

The Right Direction for the Mind

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Wednesday, 12 December 2012 08:36



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

The Great Conduct Bodhisattva said: "With another day gone, our lives become shorter." With each day that passes, we lose a day of our lives; with each year gone by, we have that much less life. Time never pauses, and our lives march inexorably on. Shouldn't we be alarmed?

In the cycle of reincarnation, we are rarely born as humans. We must cherish our time and seize every second by making the best use of our abilities to help others. Only then will we be able to live a life of value and leave behind a legacy that others will cherish.

For more than four decades now, Tzu Chi volunteers have been giving of themselves every moment to contribute to the greater good of the world. They make heart-touching history every day.

In July 2007, Sutiyoso, the governor of Jakarta, Indonesia, renamed part of the Angke River as the Tzu Chi Angke River. The river used to be nicknamed the "Black Heart of Jakarta." It was originally 75 meters wide, but its width shrank to just 25 meters as more and more illegal shacks were built along both sides of the river. Trash and mud filled the river to such an extent that its depth was reduced from seven meters to one meter. The blackened river water, with garbage and feces from humans and animals floating in it, looked like a pool of dead water.

Most of the residents of the illegal stilt houses were impoverished people from rural districts who had come to the capital to seek a better living. They depended on the river for their everyday lives. They used the water from the river to wash their faces, rinse their mouths, or to prepare and cook food. However, not far off someone else would be urinating or defecating into the river. The sanitary conditions were appalling.

In January 2002, Jakarta suffered severe flooding. Kapuk Murua, a low-lying village situated near where the Angke River empties into the sea, was hit very hard. Villagers were soaked in filthy floodwater for almost a month. When Tzu Chi volunteers went there to survey the situation, their hearts went out to the victims. They decided to do what they could to help.

Tzu Chi worked in conjunction with local entrepreneurs and the government to carry out a five-pronged aid project, including distributing emergency supplies, pumping out water and disinfecting flooded areas, dredging the Angke River, holding free clinics, and building new homes to relocate villagers from Kapuk Murua. Working alongside military personnel and people living along the river, volunteers dredged garbage and mud from the river and cleaned up the riverbanks. In November of the same year, a dragon boat race was held in the part of the river that had been cleaned up. The dragon boat race has been held annually since then to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the river clean.

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In Cengkayang, Jakarta, Tzu Chi constructed a Great Love Village housing project, which included homes for 1,700 families, a free clinic center (which has since become a hospital), an elementary school and a junior high school. Children who used to go barefoot and search for food in garbage piles now put on brand-new school uniforms and go to school. They have turned into little ladies and gentlemen full of hope for the future.

In late June this year, I visited our Jing Si Hall in Luzhou, northern Taiwan. There, I met employees from Da Ai TV Indonesia who were attending a workshop for Tzu Chi documenting volunteers from around the world. A handsome young man approached me and said, "Master, I'm Hasan. I'm visiting Taiwan again."

The young man lives in the Great Love Village in Jakarta. When he was a student at the junior high school there, he first visited Taiwan with some Tzu Chi volunteers. At that time, he made a pledge that when he grew up he would work at a Tzu Chi facility and serve his own countrymen.

He has lived up to his pledge. He studied communications in university and is now working at the Da Ai TV station in Indonesia. He works hard, and he is determined to learn Chinese so he can talk to me directly without interpretation.

I am happy to see the improvement over the last ten years in the lives of the people who once lived in those illegal houses along the Angke River. They now live in sturdy houses, have stable jobs, and can support their families. Their children are receiving a good education and growing up to be pillars of society. It's a real comfort to see all this happening.

I'm grateful to our Tzu Chi volunteers for working together with one heart and mind to help the needy with love. Because of that, many miserable lives have been turned around, and many people who used to receive our help have been inspired to cultivate their own fields of blessings by helping others.

Though time and tide wait for no one, with time we can accomplish a lot. If we can all seize time to give, respect and be grateful to one another, and do our best to spread love, we'll be able to create more truth, beauty and goodness in the world.

Young people's mission



Every summer, large crowds of young people swarm to Fulong Beach in Gongliao, New Taipei City, to attend a rock music festival. This year, the throng was even larger. In just five days, 102 tons of trash were created.

The young people sang and shouted and enjoyed themselves at the event. But how long could the joy they derived from such singing and shouting last? Were the troubles in their minds ever cleared away? No. What's more, they created large quantities of trash that polluted the beach

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and damaged the environment.

When one's mind is confused and deluded, one believes that drinking can take away sorrow, while in fact it only exacerbates it. Likewise, some people think that abandoning themselves to singing, shouting, and dancing can help release their pent-up emotions, when in fact they probably only feel even emptier and more troubled when the party comes to an end.

If we blindly pursue pleasures in life and all we know is to eat, drink and make merry, we never will find genuine happiness. Even worse, we are consuming Earth's resources for no good reason and even harming our environment. One can only find true joy when one's mind is tranquil and at peace.

On July 15 of this year, members of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association across five continents launched a campaign to love the Earth through recycling. They invited other young people to join them in protecting the environment. Under the scorching sun, in wind, or in rain, they bent down and picked up trash along the streets.

Singapore has always been proud of its cleanliness. However, when local Tzu Chi collegiate members went to clean Changi Beach, they found broken styrofoam containers, fishing lines, and shards of glass and tiles hidden in growths of grass or in other concealed corners. Surprised, they came to realize even more fully how important environmental protection is.

In Penang, Malaysia, our collegiate members have been recycling for over ten years. They visit households to collect used paper, bottles and cans, and they encourage everyone to conserve water and electricity and to adopt a vegetarian diet to help protect the Earth. They mindfully practice what they preach, too. For example, when they visit high-rise apartment buildings, they conserve electricity by taking the stairs instead of the elevators to visit residents.

Our world today is beset by disasters. To keep disasters away, we need more young people willing to step out and serve as guardians of the Earth. Instead of waiting around for others to take action, we can all be the change we wish to see in the world. When our young people can see the welfare of society as their duty and bravely take on responsibilities to improve it, they will be the force that changes the world. They will be the hope that brings light to our world.

Emotional downturn

A study shows that three to five percent of high school freshmen in Taiwan suffer from emotional dysregulation. It is a disease of civilization that is often caused by inappropriate parenting. It is more likely to happen in families where parents never say "no" to their children or where parents let their kids indulge in on-line video games without restraint. After spending long periods of time in the virtual world, these youngsters become less capable of enduring setbacks and controlling their emotions. They become more impetuous and often exhibit violent behavior.

Similarly, in Europe and America, there is a group of youngsters who were born into affluent families and who do not have to worry about making a living. Their goal in life is to pursue pleasure. They don't study hard in school, they don't have any professional skills, and they don't

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work. They continue to depend on their parents even after becoming adults. They remain unemployed not because of the economic downturn, but due to their own “emotional downturn.” Instead of working to support themselves, they choose to fritter their time away in a life of indulgence. It has become a problem for society.

A young person’s life should be vibrant and full of purpose, and yet we see many youngsters unable to emerge from their “emotional downturn” and take responsibilities for their own lives. It has led me to wonder whether or not economic affluence and technological advancement are really blessings. The conditions of these young people are truly worrisome.

Education is the best hope to set right the minds of the wayward and deluded. As long as a wholesome environment is provided for them and there are people to guide them and instill good moral values in them, they will be able to walk out of a life of purposelessness and delusion and head in the right direction of purity and light.

When an unwholesome thought arises and we fail to keep our mind balanced, it can lead to disastrous consequences. On a smaller scale, we can cause harm to ourselves and our families; on a larger scale, we might even damage the environment and cause social disorder and loss of human lives. Only when we look after our minds, embrace right views and right thinking, and walk the right path can we keep harm at bay.

A life of goodness, beauty and truth



The mind of a small child is pure and untainted, like a polished mirror that reflects everything truthfully. Small children are, therefore, especially susceptible to influence. If their parents can serve as good role models and give them a good upbringing, and if their teachers can teach them mindfully and conscientiously, they will learn to be good people.

A Tzu Chi kindergarten in Malaysia serves as a good example. Teachers there told their students that many children around the world were starving. As the students learned the importance of helping the needy, they started to put what I teach into practice: Eat until you are 80 percent full, and give the other 20 percent to help others. These children originally had three cookies for snacks, but they cut it down to two. They soon accumulated a big box of cookies to share with children from impoverished families.

The teachers at the kindergarten were truly wise in guiding their students to give their love to others. They have helped the little ones realize that if we can live a little more frugally, we all have the ability to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Everyone is born with a pure, untainted mind. But that innate purity can be clouded by ignorance and delusion, leading one to distrust others and to put up one’s guard. As long as we can uncover and bring forth our purest innate self and hold on to it, we’ll be able to lead a happy and fulfilling life.

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This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Tzu Chi Teachers Association. Many members of the association, though retired, still continue to dedicate themselves to education and to transforming and purifying people's minds to help bring about a better society. They are truly living every moment to the fullest and creating valuable lives for themselves.

Our Tzu Chi Collegiate Association is also celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. A large group of young people use their time after school to do recycling, visit the needy, and volunteer at nursing homes and orphanages. With such benevolent actions, they contribute to the well-being of society and live out the Buddha's teachings.

With time slipping away relentlessly second by second, it's a real comfort to see our Tzu Chi volunteers taking every step of their lives firmly and meaningfully, thereby helping themselves to grow in wisdom. They are really leading a life of goodness, beauty and truth.

The hope of society lies in young people. I sincerely hope that every young person can learn a specialty, put it to good use in their individual profession, and further enrich their lives by doing good to benefit the world. As long as one has the will, anything is possible no matter how many obstacles stand in the way.

On July 20, 1967, the first issue of the Tzu Chi Monthly was published. The magazine has influenced countless people since it came into existence 45 years ago.

Gao Zhao-liang (高昭良), who lives in Zhanghua, central Taiwan, is one person who was impacted by the magazine. He was in prison when he began to read the Tzu Chi Monthly and listen to Tzu Chi radio programs. What he read and heard inspired him and helped him come to his senses. When he learned that Cai Tian-sheng (蔡天生), an ex-convict, joined Tzu Chi after he was released from jail and found value and purpose in life through volunteering and helping people who once served time, he decided that he would also join Tzu Chi after he regained his freedom.

Because of the Tzu Chi Monthly, Jing Si Aphorisms, and Tzu Chi radio programs, many people who once went astray have been guided back to the right path in life and transformed into living bodhisattvas who diligently give of themselves to serve others. These people's lives were changed because of the power of love, and that power of love comes from the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings. The Dharma can purify people's minds and profoundly impact people's lives. I hope that Tzu Chi volunteers not only immerse themselves in the Buddha's teachings but also spread them to others to help transform their hearts and minds, so that together we can bring more goodness and beauty into this world.

Let us always be mindful.

This article is excerpted from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from July 14 to 23, 2012.

Translated by Teresa Chang

Source: [Tzu Chi Quarterly](#) Fall 2012