

Examples of Bodhisattvas

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Wednesday, 07 July 2010 13:59

[[Master's Teachings](#)]

Time seems to fly quickly for those of us who live in safety and peace. But for disaster survivors, time must seem to drag on, each second unbearably long.



Haiti, devastated by an earthquake in January, entered its rainy season in April. People left homeless by the quake were forced to move into makeshift tents. I saw in a news report that the vast tent area within the national soccer stadium had been flooded after a downpour. The water was thigh deep. People could only stand in the water, because there was not even a dry place to sit down. How were they able to rest at night? When one has to live such a life, each second must be hard to bear. How my heart goes out to them!

Tzu Chi volunteers, emulating the bodhisattvas' compassion, cannot bear to see people suffer. Regardless of how far away the suffering ones are, our volunteers go to them to personally distribute timely aid and to care for them, hoping to lessen the duration and extent of their suffering. That's the approach our volunteers have taken in regards to helping disaster survivors in Haiti.

Our relief work to Haiti actually began over a decade ago. In 1998, Hurricanes Georges and Mitch swept across the Caribbean, ravaging many countries in Central and South America. The foundation rendered help to six nations, including Haiti. The seeds of love sown at that time were just waiting for the right conditions to sprout and bloom.

Ten years later, in 2008, Haiti was ravaged again by several hurricanes in a row. After surveying the disaster areas, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to distribute aid in early 2009. They invited local Haitians to help them sort and pack the relief supplies. Working alongside our volunteers, the Haitians felt loved and respected. Receiving love, the seeds of kindness planted a decade earlier began to take root.



Exactly one year later, in January 2010, Haiti was devastated by a powerful earthquake. Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital, was almost destroyed. How could an impoverished nation like Haiti recover from such a strong blow? Our volunteers in over 30 nations immediately put their love into action. They helped raise money and pooled all the donations to help Haiti.

In Buddhism, the term "bodhisattvas" doesn't just refer to statues placed in temples to be worshipped by devotees. The term also refers to compassionate people who make altruistic vows, act out their love, and reach out to help the suffering. Thus, the volunteers who give of themselves to help Haiti are truly living bodhisattvas.

But to actually offer help in a place suffering from extreme poverty and the ravages of a major

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disaster is not easy. It takes sincere love, courage, compassion, and wisdom. My thanks go out to the teams of volunteers from the United States, Canada, Argentina, Jordan, and the Dominican Republic. They went to Haiti and helped the locals by distributing aid materials, conducting free clinics, and implementing work relief programs. Their efforts brought the hearts of people closer together.

Gradually, Haitians who had never heard of the Buddha's teachings learned from the examples of the Tzu Chi volunteers that bodhisattvas are in fact people who sincerely vow to take voluntary action to help others. Anyone whose innate love is inspired and who acts out their love can be a bodhisattva. In early April, as our large-scale emergency relief work in Haiti was coming to a close, several local Haitians pledged in a videoconference to emulate our volunteers and become "living bodhisattvas" to extend and spread Great Love in their country.

Light of love

Living bodhisattvas make great vows and reach out to help others without being asked. They give of themselves amidst suffering and send out ripples of love.

No seed can take root and sprout without the nourishment of dew and rain, just as no seed of kindness can sprout and grow within the human heart without the nourishment of love. This is obvious in the case of Haiti. Since the earthquake, Tzu Chi has held 12 volunteer training sessions in the country. Because there are still many locals who want to volunteer to serve others, they asked our volunteers to continue holding the training sessions. The seeds of love are sprouting in Haiti. I can see hope for the country.

In Polo, an area in the Dominican Republic near the Haitian border, there lived many families from Haiti, comprised mostly of women who had fled the country with their children after having lost their husbands to the earthquake. Their lives were harsh. In mid-April, Tzu Chi volunteers, accompanied by three Haitians, visited the area to distribute food and daily necessities and to bring care to the people there. The three Haitians were not well-off themselves, but after coming in touch with our foundation, they realized how fortunate they were compared to many others. They decided to take action to help other Haitians. They are indeed doing their best to be real-life bodhisattvas.

A clean mirror can reflect sunlight. Tzu Chi volunteers are like clean mirrors that reflect light into dark corners. They have illuminated the hearts of many Haitians. Now these Haitians are reflecting their own light and helping their suffering fellow countrymen.

Everyone is born with an innate buddha-nature, and everyone has love in their heart. When that love is awakened, people will naturally want to reach out to give to others. A heart full of love is the most beautiful thing in the world.

Kindness, compassion, joy and selfless giving

When I took refuge with my mentor, Master Yin Shun, he instructed me to "be committed to Buddhism and to all living beings." When people become my disciples, I encourage them to

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“emulate the Buddha’s heart and carry out my missions as their own.” This is the core spirit of our Jing Si dharma lineage.



The heart of the Buddha is pure and untainted. To emulate his heart, we must purify our own and let it stay tranquil, clear, and true to our altruistic vows. Only then can we be steadfastly dedicated to Buddhism and all living beings.

By encouraging my disciples to “carry out my missions,” I hope all of them can walk the Bodhisattva Path and go among people to help the needy. Everyone is like a living sutra containing wondrous teachings from which we have much to learn. When we go into the world and serve others, the innumerable dharma paths that lead us to penetrate life’s truths become clear to us. By helping others and creating happiness for them, we are actually cultivating our own wisdom.

It is my hope that every one of my disciples can emulate the Buddha’s heart and carry out my missions as their own. When they can do that, they will see everyone as a buddha, they will naturally thank, respect, and love all beings in the world, and they will help alleviate much suffering in the world.

This May, Tzu Chi celebrated its 44th anniversary. In the first decade after our foundation was established, we focused our efforts on charity. In the second decade, our work expanded to include medical care; in the third decade, we laid the foundation for our mission of education; in the fourth, we deepened our efforts in the mission of culture. All along the way, we have worked for the benefit of all living beings with an underlying Buddhist spirit. Upholding the principles of sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty, we practice the spirit of kindness, compassion, joy, and unselfish giving. In our 41st year, I announced the establishment of Tzu Chi’s dharma path as a school of Buddhism. While working for all beings, we further stress our commitment to Buddhism.

Only when our hearts are pure and untainted can we truly adhere to the principles of sincerity, integrity, faith, and honesty. “Sincerity” is to give of ourselves with the utmost earnestness, without false pretences. “Integrity” is to walk in the right direction of life without straying off. “Faith” is to give unconditionally so that we can gain others’ trust and affirmation. “Honesty” is to keep our feet planted firmly on the ground and take solid, steady steps on the path of life. When we can abide by these principles, we can develop the strength to practice kindness, compassion, joy, and selfless giving.

What is “kindness”? When we see others, even complete strangers, suffering, in pain or in fear, we immediately go and help them. We even open our arms to embrace and comfort them so that they can regain peace of mind, just as a mother would treat her child who has been hurt. Such expressions of sympathy and love, with a mind to give happiness to others, display kindness.

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“Compassion” is to relieve the suffering of others, but it is more than just that. It is also to think about their future as well, just as parents think about their children’s future. The Buddha is like a loving parent; after comforting the suffering, he helps them settle down so that they can quickly leave behind their pain, start life anew, and have a hopeful future.

In addition to kindness and compassion, we should also practice joy and selfless giving. Without being asked to, we should willingly give money, energy, and time to help the needy, and we should exercise our wisdom, perseverance, and courage to provide short-term relief and long-term companionship. Tzu Chi volunteers did exactly that by being there for survivors of [Typhoon Morakot](#) in Taiwan and the big earthquake in Haiti.

Responding to the needs of needy human beings, Tzu Chi volunteers humbly dedicate themselves to the service of others. They know that when it comes to doing the right thing, they should just do it. And once they have done their best, they should move on and let go of the past so that their minds can always be at peace and free of worries. It’s like making a long journey without getting your feet dirty. Even if some dust does stick to your feet, you can always quickly wash them clean.

So, let us do our best to give of ourselves without asking for anything in return. Even if we can only do a little, we should still seize every opportunity to contribute, to cultivate our blessings and wisdom. Let us not look upon helping others as hard work, but rather as a way to sow blessings for ourselves. That way, as time passes, we’ll be able to form good affinities with even more people in more places.

Gathering love

In August 2009, Typhoon Morakot devastated southern Taiwan, destroying homes in the mountains and wreaking havoc in the lowlands. The disaster shattered the hearts of many. Tzu Chi volunteers opened their arms to the survivors, provided them with a shoulder to lean on, and gave them care and support in the hope of restoring peace, stability, and hope to their lives.



Team after team of volunteers arrived at the disaster areas to help the survivors clean up. In just one short week, ravaged communities regained their vitality and vigor. The hearts of countless survivors were cheered.

To help build permanent housing for people who had lost their homes to the typhoon, Tzu Chi volunteers around the world hit the streets to solicit donations. Some braved sweltering heat, some freezing cold. They all hoped to gather love from across the globe so that those affected by the disaster could have new homes to live in as soon as possible and settle down to a new life.

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Pooling together manpower and resources, Tzu Chi devoted itself to providing emergency relief and mid- and long-term assistance to survivors made homeless by Typhoon Morakot. In February 2010, the Shanlin Great Love Village in Kaohsiung was inaugurated. By late March, about 500 families had moved in. On April 19, the Xinfeng Great Love Village in Pingdong was also completed and turned over to residents.

I visited the Shanlin Great Love Village in mid-April. From a distance, I saw row after orderly row of well-built houses. Tree leaves were budding and flowers were blossoming in verdant gardens. What a beautiful scene.

Coming to the activity center in the village, I saw some aboriginal residents weaving and beading, creating traditional handiwork. Right there in front of me, a beautiful new life was unfolding. The sight filled me with emotion. It brought back the memory of countless people toiling under the hot sun and late into the night to bring into being those nice, strong houses, which are nothing short of works of art. My heart was filled with infinite gratitude to all those who contributed to make it all possible.

Drops of water form a river. In the eight months after Typhoon Morakot, Tzu Chi volunteers pooled together their bits of strength to help typhoon survivors build a future of hope. I hope that with everyone's combined efforts, a thriving and prosperous future lies ahead of all the families in the Great Love villages.

On the second Sunday of May, we celebrate the [Buddha's birthday](#), Mother's Day, and Global Tzu Chi Day. On this day, Tzu Chi volunteers around the world hold Buddha-bathing ceremonies to bring the beauty, truthfulness, and goodness of the Buddha's teachings to the awareness of more people. The theme of this year's Buddha-bathing ceremonies was "The Broad and Straight Bodhi Path" ["bodhi" means enlightenment]. With his pure, untainted nature, the Buddha doesn't actually need our bathing. Instead, the ceremonies serve as a reminder to us to always keep our minds clean, pure, and unpolluted.

All the participants stand together to form the shapes of bodhi leaves. If one person doesn't show up, the leaf will look incomplete, as if a worm had eaten a hole in it. So the beauty of the ceremony lies in the participation of everyone. It symbolizes that in the past 44 years, it has taken the love of every Tzu Chi volunteer to pave the Tzu Chi Path. This Bodhi Path cannot exist without you.

It takes everyone's effort to make harmony prevail within a group. Without the effort of each and every member, harmony cannot come to a group. So, we must do our best to get along with others. Only when everyone works together in harmony can a group manifest its beauty.

I hope harmony can permeate society so that our world can be free of disaster. If we want that to happen, we must start by purifying our minds. If everyone can purify their mind and sincerely dedicate themselves to doing good deeds, our society will be a picture of truth, goodness, and beauty. Let us be ever more mindful.

Translated by Teresa Chang

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