

Words to Volunteers: Material vs. Spiritual Riches

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Thursday, 26 June 2014 00:00

Select teachings and points made by Master in the Morning Volunteer Assembly



Part I

- Understanding the Principles and Laws of Life
- Siege of Zamboanga City

Part II

- The Ever-constant Forces of Change
- To Live in Peace
- Warnings and Lessons from Catastrophic Disasters
- When Hearts are in Balance and Harmony

Part III

- Material vs. Spiritual Riches

Part IV

- A Philanthropist Changed
- Creating the Causes and Conditions for Buddhahood



Part I

- *Understanding the Principles and Laws of Life* -- Every day, being able to greet everyone here in the Morning Volunteer Assembly, I feel very blessed, for look at all the unrest and disasters going on all across the world; the fact that we can be here safe and well is truly a blessing. As I learn about all the disasters natural and man-made happening right now, I inevitably feel very worried. But, by not tuning in to the news, I would only know what is happening in my own tiny sphere of life, and this knowledge would be very limited and narrow. How do we broaden our vision to know what's happening to our world yet not become filled with afflictions as a result? Only by really understanding the way life is and how people are, and having wisdom. Then we will understand how things have come to be the way they are and have compassion for living beings. So, as we witness the destruction resulting from disasters and the turbulence caused by people creating unrest, we will go beyond worrying—for worrying alone does not help—and we will work even harder on inspiring people's love and goodness and on sharing wisdom with them so that they can purify their hearts. We must actively reach out to more people to inspire them so they become bodhisattvas who contribute to the good of the world with pure love. This is the only solution to bring harmony back to our world and our hearts, and this is what the Buddha came into the world to teach us.

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- *Siege of Zamboanga City* -- For weeks, we have been sincerely praying for everyone in Zamboanga after rebels started their siege in the city, turning it into a battle zone. Our local volunteers, compelled by a strong sense of compassion, still bravely gathered together to organize foodstuffs and other supplies, which the government delivered to people staying in shelters. During this time, I continually reminded our volunteers to stay safe, especially when they were concerned about how to salvage equipment in our two centers caught in the rebels' occupation zone (Tzu Chi Great Love Eye Center, and Tzu Chi Great Love Physical Rehabilitation and Jaipur Foot Prosthesis Manufacturing Center). Thankfully, the conflict has gradually come to an end and the city is slowly starting to operate again. But according to the news, over 100,000 people have been affected by the conflict, and over 10,000 families have had their homes burnt or destroyed. When they were allowed to leave the shelters on the restoration of peace, they found that they had no home to return to and had nowhere to go. Their foreseeable future includes still more suffering and hardship. They still have a long road ahead of them. So, I hope the kind-hearted people in society will continue their love and care for the developing situation to see how to help people in the aftermath of the siege. For instance, where will the people whose homes have been destroyed stay? How will they rebuild their lives? There's much that will need to be done.

Part II

- *The Ever-constant Forces of Change* -- We see that Pakistan is suffering from disaster again, this time from an earthquake of magnitude 7.7. The quake was so powerful that it caused a small island to form off the coast of the country. The island was not there before. This is truly startling, but in it, don't we see what the Buddha said about the forces of change constantly taking place in everything, especially the cycle of formation, continuation, deterioration, and annihilation of the world's material things? Out of nowhere, the island formed. How long will it continue to exist? After a period of time, it may deteriorate and then disappear altogether. It makes us think of our planet, which is also deteriorating due to damage from natural disasters and, worse yet, the burden of supporting humankind's increased activities. As the damage accumulates and the strain on the planet builds up over time, one day, it will also be "broken" and destroyed. The laws operating in the world are truly mysterious and profound. We really should be more mindful in reflecting on the teachings the Buddha gave and heed them, to see the laws beyond what meets the eye. Then, we can know how to stay away from creating the causes of suffering.

- *To Live in Peace* -- All over the world, we are seeing very abnormal conditions—for instance, temperatures in Japan are abnormally high for this time of year. Typhoons, floods, and earthquakes are also happening especially frequently. These are all symptoms that our natural world is no longer operating in balance. Yet despite this, we still see humans fighting one another senselessly and creating turmoil and suffering. The fighting in Syria is still ongoing, and just about every day suicide bombings happen in the Middle East. Pakistan recently suffered very devastating earthquakes, but relief workers have a hard time bringing aid there because it is rebel territory. Already there is so much suffering due to disasters, but humans are making it

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worse with the violence they create. Why do we not live in peace with one another? This truly fills me with sorrow. At this time, we really need to quickly spread the seeds of love everywhere in our world to inspire kindness from everyone and to help them awaken to the truths of life as we deal with these disasters. And to do that, we all need to learn the Dharma and transform our own hearts as well.

- *Warnings and Lessons from Catastrophic Disasters* -- Long ago, the Buddha warned us of the calamities that will afflict the world as living beings' minds become more and more impure and they take destructive actions that create much misery and lead to many disasters. He spoke of the destructive Three Major Calamities and Three Minor Calamities that will start to happen frequently: the Three Major Calamities are catastrophes upon the natural world including disasters of fire, water, and wind; the Three Minor Calamities are the human crises of war, famine, and pandemic disease. All of these, the Buddha said, are ultimately "man-made" and result from the powerful negative collective karma living beings have built up as a result of their afflicted and erroneous ways. Decades ago, when I first read about this state of Three Major Calamities and Three Minor Calamities where disasters and crises happen more and more frequently and intensely, causing massive danger to all on Earth, I could not imagine it happening. But aren't we seeing such disasters now happening in all parts of the world and at the same time? Given all these calamities happening, now is really the time for us to wake up. As I keep saying, when catastrophic disasters happen, we all must truly wake up to their warnings and lessons.

- *When Hearts are in Balance and Harmony* -- In the news, we see so many countries suffering from unrest. As people's hearts and minds go out of balance, they spread violence and turbulence in their society, destroying families and homes, causing so much suffering and hardship. This is all due to the afflictions in their minds. But, on the other hand, we see people who used to focus on their own personal pursuits now full of love, dedicating themselves to helping people in need, like the medical professionals who have joined our Tzu Chi International Medical Association. Before encountering Tzu Chi, they practiced medicine but their free time was spent on leisure or relaxation. But after realizing how many people in remote areas had no access to medical care, which caused their easily-treatable condition to worsen and become very painful and debilitating, they became motivated to carry out free medical clinics. Now, they make time to go on such medical outreaches. With a change in their mindset, they are now doing so much for others and are alleviating many people's suffering. From this, we see that everything comes down to the state of our heart and mind. If we human beings can bring our hearts back into balance and harmony so that we have pure, enlightened love for others, instead of creating violence and suffering in society, we can improve people's lives and create blessings for the community.

Part III

- *Material vs. Spiritual Riches* -- In life, many people seek material riches by accruing more and more assets, but no matter how many assets we may have, that wealth is not really ours. It is in fact shared by "the other five players": accidents, natural disasters, governments, prodigal

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children, and robbers. That is to say, wealth in this world is impermanent. At any time, disasters or accidents might happen and take away all we have, and government policies also have great bearing on our wealth. Meanwhile, if our children are not upstanding and principled, they may very quickly squander away our assets. Also, there is always the threat of our wealth being stolen. Such is the reality with material riches. Spiritual riches, however, are boundless and inexhaustible. Our inner riches are love and wisdom. When we have wisdom and make use of it, we will know the right way to go about things and can inspire people to willingly work with us and lend their efforts—then any cause can be accomplished. Wisdom is an inexhaustible resource, and by utilizing it, we can truly benefit humanity and improve the world. As for love, as long as we have love for others, we will naturally try to help people with whatever means we have. Our kindness will in turn inspire others; then with everyone getting together and contributing however much he or she can, together, many people can be helped. So, when one person serves with genuine love, over time there will be many people with love, just as one seed gives rise to countless seeds. Once this love is inspired in people, they can all give no matter their means, and they will become rich in heart. Such inner riches of love and wisdom are endless, and no one can take them away from us.

Part IV

- *A Philanthropist Changed* -- In China, there is a doctor who has been doing philanthropic work for a long time, yet in Tzu Chi, he has found something very special that has changed him. For years, this doctor who runs his own eye hospital would dedicate some of the profits he made to help the poor. Even so, one day when he had the chance, he took part in a Tzu Chi free clinic, and when he did, he found himself becoming very touched. He found it incredible that the volunteers serving at the event had paid all their own travel and other expenses, yet still gave of themselves so joyfully and humbly. He saw how they treated the patients who came with very warm, loving, and respectful care, and was moved to find that the volunteers were genuinely grateful to be able to have the chance to help. They were the ones helping others, yet they were so humble and even thanked the people they helped. He could not help but reflect on how different his own mentality was when he helped the poor—yes, he was charitable and gave aid to the poor, but under everyone's praise for his good works he started to think quite highly of himself as not only an accomplished doctor with his own hospital, but one who is helping the poor and praised by all. Unawares, he had gradually developed arrogance. This really hit him when he witnessed Tzu Chi volunteers' behavior. After being around them and being in the environment of Tzu Chi's free clinic, he started to feel for people's suffering and felt grateful for all he had and for this chance to do something to help others. This experience touched him and opened his mind. He totally agreed with Tzu Chi's practice and became very repentant about his past mentality and attitude. He is now very involved in Tzu Chi as a volunteer and is active in sharing about Tzu Chi and encouraging all the people he knows, be it coworkers, relatives, friends, patients, or acquaintances, to get involved in Tzu Chi in order to experience all the moving things that he has. Though initially skeptical, many of them have been touched by their volunteer experience and changed their minds. They have now joined and are training to become certified Tzu Chi volunteers.

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- *Creating the Causes and Conditions for Buddhahood* -- What this doctor does is also what the Buddha did during his cultivation—to do good not only oneself but to actively reach out to help others and find ways to inspire them to do good also. By doing this, the Buddha, through the course of his cultivation, was able to help countless living beings to gain wisdom. That is why after attaining Buddhahood, people were willing to listen to him, respect him, and follow his teachings. So, cultivation is about dedicating ourselves to helping the people in suffering in our world; as we do this, we gradually accumulate the causes and conditions for attaining Buddhahood.

Compiled by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team, from Morning Volunteer Assembly teachings given in September 2013