

Real-life Story of Repentance: Overcoming Cancer through Repentance and a Vegetarian Diet

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Michael Tsai (蔡志偉) is a Tzu Chi volunteer in the United States who immigrated to the United States when he was in his teens. His parents sent him to the US to study. He was very independent; despite the meager wage he earned, he was able to work to support himself while pursuing his studies. Because of the hardship he experienced early in life, he vowed to work hard and become rich. After years of hard work, he created his own company and became very successful.

At the same time, he started developing a liking for delicacies. When he went to a restaurant, it was common for him to pay around US\$1,000 for a meal. He would go to high class restaurants and order dishes such as steak and lamb, and seafood, such as shrimp, crab, and lobster. Sometimes, he would order items not on the menu, asking the chef to prepare special dishes for him. He was fond of Korean and Thai style barbecues. He could eat a five pound lobster by himself. Every few days, he would go to Japanese restaurant to eat sashimi. On weekends, he would buy live seafood and cook it at home. He was a dab hand at cooking the gourmet Chinese oxtail soup.

Six years of eating in this way took a toll on Michael's health. At the age of 29 he was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a type of bone cancer; the doctor told him that he had only six months to live. At the prime of his life with a successful business, this news was a shock to him.



He then started chemotherapy. After three months of intensive chemotherapy, his cancerous tumor was found to have grown from 5cm to 7cm. Since the treatment had failed, Michael's doctor gave him two options: go to another specialist or stay and try out other treatments that may or may not be effective. Since his doctor was among the top three treating bone cancer in the United States, Michael chose the second option.

Before the illness, he did not hold a religious belief. It was after the doctor had told him that there was little hope for him that he started to ponder on the meaning of life and reflect on what he had done. He also started to learn Buddhism. Once, when he was reading the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sutra, he came across a passage which describes the sufferings the beings in hell go through. Some have their tongues stretched out and plowed by cattle. Some have their internal organs gouged out, sliced, and minced. Some have their bodies stabbed. Others are cooked in cauldrons of boiling liquid.

When he read this, he started to reflect on his gourmet habits. To cater to his preference, didn't animals go through cruel, hell-like suffering? He thought of his favorite dish, duck tongues. To make this dish, many ducks' tongues have to be cut out, and cooked, just like the hell of pulling tongues. The process of preparing the meats and cooking them fit the descriptions of hell.

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