120 miles per hour struck along a seven-mile-long path. Red Cross personnel and Tzu Chi volunteers visited and evaluated the disaster area twice. Tzu Chi volunteers from the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in New Jersey drove six hours to reach the area and help by distributing cash cards and blankets. When they saw video of the devastation caused in Japan by the tsunami, victims of the Pittsburgh storm were deeply affected because they could empathize with the victims in Japan.
In 2012, several Midwestern states were struck by major tornados. The town of Harrisburg, Illinois, suffered the worst damage. Tzu Chi volunteers from Chicago, St. Louis, and several cities in Ohio worked with the Red Cross to visit the area and evaluate the damage. They then distributed daily necessities to the victims, spreading love to help them rebuild their lives.

Just before Thanksgiving 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast, causing massive destruction. Tzu Chi volunteers from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regional offices immediately sprung into action, reaching out to all of the affected communities and setting up distribution sites. Tzu Chi invited the Red Cross to set up their food trucks at Tzu Chi distribution sites to supply hot coffee and food to people waiting for the distribution from Tzu Chi.

Charity Partners Communicate and Learn Together to Help Disaster Victims

To share information and learn from each other, Tzu Chi volunteers all across the country visit the Red Cross to attend classes in CPR, first aid, and disaster response. The objective is to share information, learn new methods of emergency assistance, prepare for more difficult missions, and be able to offer disaster victims better services.

Each year, Tzu Chi volunteers participate in the NVOAD annual meeting. At the meeting, the organizations share lessons and experiences. In particular, Tzu Chi has been sharing the idea of “green initiatives,” by featuring Da Ai Technology environmentally friendly products and introducing Jing Si Instant Rice, which Tzu Chi has developed for use in disaster relief efforts. Tzu Chi volunteers not only use reusable dinnerware themselves, but also distribute meals in reusable containers to disaster survivors in places like Haiti and China in order to avoid creating additional waste. This recognition of the importance of preserving the environment to prevent secondary damage has gained the recognition and endorsement of many individuals and organizations.

Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s Bamboo Bank Era stories of kind hearts and the Jing Si Abode principle of “No Work, No Meal,” have received recognition from the disaster relief community. The Administrative Director of FEMA is well aware of the difficulties nonprofit and religious organizations face when coordinating with governmental agencies. He has said that the first job in disaster relief is to comfort victims—a simple statement which shows how the basic focus of disaster relief is in harmony with Buddhist philosophy.

In March 2010, forty officials from the Red Cross even visited Tzu Chi’s Great Love Village in Kaohsiung. They learned about how the entire village had been reconstructed by Tzu Chi after the local community was devastated by Typhoon Morakot in 2009. They brought back information to help them when they rebuild disaster areas.

Human hearts full of greed, hatred, ignorance, pride, and doubt result in frequent war, pestilence, hunger, extreme weather, and many other kinds of disaster. Tzu Chi volunteers must work with organizations like the Red Cross and local community groups, as well as strengthen their ability to evaluate and respond to disasters. We need to care for victims not only when disasters occur, but also afterwards. To help disaster survivors stand on their own and become self-reliant again is the true meaning of Great Love (Da Ai).
On Saturday, October 19, 2013, I was part of a fellowship of people coming together to provide, as well as to receive, support in light of the recent Colorado floods.

I am a Red Cross volunteer and I have been working with the disaster response and recovery operations centers since the devastating floods swept through our beautiful state of Colorado mid-September. Thousands of people suffered incredible destruction. Yet, as it happens in crisis situations, people come forth to offer assistance, breaching lines of economic status, religious belief, and ethnic makeup.

The Tzu Chi Foundation, which literally means “Compassionate Relief,” is a Buddhist, nongovernmental international humanitarian organization that visited Greeley, Colorado, to provide additional aid to support some of those greatly affected by the flood waters in an area of Weld County.

There were Buddhists, Christians, and perhaps those of other religious beliefs; Latinos, US citizens, Chinese, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and other ethnic backgrounds. All came together under the roof of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church in Greeley, sharing emotions and compassion to help alleviate hardship for those currently in need.

I went to the meeting to assist with the English-Spanish interpretation. I was deeply touched by the experience.

As part of the intake process, the Tzu Chi volunteers gave each client two additional gifts—a small bamboo piggy bank and a fleece scarf. The piggy bank symbolizes that by saving a few cents a day, the person who received the help may one day help out another person in need. Indeed, this is how the Tzu Chi volunteers are able to gather funding for the aid they provide in the community! The fleece scarf, besides providing warmth, was made out of recycled plastic water bottles, teaching us the importance of recycling garbage for a repurpose use such as this.

There is a perfect saying in my native Spanish language that symbolizes the overall message of that day—“Hoy por mí, mañana por ti.” Today for me, tomorrow for you. Today, we are here for you, but tomorrow, you may be called to assist another in need.

What a great way to spend my Saturday morning, in fellowship with people I may never cross paths with again, but an experience that left a path of sunshine in my heart.
A World Filled With Warmth

溫暖滿人間
wēn nuǎn mǎn rén jiān

Music & Lyrics: Wu Jia Xiang 詞曲：吳嘉祥
Translation: Tzu Chi USA Translation Team
Video: Eddy Lin

When you reach out your hands
當你伸出雙手
dāng nǐ shēn chū shuāng shǒu

To help those who are in need
幫助別人的時候
bāng zhù bié rén de shí hòu

Your life will surely change
生命從此不同
shēng mìng cóng cǐ bù tóng

Because you have opened your heart
因為我們不再冷漠
yīn wèi wǒ men bù zài lěng mò
Our hearts feel grateful

感謝在心田
gǎn ēn zài xīn tián

The world is filled with warmth

温暖满人间
wēn nuǎn mǎn rén jiān

The world changes just as we do

让世界跟着我们改变
ràng shì jiè gēng zhe wǒ men gǎi biàn

Forming a circle of love

用爱画一个圆
yòng ài huà yī gè yuán

When you reach out your hands

当你伸出手
dāng nǐ shēn chū shuāng shǒu

’Cause you need a helping hand

需要帮助的时候
xū yào bāng zhù de shí hòu

Perhaps you’ll meet again

也许你会遇见
yě xǔ nǐ huì yù jiàn

A hand you once held before

那一双你牵过的手
nà yī shuāng nǐ qiān guò de shǒu

Tzu Chi songs are composed based on the teachings of the sutras and Dharma Master Cheng Yen. When we sing the song, we are reminded of the way of the bodhisattvas in daily living. Please visit “The Song of Bodhisattvas” on www.us.tzuchi.org to enjoy music videos for this and other Tzu Chi songs.
Real-life stories about US Tzu Chi volunteers active in their communities and around the world: a view from all angles, a view from all perspectives:

USTzuChi360°

Watch episodes online at www.us.tzuchi.org and www.youtube.com/ustc360.

Click the "Videos" tab on www.us.tzuchi.org to watch USTzuChi360° and programs including Life Wisdom, a twelve-minute daily talk by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, and Tzu Chi This Week, a half-hour weekly roundup of Tzu Chi news from around the world.
In Santa Ana, California, Tzu Chi volunteers have been supporting Lincoln Elementary through the Happy Campus Program. On December 13, 2013, local Tzu Shao youth group volunteers delivered love to underprivileged students in the school by bringing warm care and early Christmas presents.

Photo: James Huang

Tzu Chi volunteers continue to actively promote the Happy Campus Program in New York. On November 22, 2013, they visited Kissena School in Flushing to read and draw with the students.

Photo: Peter Chu

At Westminster retirement community in Austin, Texas, Tzu Chi volunteers spent an early Christmas together with senior residents on December 21, 2013. Here, an elderly gentleman learns the sign language for the song “The Spirit of Great Love.”

Photo: Jason Chen

Through the Happy Campus Program, Tzu Chi volunteers in San Francisco, California, have been providing warm, loving care to underprivileged students of Malcolm X Academy for several years. On February 8, 2014, Tzu Chi and the school honored students who had achieved perfect attendance from September to December 2013. After the ceremony, students were also provided with free dental care.

Photo: Etta Jones
Tzu Chi volunteers held a winter distribution in Watsonville, California, on December 15, 2013, to support local migrant farm worker families. Photo: Dawen Mei

Tzu Chi volunteers visited the YWCA in Dayton, Ohio, on December 4, 2013, to bring an early Christmas to women and children affected by domestic violence. Here, a volunteer presents an eco-friendly scarf made from recycled plastic bottles. Photo: Guocheng Lin

On December 15, 2013, Tzu Chi volunteers went out on the streets of Oakland, California, to deliver eco-friendly blankets to local homeless individuals to help protect them from the winter cold. Photo: Qiwen Bo

Tzu Chi volunteers once again helped decorate the Donate Life float, which participated in the 125th Rose Parade on January 1, 2014. Among the eighty-one organ donors honored this year was young Chin-Te Liao, whose organs were donated at Tzu Chi Hospital in 2003. His parents and alumna Tzu Chi volunteers helped decorate the float—entitled "Light Up the World"—which was honored with a trophy for Excellence in Presenting Parade Theme. Photo: Michelle Chen
An historic tornado outbreak on November 17, 2013, swept across seven Midwestern states, killing several individuals and affecting millions more. In the weeks that followed, volunteers held several emergency cash distributions to bring relief to those affected and help them get back on their feet again. Photo: Qingxiong Lin

On December 3, 2013, Tzu Chi and Lutheran Community Services jointly held a distribution to provide winter clothing and daily necessities to refugees in Seattle, Washington. Here, recipients try on donated shoes. Photo: Yingxia Qian

Each year, Tzu Chi volunteers in New York gather winter clothing to distribute to individuals in need. On December 21, 2013, they visited Brooklyn to distribute clothing to families who were affected by Hurricane Sandy one year prior. Here, a Tzu Shao youth group volunteer helps a young girl choose a stuffed animal. Photo: Peter Chu
After the Buddha left home to become a monastic, He engaged in spiritual cultivation and attained enlightenment. Then He led His disciples far and wide to spread the Dharma. After a period of time, many laypeople came to admire His wisdom and magnificent demeanor, so one after another, they also joined the Sangha to engage in pure spiritual practice.

Because of the way many of them came to be monastics, many of His disciples remained confused by the path He took. The Buddha had once been a prince who enjoyed the great splendors and wealth of palace life, but in His youth, He left His wife and young son to engage in spiritual practice as a monastic. His situation was very different from that of most spiritual practitioners, who usually became monastics after fulfilling their responsibilities to their families and their work. Therefore, His will to give up everything and walk the path of spiritual cultivation was often the subject of discussion within the Sangha.

One day, the bhiksus had gathered to discuss this topic again. This time, the Buddha noticed them talking in small groups, so He asked, “What are you discussing? Allow me to resolve your confusion.”

So, one of the bhiksus said, "Venerable Buddha, there is something we do not understand. How do You perceive life in such a way that You can do what normal people cannot? For example, before You became a monastic, You had everything that most people wished for. How were You so determined that You gave up everything? What force drove You to take the path of spiritual cultivation?"

The Buddha smiled at His disciples and said, "Actually, my determination did not simply arise in this lifetime. Let me explain the karmic conditions from a past life…"

Then, the Buddha told this story…

Countless kalpas ago, there lived a very wise king. Under his leadership, his country prospered, and his people lived in peace. One day, the king told the servant responsible for his grooming, "Pay attention to something for me. If you notice a gray hair on my head, you must immediately tell me." Then some time passed, and one day the servant noticed a gray hair as he brushed the king’s hair, so he reported it to the king right away.

The king said, "Pull out that gray hair and place it in my palm." The servant respectfully complied with his order. The king looked at this gray hair and thought, "I am old now. How many days do I have left to live? In the past, I gave everything I had to my country. Now, I must immediately engage in spiritual cultivation and find my own spiritual path."

Humans have a body that undergoes birth, aging, illness, and death and a wisdom-life that is undying. We must make use of this impermanent life to seek our everlasting wisdom-life.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*
Soon after, the king summoned the crown prince and said, "Look, my hair is turning gray! So now, I want to seek my path in life. I am turning the country over to you. Follow the policies I have established and focus on benefiting the citizens. Maintain the prosperity and peace of the country."

Thereafter, the king abdicated the throne and left the palace. He built a small hut to live in and practiced in solitude. He worked extremely hard and was very diligent, so he soon eliminated all his afflictions and attained realizations. His mind became liberated, thus nothing bothered him. Then he made a vow: "I vow to engage in spiritual practice as a monastic, life after life. I want to share my realizations and spread the state of mind of being liberated with everyone in the world."

At this point, the Buddha told His disciples, "Dear bhiksu, in my past life, I was that king. Ordinary people are lost and confused, with desires as boundless as the sea. They continuously seek material comfort, so they are always in conflict with each other, causing much suffering in this world. Ordinary people do not usually ponder the important questions of life: Where were we before we were born? Where will we go after we die? What is our ultimate purpose in life? What happens after we attain that purpose? Therefore, they do not realize that things are impermanent and do not strive to engage in spiritual practice."

He then said, "Birth, aging, illness, and death are all part of the natural process. Once we are born, we will age, and because we age, we will certainly die. Ordinary people are happy at birth, then become afflicted throughout life, and as they approach old age, they grow terrified of death. In fact, this cycle is the natural course of life; it should not cause us to feel joy, afflictions, or fear. Once we thoroughly understand the truths of life, what in the material world is worth chasing after?"

Though we may be very familiar with these principles, in reality, when we encounter these inevitable stages in our lives, we often become ensnared in our suffering and afflictions, lost in our confusion.

As we study the Buddha’s teachings, we must learn to accept the nature of life. Instead of being troubled or worrying about where we will go in our next life, we should seize the present moment to always be mindful. We must always ask ourselves, do we crave recognition and wealth? Do we crave the enjoyment of pleasures? Are we afflicted by interpersonal conflicts? As long as our minds are calm, no matter what happens, we will be at peace. Furthermore, we need to live with others in harmony. Then, in every moment, we will feel liberated and at ease.

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1. Sangha: the community of the Buddha’s followers
2. Bhiksu: a male monastic practitioner
3. Kalpa: an extremely long period of time
New Books by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Several new books of Dharma Master Cheng Yen’s teachings are now available in English from Jing Si Publications.

From Austerity to Prosperity
The Power of the Heart
Life Economics
Dharma as Water (Volume 1)
The Essence of Filial Piety

Find these and more at jingsi.us.tzuchi.org or your local Jing Si Books & Café.

(Dictionary on pg. 72-74)
Book Review:

Dharma as Water (Volume 1)

Jeff Steward

Jeff Steward, Ph.D., uses satellite data to improve hurricane predictions. His interest in Buddhism began as he sought answers for his mother’s death when he was a child.

Have you ever felt regret gnawing at you inside your stomach? Have you ever felt remorse for your inconsiderate actions? If so, you are not alone. Most people have done things they now regret. Buddhism teaches the law of cause and effect, and the Buddha said in the Upajjhatthana Sutra that each person should realize, “I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my arbitrator. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, to that will I fall heir.” Therefore, we know that whatever negative actions we have done in the past will have consequences for us now, later in this life, and/or in the next life. Some believe a higher power can remove our sins for us, but Buddhism begins from the principle that the wrong actions we have committed simply cannot be undone; for example, those who were harmed by us are unlikely to ask a higher being permission before trying to get even. We are indeed the heirs of our actions, and no one can take our actions (or their consequences) away from us. So how can we overcome these regretful feelings? How can we overcome not only our remorse but also our fear of future negative consequences as well?

Fortunately, throughout the years many Buddhist masters of the past have left us with repentance ceremonies, powerful group rituals where we face the negative deeds we have done in the past, directly come to grips with our regret, and vow to change for the better. Master Cheng Yen’s book, Dharma as Water, teaches us about one such powerful repentance ceremony, known as the Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance (or Water Repentance for short). The idea for repentance goes back to the Buddha, who taught in the Lonaphala Sutra that when a salt crystal is placed inside a glass of water, it becomes unbearably salty to anyone who would try to drink it. However, if that same salt crystal is placed inside a large river, the salt will dissolve to the point where it is no longer painful to drink. In the same way, our negative actions, like the salt crystal, never go away. Water represents the amount of good merit that we have accumulated. So if our good karma is only the amount of a single glass of water, the negative deed we committed will have unbearable consequences, while if we widely practice good deeds, filling our mind with great Dharma Love as wide as a river or even an ocean, the experience of retribution for our misdeed will be relatively minor.

In the English translation of the first volume of Dharma as Water (240 pages, published February 2013), we learn about the powerful Water Repentance ceremony developed by the Chinese master Wu-da in the ninth century. According to tradition, Master Wu-da had the strong negative karma of killing another human from many lifetimes ago. After that he had become a Buddhist monk and practiced diligently for many lifetimes. It was only
when he became slightly arrogant about his Dharma accomplishments that his karma was able to catch up with him and he developed a painful boil. Through his good affinities with the Venerable Kanaka, he was able to overcome his negative karma and wash the boil away. From his experiences, he wrote the Water Repentance, introducing a ceremony that is still practiced to this day. Master Cheng Yen wraps *Dharma as Water* around main passages of this text, and the book serves as a modern commentary on this ancient teaching. She uses these passages as starting points to discuss her compassionate worldview and talk about the amazing organization, Tzu Chi, she has grown during her life.

Master Cheng Yen begins by teaching the most important aspects of Buddhism, namely generosity, virtue, impermanence, cause and effect, and not seeking happiness outside of your own mind. If you would like to learn the basics of Buddhism, this book serves as a good introduction, but even if you are fully familiar with the main ideas of Buddhism, Master Cheng Yen's words serve to remind, rally, and inspire. As the Master says in the book, we need to fill up our mind with spiritual antibodies so that when negative thoughts arise we will be able to handle them in much the same way our body handles invading bacteria or viruses. Therefore, the aspects of Buddhism in this book serve to increase our immunity to painful suffering we would otherwise experience in the future.

In addition to the commentary on the Water Repentance and the main ideas of Buddhism, the Master shares many inspiring stories of real-life people from our modern life that she has encountered. The stories range from bravery and self-sacrifice in the face of illness to the transformation of a compulsive gambler into a model citizen. In these memorable stories we see human beings not unlike ourselves in a wide range of spiritual and material states; there are the “rich among the poor” who are happy and content in spite of their station in life, and the “poor among the rich” who are unhappy despite their substantial wealth. We see in each story the power of changing one’s mental habits, speech, and actions, and the profound influence this can have.

*Dharma as Water* is a book about using the power of Dharma to dilute our past misdeeds and widely develop a good character. This is the most important antidote to regret. While we cannot undo what we have done in the past, it is never too late to change our future. With a single action today, we will create our lives for tomorrow. What kind of life would you like to lead? What do you need to do to get there? You can use *Dharma as Water* to inspire you to answer these questions, and your future self will thank you!

The act of repentance is tantamount to the purification of the heart, like a clear stream flowing over the heart, cleansing away its defilements.

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*Ming Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*
Sautéed Vegetarian Flatbread

Recipe provided by Vegetarian Cooking Team
Tzu Chi University Continuing Education Center
Instructor: Hsien Liu

Ingredients
- 1/2 cup Wood Ear Fungus
- 1/3 cup Carrots
- 1/2 lb Bean Sprouts
- 3 Eggs

Dough
- 3 cups All-Purpose Flour
- 1 1/4 cup Water
- 1/2 tsp Salt
- 1 tbsp Oil

Seasonings
- 1/2 cup Soy Sauce
- 1/3 tsp Mushroom Essence
- 1/3 tsp Salt
- 1/2 cup Water

Directions
1. Prepare the flatbread:
   A. Add water and all-purpose flour and knead until smooth. Shape into a ball. Cover with damp cloth and set aside for 10 minutes.
   B. Take out dough ball and knead until dough is elastic. Shape into a ball again. Cover with damp cloth and set aside for 10 minutes.
   C. Knead and roll the dough into small round discs. Sprinkle some salt and continue to roll out the dough.
   D. Coat each disc evenly with oil. Roll into strips, then flatten with rolling pin.
   E. In a heated pan, evenly toast the flatbread on medium-low heat until both sides are golden brown.
   F. Cut flatbread into long, thin strips.
2. Beat the eggs. In a heated pan, cook into a flat omelet.
3. Remove eggs from heat and cut into long, thin strips.
4. In a heated pan, sauté wood ear fungus and carrots in a bit of oil.
5. Add soy sauce and water, then salt and mushroom essence. Sauté evenly.
6. Add bean sprouts and egg strips, and finally flatbread strips. Mix well.
7. Cover pan and let steam for 5 minutes on medium heat.
8. Uncover, mix well, and serve.

Vegetarianism means disciplining ourselves, cherishing our own lives, and respecting all living beings.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Austin, Texas, suffered three straight years of drought. However, on October 30, 2013, a massive storm caused flash flooding in the Onion Creek area. The flood had a flow rate nearly twice the force of Niagara Falls and raised Onion Creek to historic heights.

Tzu Chi volunteers conducted a disaster assessment on November 2 and determined that approximately twelve hundred households had been affected. They then held a distribution of cash cards and blankets on November 17. Twenty-two Tzu Ching collegiate volunteers (all students of The University of Texas at Austin) signed up to help out with computer intake, material distribution, and sign language performance to reach out to people’s hearts and bring them back to feel “Love and Care” again.

After seeing many distributions growing up with Tzu Chi on television, photographs, and videos, I realized by going through the experience firsthand what the pictures could not really describe: human strength and love for each other in the face of suffering. I heard stories about a man who literally hung on to a tree for five hours to try to escape the raging floodwaters, a woman who is trying her best to make her son as comfortable as possible even though most of his belongings were lost in the flood, and a loving mother of five children who was finally able to talk about her struggles with possibly moving her family and shed some tears without her children seeing, and many more that touched my heart in a powerful way.

I have never been more inspired or humbled than when I took my ninety-degree bows and comforted these amazing individuals I had the honor of serving. Their words of thanks just reminded me of how thankful I am for the blessings I have in life. I truly appreciate that I was given this opportunity to reach out to our local community because I was shown that Great Love is everywhere regardless of the distance or the magnitude of the disaster. This could not have been more apparent than when a lady asked me if she could only donate coins into the Bamboo Bank. I said that anything would help, and the lady immediately pulled out a twenty-dollar bill, put it into the Bamboo Bank, and said, “Thank you all so much for what you do.”

Alice Jean
After seeing vicariously all the relief Tzu Chi has done through disaster relief and distributions, it was a really incredible experience to be able to finally participate in one. Not only did we help many families in the affected community but we were also very humbled and grateful to be able to reach out to so many hearts that day.

*Amanda Lin*

Although it is saddening that people have to go through tragedies, it was inspiring to see the flood victims smile easily and carry a graceful dignity even in the midst of disaster. People are not defined by events that happen in their life but by how they act in the face of adversity, and seeing the strength of the victims makes me want to be a better person.

I also did not expect to be so affected by the compassion of Tzu Chi. With no complaints or hesitation, all the volunteers continuously put in their effort in order to lessen the sadness of another. The selfless acts I saw today remind me that everybody feels human emotions, that kindness is admirable, and that we are not alone.

*Anna Dang*

"If there's an upside to falling, it's that you give your friend a chance to catch you." I have always loved this quote for its naïve optimism, but now I love it for its beautiful truth. As victims befallen by the tragedies of the flood reached out to us, I couldn’t help but feel enraptured by the sharp glint of determination and strength within their eyes: a steel dam restraining, controlling unrelenting tears of anguish and despair.

As we, in turn, reached out to them, their tired, stoic expressions softened into sighs and tears of relief. Looking back, I can’t help but wonder if at that very moment, they had perhaps begun to realize the beauty of falling and letting their friends in the community catch them and love them. I can’t help but wonder if they had finally found a glimmer of beautiful hope in the midst of terrible tragedy.

And so, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a friend of the Austin community. Thank you for showing me such moving strength in tragedy, and more importantly, such inspiring hope in recovery. Thank you for highlighting the beautiful truth in one of my most beloved quotes. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

*Benjamin Yang*
Of all the volunteer events that I have done with Tzu Chi, this was by far the most meaningful and memorable. It was heartbreaking to see the videos and pictures of the flood destroying people's homes and possessions and to hear the stories about how each and every one of the flood victims was personally affected. However, the attitude that all of these families reflected was so inspiring and humbling. Almost every single person I interacted with mentioned the recent typhoon in the Philippines or neighbors whose houses were in worse condition than their own, and how they felt blessed because they are lucky compared to many other people out there.

In the midst of losing everything, they didn't think to feel sorry for themselves and shut down. Instead, they are on their feet fighting to not only rebuild their own lives one step at a time, but also to rebuild others' who are more in need. The fact that they can face this disaster in such an optimistic light is extremely motivational.

It makes me think of all the trivial things we perceive as 'the end of the world' and realize just how ridiculous they are: doing poorly on a test, having a tiny leak in your roof, accidentally leaving our phones at home for a day, etc. If we could adopt their way of thinking and realize that no matter what, we are very fortunate and our lives are filled with miracles, we would be so much happier and so much more inclined to take part in the backbone of Tzu Chi, in the cycle of great love. I was so touched by how grateful and open the community was and I know without a doubt that they will be fully recovered in no time.

Catherine Tsao

I had a lot of fun volunteering. I feel very happy whenever they show gratitude and happiness of us helping them.

Chunying Su

I met this tiny girl who had the cutest smile on her face the whole time, and her humble mother who insisted that the damage to her house was minor, so she didn't need as much help as her other neighbors. They taught me that no matter how challenging life may seem sometimes, we should never forget to smile and should all the while still be mindful enough to think of others' needs before our own. It was truly a humbling experience.

Coco Kuo

The experience was very real and unexpected. I was really happy to help serve the people who were harmed in the disaster and will probably help out again in the future!

Dingbo Shi
It is one thing to hear about natural disasters in other parts of the world through the news, but something else entirely when it’s right here at home—it seemed much more real, more devastating. Speaking to the flood survivors was a very emotional and difficult task, and at times I felt like I lacked the words needed to comfort them. Then I realized how even the simplest gesture, like a smile or a hug, can make a lasting impact in the victims’ lives, and that despite this tragedy, they are grateful for so much. We should be, too.

*Michelle Zhang*

I saw there was a kid crying and a volunteer went up with chips and cookies. Then the kid’s smile was so good! The other kids looked kind of jealous, but Shawn wasn’t done yet: he gave snacks to all of the kids!

*Po-Chen Yang*

Among other tasks, Tzu Ching volunteers were responsible for data entry and validation. Photo: Jason Chen

It was a liberating experience to see how giving up a little bit of your time can make such a life-changing impact on so many people’s lives.

*Camilla Yen*
On April 14, 1966, Dharma Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Merits Society in Hualien with the support of thirty housewives who each put aside a couple cents of their grocery money every day to establish a charity fund. During the first five years, they helped a total of thirty-one elderly, ill, and poor people from fifteen families. As word spread, more people participated and the program gathered strength. It spread beyond Hualien: across the island and around the world.

Today, Tzu Chi is a nonprofit charitable organization with ten million volunteers and donors in roughly fifty countries worldwide. Over the past forty-eight years, Tzu Chi’s four missions—Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanistic Culture—have grown from the seeds of gratitude, respect, and love, and Tzu Chi’s activities have expanded to include international disaster relief, bone marrow donation, community volunteerism, and environmental conservation.

In the United States, Tzu Chi operates nine regional service areas with more than eighty offices nationwide. Volunteers give back to their local communities through family services, emergency disaster services, homeless services, school support programs, college scholarships, income tax reporting assistance, relief distributions, holiday care packs, free and low-cost medical clinics and outreaches, preventive health education, cancer support groups, character education curricula, community education classes, and production of positive, inspiring media.

Whenever disaster strikes at home or abroad, Tzu Chi volunteers deliver cash aid, hot meals, and emergency relief supplies directly into the hands of disaster survivors. Over the years, US Tzu Chi volunteers have actively provided relief after such major disasters as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and Hurricane Sandy.

In recent years, Tzu Chi volunteers’ charitable work has been increasingly recognized by the global community. In 2010, Tzu Chi was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In 2011, Dharma Master Cheng Yen was recognized with the Roosevelt Institute’s FDR Distinguished Public Service Award and named to the 2011 TIME 100 list of the world’s most influential people. In 2013, Tzu Chi was honored by the White House for its Hurricane Sandy disaster relief efforts.
Gratitude is the world's most beautiful language and the most genuine way for people to interact.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen