

Eating Less to Help the Poor

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[[Master's Teachings](#)]

What is a poor person's life like? In Jakarta, Indonesia our Tzu Chi volunteers discovered a poor family of twelve: a grandmother living with her daughter and her ten grandchildren inside a very cramped house. This 65-year-old grandmother herself had borne eleven children but nine of them died because her family was always too poor to afford medical treatment when they were ill. Now she has to raise her ten grandchildren left by her deceased children. The grandmother says, "Our three meals depend on whatever people give us. Some will give us cash, 12,000 or 15,000 Indonesian Rupiah (US\$1.50), to buy food or snacks for the children."

What a hard life this family is living! They don't even know where their next meal will come from. In fact, there are many families like this one around the world. Out of a total population of seven billion people in this world, one billion are malnourished or starving.

At the same time, we often see news reports of people wasting their food and producing a lot of food scraps. For example, in Taiwan, many people like to eat out. When they do, many order too much and simply leave whatever they cannot finish.

In Japan, there are many convenience stores which provide ready-to-eat food. To keep the food product fresh, the stores set a very short expiration date. For example, in some stores, food such as rice balls and sandwiches has an expiration window of eight hours. To give the consumer the freshest possible food, when the rice balls and sandwiches are within two hours of their use-by limit, they are thrown away. Other less time-sensitive foods not sold by their expiration date are taken off the shelves and thrown away, even if they are still perfectly edible. One store owner noted that many imported ingredients are used for the box meals; the ingredients are brought into Japan from around the world, but they end up being thrown into the trash. The amount of food thrown away nationwide is three times more than what the country produces*. So much food is thrown away; such an attitude of consumption and wastefulness is truly alarming.

Our eating habits have changed a great deal. In the past, people cooked and ate meals at home. When they went to work or to school, they brought their own lunches; after work or school, they went home to eat dinner. Whatever breakfast they didn't finish in the morning, they would warm up at dinner and finish. Very little food was wasted. Nowadays, people like to eat out. When they go out in the morning, they buy breakfast. For lunch, they eat out also. After work, instead of cooking, the family goes to a restaurant where they tend to order more than they can finish. This is waste of money and food which could help a starving family to survive another day.

If we can eat more simply and donate the money saved, we can help families like the one in Indonesia avoid going hungry. When eating out, choosing a simple meal can save us money.

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For example, when we go to a restaurant, we might spend NT\$1,000 (US\$33) on a meal. In Taiwan, there are many other food venues to choose from, such as street food stands. People can buy a simple bowl of noodles for NT\$100 (US\$3.30) that is as filling and nutritious as a restaurant meal. Instead of spending NT\$1,000 at a restaurant, we can save NT\$900 (US\$30) when eating at a food stand, and even after donating 20 percent of the NT\$1,000 to charity, which would be NT\$200 (US\$7), we will still have NT\$700 (US\$23) left in our pocket.

There are so many people suffering in this world because they have a hard time surviving. If we can keep them in our mind when we make decisions in our daily life, it can help us cut down on our extraneous expenses. With the little extra we save we can help people in need and bring much relief to them. If everyone can donate a little bit of what they save, collectively it can become a sizable sum to help the poor.

* See *Earth from Above*, a DVD set produced by Yann Arthus-Bertrand.

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