



Compassion welled up from within the depths of Dr. Ng Poh Yin's heart when she saw the lack of medical care and the harsh living conditions of the cyclone survivors in Myanmar. As a urologist and obstetrician-gynecologist, and also a member of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association, she was filled with sympathy for them as she provided them with treatment. She was also touched by their gratitude—their smiles brought her joy and generated an abundance of warmth inside her. For the first time in her life, she felt grateful to her patients for giving her the chance to serve.

Dr. Ng Poh Yin (鄧佩儀) was greeted with hearty shouts of “Congratulations!” by volunteers at the Tzu Chi free clinic center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, the day before she flew to Taiwan to be certified as a Tzu Chi commissioner. Her smile was so broad that her eyes narrowed into slits, and she began to roar with laughter. But then she suddenly covered her mouth with her hands and stifled her laughter. “I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t laugh so loudly,” she said in a low voice. “Some senior Tzu Chi sisters told me that as a commissioner, I must conduct myself properly. I must speak softly. I mustn’t laugh loudly. I mustn’t eat while walking. I mustn’t do this or that. I must be good.”

Seeing how seriously Dr. Ng recounted the Tzu Chi sisters’ words made everyone else start to laugh too. When the merriment died down a little, Dr. Ng expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the friends surrounding her. She said that joining Tzu Chi and training to be a commissioner had really made her life much richer and fuller.

A doctor to avoid

Dr. Ng used to be very hot-tempered. No one at Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, where she worked, liked to be around her. Her colleagues avoided her. Her patients shied away from her. No one knew when her temper would flare or when she’d lash out at those around her.

“When I was in a bad mood, I’d lose my temper and take it out on the nurses or my patients,” she recalled. “Sometimes after I got off work, I would still be mad and continue cursing them at home. I always thought that everyone else was in the wrong and that they deserved my yelling at them.”

Some nurses couldn’t put up with her, and they applied to be transferred to other departments. Even so, it never occurred to Dr. Ng that there might be something wrong with the way she interacted with others.

She attended to many patients each day, including foreign laborers from Indonesia and the Philippines and refugees from Myanmar. To her, the patients were a heavy burden. She dreamed of how great it would be if there were no sick people in the world—that way, she wouldn’t have to work so hard and life would be much more pleasant.

Finding Tzu Chi



In 2007, Dr. Ng happened to attend an annual conference of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) in Taiwan. At the meeting, she heard doctors from different countries share their volunteering experiences at Tzu Chi free clinics. She was deeply moved when she heard how they had traveled to far-off countries at their own expense to provide love and care for people in need. Their humanitarian spirit and the way they attended to the physical and spiritual well-being of their patients touched a deep chord in her heart. “At that moment, I realized how little I had done and how small my contribution as a doctor had been. I felt ashamed at constantly whining about my workload. What I had done was so insignificant and yet I thought I was so great. I really was a long way from what a good doctor ought to be.”

After that, she decided to devote herself to volunteering for Tzu Chi. In 2008, she joined other TIMA doctors and traveled to Myanmar to provide medical aid to survivors of Cyclone Nargis. When she set foot in that devastated land, she was taken aback by the harsh conditions in which the locals lived. The huts they called home had no electricity, no running water, and no food. What surprised her even more was that some of the villagers had never seen a doctor in their entire lives; they had no idea what a stethoscope was, and they had never taken a single pill. She couldn't imagine how they must have suffered when they were stricken by illness. It was then that she came to understand why the Burmese refugees that she had treated in the free clinics back in Malaysia showed such respect for her—for them, seeing a doctor was a rare blessing.

In Myanmar, she met a female patient who was already in the terminal stage of cancer. She noticed that although the woman hadn't had a chance to receive treatment, she remained strong and upbeat in the face of the illness. Encounters with patients like this woman stirred up compassion in Dr. Ng's heart.

When treating the cyclone survivors, she was touched by the sincere gratitude they expressed. The smiles that shone on their faces when she helped alleviate their pain brought her joy and generated an abundance of warmth within her. She found that when she opened her heart and showed sincere care for her patients, they would return her love with all their heart.

The experience gave Dr. Ng a whole new perspective on the relationship between patient and doctor. For the first time, she was grateful to her patients for giving her the chance to serve. Instead of feeling that her patients were a burden on her, she came to realize that if there were no patients in the world, there would be no need for any doctors. She made up her mind that she would never again complain or be harsh towards her patients. Instead, she would feel for their pain and care for them with the utmost sincerity.

A humble and loving heart



In addition to volunteering for Tzu Chi, Dr. Ng read Master Cheng Yen's books for spiritual guidance. She truly took the Master's teachings to heart. The Master says, "If you want others to smile at you, you must smile first." So, instead of putting on a poker face when she was working at the hospital, she greeted others with smiles. Bit by bit, her demeanor softened and she became gentler. When she was seeing patients, she would also pay attention to their family backgrounds and see if they had difficulties affording treatment. If so, she would help them apply for government subsidies. She was no longer the hot-tempered Dr. Ng that others avoided.

While giving free medical services in Myanmar, Dr. Ng was impressed by the loving way that Tzu Chi volunteers interacted with the locals. She was curious what "magic medicine" the Master prescribed for the volunteers that made them so full of compassion, love, and joy. To find out, she took time to participate in all kinds of Tzu Chi work, be it providing free medical treatment, doing recycling, paying home visits to the needy, or receiving training to become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer.

The more Tzu Chi activities she is involved in, the more spiritually rewarded she feels. She truly feels the happiness of giving without asking for anything in return. Among all sorts of Tzu Chi work, she especially likes working at a recycling station. She says that when she personally pitches in to sort recyclables with her hands and flatten aluminum cans and PET bottles with her feet, a sense of fulfillment fills her. All worries and vexations vanish from her mind.

While paying home visits to the needy with other volunteers, she saw how the volunteers cared for the needy and how mindfully they listened to them as they poured out their sorrow. The examples of the volunteers made her realize that though doctors with good medical skills could treat patients' physical ailments, it was only doctors with loving hearts that were truly able to bring support and comfort to the sick.

"More than ten years ago, I came across a patient who had suffered a massive hemorrhage induced by difficult labor. Although we were able to save her life in the end, her baby suffered some irreparable damage during the birthing process. As a result, the woman lost her sanity and wasn't able to recover from the emotional trauma." Dr. Ng hypothesized that if there had been Tzu Chi volunteers to help the woman at the time, perhaps her fate could have been rewritten. In view of that, she hoped to bring more people into Tzu Chi. When there are more volunteers to give help, more suffering people in the world will be able to get help and there will be less anguish and pain in the world.

Three vows

After the trip to Myanmar in 2008, Dr. Ng vowed to recruit more medical personnel for TIMA. She has since introduced six doctors into the association. However, she wishes she could recruit more members because she feels that there are simply too many people in need of help.

"Every time I hear the Master say that time is running out and that we must seize time to do good before it's too late, I grow anxious," said the doctor. "How I wish that there were TIMA doctors in every corner of Malaysia. I must help build up TIMA in Malaysia."

To make her wish come true, she spends time sharing touching stories of TIMA members with the medical workers she knows. Many of her coworkers have begun taking part in Tzu Chi activities with her, such as holding free clinics, sorting recyclables, and visiting children in orphanages. To make it easier for her coworkers to attend a Tzu Chi event, she even volunteers to drive them.

She carries a copy of the Tzu Chi Monthly with her wherever she goes and tells people about the foundation every chance she gets. "In the past, when I was seeing patients, I tended to spend as little time as possible with them. I couldn't wait to send them packing as soon as a session ended. But now I can tirelessly talk to them about Tzu Chi and encourage them to do good and help others."

After being certified as a Tzu Chi commissioner, Dr. Ng made three new vows: to continue doing good deeds, to learn as much as possible from the Master's teachings as a way to cultivate herself spiritually and become a better person, and to inspire everyone to join Tzu Chi. She knows that these vows may not be that easy to fulfill, but if she can help the world become a better place, she fears no hard work and is more than willing to commit herself to more responsibilities.

Translated by Evelyn Yi-chih Sung
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