

The World is Impermanent

Written by Master Cheng Yen
Monday, 09 September 1996 00:00



All our lives rely on the land. The Buddha said, "The world is impermanent, the land is fragile." This truth was recently proved during the attacks of two typhoons.

Herb Was Heartless, But There is Love in Taiwan

Typhoon Gloria just passed through Taiwan at the end of July. Supertyphoon Herb (1996) followed with full fury. Herb landed at Suao, Ilan County, sweeping the northeastern corner of Taiwan and heading for the sea from there. This is what we call a "northwest typhoon." Although it lasted only two short days, the damage was the most serious in the past 30 years. Many homes were destroyed. We don't know how much time it will take to rebuild them.

When the typhoon invaded Taiwan, I was in Hualien. Each day I heard damage reports from the news media and from Tzu Chi people. I was worried and nervous as an ant on a hot pan. I couldn't calm down for even one minute, let alone eat or sleep well.

The damage done by Herb was unexpected and extremely heavy. People were dead or missing and many homes had been washed away, making us feel very sad. Fortunately, many kind people immediately went to help the victims. Many others extended helping hands and showed their care for the victims. I am really touched and grateful.

Tzu Chi Relief Centers Serve Victims

Whenever a disaster happens, Tzu Chi members always respond immediately. They provide whatever is needed wholeheartedly and without rest. We can only describe them as living bodhisattvas who give people help whenever required.



The day before Herb landed, the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps had already mobilized to form an emergency communication network. The day after the typhoon, we organized several relief centers, calling Tzu Chi members all over Taiwan to join in the relief work. Whenever a relief center received a report that some place needed help, the center immediately sent Tzu Chi people there. If the road to a certain devastated district was blocked, the Tzu Chi members would stand by until the way was reopened. Then they would go into the area right away to investigate the situation. They really showed that they dared to give of themselves completely. "When others are hurt, we feel the pain; when others suffer, we feel the sorrow." This kind of compassion and great love were demonstrated by our Tzu Chi members.

Take the devastated areas of Panchiao, Shihtzu, and Hsichih as an example. On August 1, several hundred [Tzu Chi commissioners](#) and members of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps went to these areas. Some of them cooked meals for victims of the typhoon. Others, by wading through the water or riding rubber boats, delivered more than 10,000 box lunches and bottles of mineral

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water to flood victims who had no water or electricity.

After the flood, the hot sun shone on the garbage and mud, and there was a great danger of the spread of infectious diseases. In order to prevent this, more than 1,000 Tzu Chi members joined in cleaning up all the garbage and mud piled on the streets of Panchiao. It was a hard, dirty, smelly job. However, Tzu chi people have great love. They never moaned or complained.

I am really very grateful to them. Judging from what has happened, I have a deep feeling that we should organize a volunteer group in each community. In peaceful times, they can provide cultural and educational services to the local residents. When any emergency happens, they can work together to help solve problems.

In Nantou county, several areas were completely isolated. The victims could only depend on military helicopters to airdrop food and medicine. The military requested Tzu chi to help provide medicine. I immediately asked [Tzu Chi Hospital](#) to give them the medicine required. Tzu Chi members also took the helicopter to the devastated areas to help the victims stuck there. Whether by helicopter or on foot, Tzu Chi members quickly reached those places to ascertain what was needed and to offer help.

Tzu Chi commissioners in Pingtung County went to Haocha Village in heavy rain. They had to wade through water and climb steep cliffs. Most of those commissioners were quite old. I was astonished to hear that they had done this. While I was very grateful for their great courage, I was also very worried about their safety.

Shanlin Township, Kaohsiung County, was completely cut off from the outside world. The damage there was not known until much later. Since it was impossible to make any airdrops, Tzu Chi people had to walk on dangerous roads to carry food to the victims. I am really grateful to them.



Army helicopters made several attempts to airdrop relief supplies to a ravaged mountain district in Chiayi County, but they failed. The army asked Tzu Chi for help. The next day, Tzu Chi people arrived at the spot. They found that some sick people could not come down from the mountain and there was no medicine up there. One Tzu Chi member hurried down to look for a doctor. Fortunately, there was a young doctor at the place where Tzu Chi people used to get together for spiritual cultivation. That young doctor volunteered to give free treatment to the victims. He carried medicine on his back while members of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps carried vegetable oil, salt and rice. They went up to the mountain together. Just as I have always told Tzu Chi people, the more blessings there will be.

Tungshih Village in Chiayi County was badly flooded. On August 1, when the wind was still strong and the rain was still heavy, Tzu Chi began to deliver box lunches to the victims. Within three days, they sent more than 10,000 boxes. In other villages, the damage was heartrending.

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Tzu Chi people delivered lot after lot of relief supplies there. I can imagine their great love, great courage and fearless spirit, but I can not describe these with words. The damage in Hsinchu and Miaoli Counties was very heavy too. Even graves were blown open and coffins were washed away. This reminds me of the invasion of Typhoon Nina in 1973, which caused serious damage at Tawu, Taitung County. When we opened our eyes, we could see corpses, just buried or half rotten, or skeletons. Therefore, I can imagine the sad scenes in Miaoli this time.

When I arrived in Hsinchu, Chienshih and Wufeng Townships were very foggy. Helicopters could not fly there. Tzu Chi commissioners and members of the Tzu Cheng Faith Corps drove three cars toward Chienshih Township. Rocks were still sliding down from the mountains. Two backhoes were working to open and the road. One of them had almost slid down into a steep valley. The other one was working to save it. At 11:00 a.m., the road was finally opened. By the time the Tzu Chi people came back to Hsinchu, it was already 2:30 the next morning. I was really very worried.

Tzu Chi's relief work in Nantou County is still continuing. On August 4, Tzu Chi people set up a supply station in Shuili to prepare meals for army soldiers who were working on relief operations. One of the officers said they could have breakfast at 6:00 a.m. because Tzu Chi members started cooking at 4:00. The Tzu Chi people's love and sincere devotion moved the soldiers to tears. They wished that Tzu Chi people would continue to provide them with breakfasts.

When I returned to Taichung, I summoned the commissioners and members to the Tzu cheng Faith Corps to discuss how to help with the reconstruction work. It will be a very hard task. At Shuili, Nantou County, Tzu Chi members are still working with army soldiers to save victims. In addition, we have organized a care team in Taichung to look after sick and injured victims of this disaster.

There is another important mission - to replant trees on the mountains. Otherwise the map of Taiwan might have to be redrawn some day. The Ali mountain range is one of the major mountain ranges in Taiwan. It is quite extensive, covering the counties of Nantou, Chiayi and Kaohsiung. Its land and water have been damaged considerably [by illegal logging operations]. The whole mountain range is exhausted. Whenever there is heavy rain, rocks and mud flow down. If we don't improve this situation and do rehabilitation work, one day the whole mountain range will collapse. There will be no more cities or towns. The whole plain in the central southern area will be affected.

In short, whether up in the mountains or along the coast, we have a lot of work to do. We have to communicate with local residents and assist them to move to safer places. We need a tremendous amount of money to help them rebuild their living problems in the future.

We have to exert ourselves to the utmost to carry out our charitable spirit. Whether to save the mountains or to save to sea, we will work together without asking for anything in return. However, the mountains are so high and the sea is so vast. We don't know how much manpower we will need to accomplish the mission.

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