

Around the World, From Rich and Poor, an Outpouring of Love

Written by Master Cheng Yen
Friday, 30 September 2005 00:00



One often hears the claim that "Man, by his efforts, can conquer Nature." Is that really true?

In the few years since we stepped into the 21st century, there have already been many significant calamities. Natural calamities and man-made misfortunes destroy the Earth like a giant blowing out a candle. A light breath can darken the world. Many beautiful lives have been blown out or disturbed, and many people are suffering.

At the end of August, New Orleans in the United States was devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane destroyed the port, and flooded the entire city. It was like the petals of a fully bloomed flower being scattered by a strong breeze.

The disaster shocked the world. Regardless of the nature of their past relationship with the United States, many countries have expressed sympathy and offered assistance. Even with such an outpouring of support, it will be a long time before the lives of these victims are whole again.

In living on this planet, we are all one family. We should love one another and help one another in times of peace and in times of disaster.

Fifty some years ago, after World War II, Taiwan had to go through much rebuilding. With aid from the United States, poor people were fed, children were educated, and the country became more developed.

The United States has long been a strong country. Now, more than half a century later, the people of this country are also in need of help. Hurricane Katrina has brought unprecedented disaster, where hundreds of thousands of people in New Orleans alone were forced to leave their homes and lost everything in mere moments. How many families were ruined and how many now bear physical and mental wounds? It is truly heartbreaking.

On Sept. 3, I made an urgent plea to Tzu Chi members all over the world to reach out and help New Orleans and other areas affected by the hurricane. Just as aid from the United States helped Taiwan rebuild after World War II, I hoped that the sincere outpouring of love and support from Tzu Chi could help the victims of this disaster begin the process of healing and recovery.

Since then, there have been continuous fundraising efforts from Tzu Chi members in thirty countries across the world. They either walked on the streets to ask for donations, or held fund raising events.

At one supermarket in the U.S., many of our Tzu Chi volunteers were standing outside holding donation boxes. They bowed to everyone who walked by, even those not stopping in at the market. They continually appealed for donations, letting people know about the tsunami, how

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many people were affected and in great need. Then, an elderly woman came who was probably close to 80 years old. She was by herself and very hunched over, in fact, over 90 degrees. With her head lowered and her whole body bent over, she made her way over to the volunteers from a distance. When our volunteers saw her their hearts went out to her. They thought she might need help. They were supposed to hold the donation box and tell people: "There was a disaster at this place. Everyone, please help." But seeing this elderly woman, their voices died down and they all thought, "Maybe we should rush over to help her walk or maybe she is coming to seek our help." Everyone had the same exact thought.

This old woman kept coming closer and closer to them. When she finally reached the volunteers, she had a US\$20 bill in her hand and kept wanting to put it in a box. It was then that our volunteers suddenly realized that the old woman wanted to donate the money—so, the volunteer quickly bowed and lowered her box so she could put the US\$20 bill in. After the old woman did that, she walked away and entered the supermarket. All the volunteers were astounded and very moved by her.

When the old woman came out of the store, another Tzu Chi volunteer was with her. That Tzu Chi volunteer told the other volunteers the old woman approached her to donate money inside the store. The old woman wasn't shopping—she had gone in to donate money again. The old woman said to our volunteers, "Keep doing what you're doing—keep helping others. I'm really touched to see you standing on your feet so long just to help others." She had also donated to encourage the volunteers, who had been standing for so long.

How is love demonstrated? Love is when one is willing to be frugal with one's own needs in order to fulfill what others lack. The world is filled with kind people. As long as we are truly sincere in wanting to help and earnestly dedicate ourselves in doing this, people will most certainly be touched.

In South Africa, one Tzu Chi volunteer from the nation's Zulu tribe organized a gathering at a community Tzu Chi built in order to raise funds for Hurricane Katrina. Telling the audience that, "All people living on this planet are one family, that no matter how far away the disaster victims are, they are nevertheless our family," the volunteer appealed for donations. To her dismay, the crowd started thinning after she said this.

After the volunteer put the room back in order, to her surprise, as she was about to leave, many people started returning to donate money. However, some individuals came to her and flipped over their hands, indicating that, though they wished to, they had no money to offer. To these people she handed them each a coin from her own pocket.

Although poor herself, she thought ahead of time to change her money into coins so she could give them to other people so that they too could make donations to help those in need. She said to the people, "I'm giving you this money now, so it's yours. When you put it in the donation box, you must be very earnest and think that this is your money that you are giving and pray sincerely for the disaster victims, that they may be able to soon recover and come out of hardship." Even though these people are poor, they still show love towards victims they do not know. The power of their love is equal to that shown by the rich and privileged.

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In Taiwan, the medical staff of our hospitals donated a day's income to the relief efforts. In Malaysia, Tzu Chi volunteers made Moon Cakes for a charity sale. In Canada, the Tzu Chi members went out onto the streets for donations.

Regardless of where one lives or how wealthy one is, you can reach out and give love to those in despair. This spirit of loving and helping one another makes a truly rich life.