

More Than a Doctor

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Saturday, 25 June 2005 00:00

The ocean is dotted with fishing boats again. They gently rock within its cradle, as helpless as a sleeping infant held softly in its mother's arms. Throughout history, these people have always unburdened their needs and worries to the mother-like ocean. But to whom can they now confide when their grief and sorrow stems from the ocean's terrible power?

As medical practitioners, doctors are trained to use their stethoscopes to listen for signs of physical ailments. But as true healers, they must also listen for the darker, unspoken pains.



All along the road, one can see tatters of torn clothing caught on tree branches, flapping and fluttering in the wind. These eerie rags resemble the funeral banners hung outside Taiwanese homes following a death in the family. On the remnants of a crumbling wall, scribbled contact details of many survivors are scrawled. They left their names, addresses and the phone numbers of temporary shelters and locations in the hope that they will be found by their missing family members or recognized by someone who may know where they are. There are a few people standing around, facing a large heap of rubble, looking dazed as they search for something that is no longer there. Others have set up small tents, prepared to face whatever hardships life will bring their way tomorrow. But for the injured, or for those whose tools of livelihood were completely destroyed, tomorrow is too far and too frightening a concept to even contemplate.

A medical post was set up by Tzu Chi in Hambantota, where some of the most severe damage occurred. Eighteen days after the tsunami struck, a sixty-year old retired government employee by the name of Doole showed up at the medical post looking for help. He appeared unusually calm, but it only made his effort to conceal his catastrophic experience all the more poignant.

Dr. Wu Kun-ji of the [Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center](#) gasped in horror when he slowly drew back the gauze on Doole's leg. "Oh! My..." When the tsunami came, Doole was struck by a steel plate which left a deep gash on his lower leg. Without prompt and proper medical attention, the wound had become infected. Dr. Wu removed the festering tissues immediately. For Doole however, this was the least of his agonies. His wife and six daughters had all been killed by the tsunami. Now he and his youngest son were living with relatives. After being treated at the medical post, Lin Tsui-lien and several other Tzu Chi volunteers accompanied him back to where his home had once stood.

Doole said that over 220 homes in his neighborhood had been destroyed by the tsunami, and now where there used to be places full of people with familiar names and faces, only large piles of rubble remained. There was so much destruction around us that we could barely comprehend the extent of this seemingly infinite wreckage. When Doole got out of the car, he walked in front of us to lead us to his house. He walked with haste as if he were not suffering from his injuries, and he repeatedly kept hitting his head with his hand as if trying to knock the reality and memory of what had happened out of his skull.

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According to Doole, Islamic funeral rites call for the bodies of the deceased to be wrapped and buried in white cloth. Not being able to bury his wife and daughters properly would be the greatest regret of his life.

He pointed to three coconut trees and gestured where his two houses used to be. "This was my kitchen, my living room..."



He explained that his wife and he had been married for 26 years. They had inherited and lived in her father's house, where they worked hard together for many years to build a happy family. In a flash, the results of all that effort and care had been snatched away.

Doole hated the thought of being a burden to his relatives or friends. However, erecting a new house of his own would cost at least 350,000 rupees (US\$3,500). Yet since he had retired from his government job, his monthly pension was only 6,500 rupees (US\$65). Therefore, having his own home was a notion far beyond the realms of possibility, especially since he also had the added expense of his youngest son's education to contend with.

"This is the will of Allah," Doole said quietly, trying to convince us, when really it was clear that he was trying to convince himself as well, for this was the only acceptable explanation he could stomach. He continued by saying that Allah had taken his wife and children away so that he would be reminded to lead a more meritorious life.

The time on a clock caught in the shattered window of another house was frozen at 9:21. A small boy lingered alone on top of where his home and family had once thrived, his gaze revealing an anguish as tortured as his shadow on the rubble.

The wife of one of Doole's neighbors broke down sobbing on Lin's shoulder, because she had lost 14 members of her family in the disaster...

"It feels like time has stopped, but only God knows how much suffering has just begun," Lin remarked.

Susilawathi

Since December 29 of last year, one Tzu Chi group after another has arrived in Sri Lanka. Tzu Chi's Medical Disaster Survey and Assessment Teams have been made up of members of the [Tzu Chi International Medical Association](#) and volunteers from Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, the United States, and Canada. This unceasing relay has carried out its daunting mission without interruptions, and as of February 3, 2005, a total of five teams had helped more than 27,000 patients during 35 days of free medical clinics.

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