

Eternal Life With Goodness and Beauty

Written by Master Cheng Yen
Tuesday, 11 September 2007 00:00



While alive, make the best of every second to fulfill your filial duties, do good deeds, and contribute to the welfare of mankind. When you have passed on, let your body be put to good use by donating it for medical education. Then you will live life to the fullest.

In mid-September, Typhoon Sinlaku wreaked dreadful havoc in central Taiwan. Take Nantou County for example. In Lushan, a hot spring resort, floodwaters washed away the foundations of hotels. In Xinyi, a tunnel crumbled under the weight of a mudslide. Bridges fell apart, mountains collapsed, houses toppled down, lives were lost--the typhoon destroyed buildings and took lives in just a few seconds, breaking the hearts of victims and frightening bystanders.

Nantou County was devastated by a powerful earthquake on September 21, 1999, and the soil and mountain slopes there have since been unstable. The injured land should have been allowed time to recover after suffering such severe damage; however, since Nantou is a scenic spot, businesspeople continued to develop this area and build hotels to accommodate tourists. One after another, buses loaded with tourists drive into the area during weekends and holidays, causing even more harm to the land.

Many people hold the view that they can do whatever they want as long as it makes them happy, so they indulge in momentary pleasure regardless of the consequences. But how long can such pleasure last? And will sorrow soon follow?

Just look how many disasters in the world are caused by mankind. Some people might say, "I only do a little damage. How can that have any impact on the whole environment or the global climate?"

Look at those turbulent floods. Aren't they formed by many small, tiny drops of water? Although a small bad thought may seem insignificant, many of them can become a powerful force of bad karma.

Then how can we attract good fortune and fend off trouble? We should give unselfishly and do as much good as we can. We should not while away our lives by living only for our own pleasure and doing whatever strikes our fancy. When we become prudent, sincere, and take good care of our hearts and minds, blessings will be accumulated and disasters will be warded off.

On September 16, an inauguration ceremony was held to bring 11 "silent mentors"--people who donate their bodies for medical education after they pass away--into service for an anatomy class attended by third-year medical students at Tzu Chi University. Among the 11 body donors was Hong Zhi-cheng (洪志誠), who was well known by many Tzu Chi volunteers.

Mr. Hong was a successful entrepreneur and a dedicated Tzu Chi volunteer. After a strong earthquake jolted central Taiwan on September 21, 1999, he went to the hard-hit area of

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Nantou with other Tzu Chi volunteers to take part in disaster relief work. He cooked hot meals for survivors, he mixed cement and helped carry steel bars for the construction of prefabricated houses, and he even sorted through piles of garbage for recyclables.

He used to play multiple roles in our foundation. He was a Tzu Chi commissioner, a Tzu Cheng Faith Corps member, and a convener of the Tzu Chi Honorary Board for Central Taiwan. Additionally, he participated actively in the Tzu Chi missions of international relief, medicine, and education. You could see him almost everywhere, leading a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Three years ago, he was diagnosed with liver cancer at the age of 56. Even when he was laid up in bed, too weak to rise, he continued to remind Tzu Chi members who came to visit him to seize every second of life and wholeheartedly carry out the Tzu Chi missions.

The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings describes a bodhisattva as one who, even when suffering from a serious illness, still cares first about others. Like a bodhisattva, Mr. Hong used his life to the fullest. Even in the final moments of his life, he still embraced the Buddha's compassion as his own and kept firmly in mind my commitments to relieve suffering. He was like a ferryman who, even though gravely ill, was still able to take people in the right direction in his boat.

Mr. Hong died just three months after he was diagnosed with cancer. On the day he passed away, an ambulance delivered his body back to Hualien (because he wanted to donate his body to the anatomy class of our medical school there). When I lifted the cloth that covered his face, I saw a bright smile on his face. He must have been happy that his wish to be a silent mentor was fulfilled. The smile on his face set the minds of his family members, who were standing beside me, at ease.

Three years have passed since he departed from this world, but he still lives in the loving memory of many people. A lot of Tzu Chi members with whom he had once worked came to the inauguration ceremony to pay their respects. When reminiscing about him, they spoke fondly of his smiles, his great sense of humor, and his diligence in doing good deeds.

His image and all the good he did have been deeply engraved in the minds of many. Having left behind a valuable legacy, he is a true role model for others to follow. How meaningful his life was!



Tzu Chi set up its first free clinic center on September 10, 1972, six years after the establishment of the foundation. Through helping the impoverished in those early years, I found that many people became financially strapped because they fell sick. I hoped to help reduce poverty by providing medical treatment for the needy.

That clinic, however, had only limited resources and could not provide help for very many people. I knew that only a full hospital could truly benefit an area as medically underserved as

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Hualien. This conviction led me to establish a hospital in that region. After a lot of difficulties and challenges were overcome, Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital was opened in 1986. But another problem soon emerged: Few medical professionals were willing to come to the backward, underdeveloped Hualien region to serve. In order to cultivate caring and conscientious doctors, Tzu Chi established a medical college in September 1994, which was later upgraded to Tzu Chi University by the Ministry of Education.

All medical students must study anatomy. In Taiwan, the cadavers used by medical students usually came from executed criminals or unidentifiable bodies found by authorities. But Tzu Chi wanted to educate medical students to respect all life and to treat patients with care and love. So in 1995, I began asking Tzu Chi people to sign up to become body donors to benefit medical education. When alive, I hope Tzu Chi people can faithfully and resolutely dedicate themselves to doing good. When they leave this world, I hope they can let their bodies be put to good use by donating them for medical education.

Many Tzu Chi people have since signed up to become body donors. They seize every moment of their life to lovingly serve the needy when they are alive, and when they pass away they donate their bodies to nurture future doctors. They don't stick to the traditional Chinese myth that your soul can only rest in peace when your body has been buried whole. They demonstrate profound wisdom and greatly enhance the value of their lives by letting go of all attachments to life and death.

I still remember what Li He-zhen (李合真), one of our first silent mentors, said to a group of doctors and medical students at the Tzu Chi Hospital palliative care ward: "You can make hundreds or even thousands of wrong cuts on my body, but please don't make even one wrong incision on your patients in the future." Over ten years have passed since then, and what he said has become a motto for all Tzu Chi medical students.

The Tzu Chi University anatomy class is not merely a technical education, but an education on the meaning of life as well. Every year, before they take the anatomy class, all medical students must visit the family of their silent mentor to learn his or her life story. In this way, the body donor becomes a real person to them and not just a strange, cold body laid on the dissection table. When the anatomy class begins, the students naturally know to look upon their mentors with respect and gratitude and try to learn as much as possible from them.

The Medical Simulation Center at Tzu Chi University was inaugurated on September 10, 2008, 13 years after I first appealed for body donations, and 36 years to the day after the opening of our first free clinic. Performing simulated surgery on real, whole bodies has become part of the regular curriculum at Tzu Chi University Medical School.



From September 11 to 15, the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) held its tenth annual conference in Hualien. Many conference attendees also participated in the inauguration

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of the simulation center. Eight donated bodies were used for simulated surgery that day. One of the body donors was Li Bao-gui (李寶貴), a Tzu Chi commissioner from Zhongli, northern Taiwan.

Li had lived with cancer for more than ten years before she died. Despite her illness, she lived in peace and tranquility. She dedicated her time to looking after the poor, soliciting donations, and taking part in disaster relief operations. When her physical condition took a turn for the worse, she still harbored no complaints and faced death with ease. One time, she and other Tzu Chi volunteers took a bus to attend a retreat in Zhanghua, central Taiwan. On the way, she asked the volunteers to hold a "before-death farewell party" for her. Just see how carefree and open-minded she was!

She took every step of her life firmly and meaningfully. When she was about to take her last breath, she vowed to return to this world to carry out the Tzu Chi missions in her next life. Her life of 57 years, though short, was fully utilized. In her ability to live with cancer and face death without fear, wasn't her state of mind like that of nirvana?

Many people live in confusion when they are alive, and at the end of their life all they care about is finding a burial site with good fengshui, supposedly in order to accumulate blessings for their offspring. Actually, blessings come from doing good deeds, and your offspring must create blessings for themselves. It is impossible for you to protect your offspring from the retribution of karma even if you are buried in a place with good fengshui.

Many people who donate their bodies to Tzu Chi, on the other hand, choose to live a different life. They actively contribute to society when they are alive, and when they die they give their bodies to help facilitate medical learning and nurture skilled, conscientious doctors. Their lives are truly full of wisdom and value.

Currently, TIMA has 7,000 members around the world. These medical professionals conduct free clinics on their days off in remote villages lacking in medical resources. They also personally visit poor families to offer medical care. When they hear that a country has been stricken by a natural disaster or needs medical assistance, they also travel long distances to help out. They are truly exemplary doctors who are devoted to using their skills to relieve the suffering in the world.

Pedu is a poor farming village in Malaysia. Close to the border with Thailand, it has more than a thousand inhabitants, most of whom are of Thai descent. Since 1999, TIMA members from Kedah have held free clinics in the village every four months. Over the past decade, a total of 23 free clinics have been conducted there.

Warm relationships have blossomed between the villagers and the TIMA members. Whenever the volunteers allow a longer period of time to pass between their visits, the villagers start missing the volunteers. The scope of care the TIMA members provide for the villagers has expanded from free clinics to home visits, and now to physical check-ups. Last year, they even began encouraging villagers to save money every day to help other needy people. Although the villagers are impoverished themselves, the TIMA members have inspired them to see that they are capable of helping others as long as they have a mind to do so.

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One villager, who lives on government subsidies due to a chronic illness, lost the courage to live after his wife passed away. But that changed after Tzu Chi people walked into his life. They not only treated his illness, but cared for his psychological well-being too. With their help, he has rediscovered the value of life, and he has vowed to save money every day to help the needy until the day he leaves the world.

If our TIMA doctors had not overcome challenges and difficulties and traveled to far-flung, underserved regions to extend care, would these suffering people have been able to receive help? Would the villagers have been inspired to help others, or open up their hearts which had long been closed because of their poverty?

TIMA doctors not only heal physical illnesses, they guide deprived patients to lead a spiritually abundant life by helping others. They are truly wonderful doctors who conscientiously answer their calling!

A really fortunate life lies in being affluent both physically and spiritually. Some people may have money, children, good fortune, prosperity, and a long life, but they are discontented. Even when they possess nine things, they still feel they lack one more. They say they have no time to do good deeds because they are busy with their careers or are physically unwell.

Lin Xiao-yan (林小燕), a Tzu Chi commissioner in Wanhua, Taipei, is different. She is afflicted with lung cancer and stomach cancer, her retina is detached, she wears a hearing aid, and she has undergone more than ten operations for her illnesses, but she still diligently walks the Path of the Bodhisattvas. Even when she is under great pain, she changes into her Tzu Chi uniform and goes out to visit care recipients whenever called to do so. She also participates in recycling work even though she needs to wear a back brace to sort through recyclable garbage. And she even works as a volunteer writer and helps record the history of the foundation.

Physical pain might rule her body, but the Buddha's teachings are in her heart. She takes her illness as spiritual training, and by exercising wisdom, she is able to adjust her frame of mind and keep her spirit from being tied down by her physical condition. She said, "I still have a mouth, so I can share a lot with others. I still have two legs, so I can still walk the Path of the Bodhisattvas." Her perseverance in overcoming physical pain and other difficulties in life is truly admirable.

Doing good deeds is not a privilege of the rich or the healthy. As long as our hearts are rich, we will have the power to give and create a valuable life. Thank you all!

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