

## Work is a blessing

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
Monday, 01 August 2011 11:07

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For over 50 years, I've been going to bed before 11 p.m. and waking up at 4:00 a.m. I've been doing it so long it's become a habit. I have an alarm clock, but I don't need it to wake me up. Instead I set my alarm to remind me it's time to go to bed.

I'm a Tzu Chi construction commissioner. Though I'm just a volunteer, I work every day. A new Tzu Chi office in Taichung, central Taiwan, is being built, so I go to the construction site early every morning to inspect the safety, quality, and progress of the construction work. My inspections often require me to climb up and down ladders or scaffolding. People who see me find it hard to believe that I'm already 76 years old.

During the day I oversee Tzu Chi construction work and attend meetings. Sometimes I also chant sutras at funerals. In the evenings, I occasionally accompany other Tzu Chi volunteers to visit elderly people who live alone. On weekends I do recycling work. People that care for me suggest that I should rest more often. I tell them though I work every day, every day is like a Sunday to me. What could be happier than spending time doing your favorite things?

### Live to do good

I was born during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan (1895-1945). When I was a child, the Japanese government expropriated iron bars and farming tools to make weapons. My uncle was left with only a hoe—he couldn't farm even if he had wanted to. After World War II ended and the Chinese Nationalist government regained rule of Taiwan, the people's life was just as difficult. As a high school student then, I realized that a lot of construction work would be needed as the government began to build up Taiwan's new infrastructure. I therefore decided to pursue a career in civil engineering.

In 1963, I returned to Taiwan from the United States with a Ph.D. in civil engineering from Purdue University. I taught at Cheng Kung University and Chung Hsing University. I also worked in construction to get some hands-on experience. It takes a lot of time and hard work to excel in this field, but since it was my chosen profession, I wasn't about to complain.

During this time, I diligently asked workers at construction sites to recycle anything they could. Pulled-out nails and cut-off steel wire were collected for recycling, and discarded moldboards were used to boil water. In fact, anything that could be recycled or reused wasn't allowed to go to waste. The money we made from selling the recyclables went to the workers' benefit fund. After I joined Tzu Chi, I began delivering recyclables to nearby Tzu Chi recycling stations so that the money could be used to advance the missions of that charitable foundation.

After I retired, and especially over the last few years, I began to feel that there weren't enough hours in the day to do what I wanted to do. My wife, children, and grandchildren all live in southern Taiwan; I live in central Taiwan because I'm so busy with Tzu Chi work. Many people can't understand why I can't just take it easy and still have to "toil and moil" at my age. But I

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don't feel I'm "toiling and moiling" at all. How can doing things you enjoy make you feel that way? Actually, I feel a liberating sense of peace for being able to contribute to the work of Tzu Chi.

Twenty years ago, I was diagnosed with rectal cancer. My doctor said I had only five more years to live. I was 56 years old then. My oldest brother had died of lymphoma cancer at that age. I thought to myself, "Can it be such a coincidence? Is it my turn now?"

But then I began to think: If I could do a good thing just once every three days, then I'd still have time to do more than 600 good things before my time was up. I took comfort from this reasoning and quickly came to terms with my illness. I even consoled my friends and relatives who felt sad for me. I told them I didn't think about how much longer I could live, but how much more I could still do.

I had an operation and underwent chemotherapy for a year, followed by smaller surgeries every six months to catch and remove any remaining polyps. My condition was pretty unstable during the first four years of the treatment, but my health started to improve in the fifth year. After the fifth year, I looked upon every day lived as another day gained.

To be honest, it was no fun enduring the pain and physical discomfort that came with the illness or its treatment, but I tried not to let it get me down. When it was time to take my medicine, I took it; when it was time to get injections, I got them. I even taught and went to construction sites as usual. In fact, I worked harder, not less, during my illness. I wanted to make the most of my life while I still could.

Now I've survived cancer for 20 years. People often ask me what I do to keep healthy, but I've got no particular method or secret. I never take tonics or health supplements, and I eat simply. I've been a vegetarian for 20 years and I'm not picky about food. I'm satisfied as long as I have enough to fill my stomach.

I keep regular hours, and I never use electric fans and air-conditioners. Everyone who is familiar with me knows that no matter how hot it is, all I need is a towel to wipe away my sweat. One other thing is that I rarely worry about this or that. I just do what I need to do and never let interpersonal problems bother me. Because I'm free of attachments and worries, I fall asleep in no time when I go to bed at the end of the day.

Recently, I attended a funeral where I met several of my college classmates. There were 25 people in my class, but only eight are still alive. My classmates' hair had all turned gray; only mine still had some black in it. Some were stooped with age and even needed support to walk. I told them that to be healthy, one must remain physically active. Being at loose ends or remaining seated all day playing mahjong or cards is not conducive to good health.

Naturally, if we do the same thing over and over again for an extended period of time, we get tired easily. Master Cheng Yen says, "A change of work is as good as a rest." I think that's really true. Take me for example. If I spend the morning doing office work, I switch to more physically active work in the afternoon, such as visiting a construction site. That way I don't feel tired or

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burned out as easily.

In my opinion, we don't have to lie in bed or go sightseeing to get rest. Sometimes work itself is rest!

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