

Today Is the Continuation of Yesterday

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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[Master's Teaching]

We are always involved with the past, the present, or the future. For instance, we often speak of last year, this year, next year. On a shorter interval, it would be last month, this month, and the next month. On an even shorter interval, it would be yesterday, today, tomorrow, or even last second, this second, and the next second.

No matter how long the time intervals are, there seems to be three components—the past, the present, and the future. But, do the past, the present, and the future really exist? Actually, these are just terms to describe the progression of time. Time ticks on continuously. So, how can there be such a time as the "present"? Nevertheless, the "present" is very important in leading to the future. There is a saying, "Tomorrow will be better than today." This is the wish of many people. But, in order to make our life tomorrow better than today's, we need to seize the present and not waste the time we have today.

At the Morning Volunteer Assembly*, held every morning at the Jing Si Abode, Tzu Chi volunteers share many touching stories that they have observed or experienced. What they share are accounts of events that occurred the day before or earlier. The "present" at the Morning Volunteer Assembly is composed of events of yesterday. If the volunteers had not done the work yesterday or earlier, they would have nothing to share today.

For example, Tzu Chi holds relief distributions for low-income families every month. On this day, we can always see some very touching and heartwarming scenes. One time there was a group of college students participating in the distribution. These young people attentively served the elderly, children, and the underprivileged. They helped groom the elderly and took them to the place where they could get their hair washed. They also shaved and trimmed the hard and thick nails of the elderly with a specially-prepared heavy-duty nail clipper. Sometimes, they would even place the feet of the elderly on their knees to trim the toenails. Although some of the elderly's feet were dirty, these young people did not mind and still cut their nails in a very gentle way. Their care to the elderly created a very heartwarming scene.

I hope that everyone can make good use of his or her "present time." If, right now, we can give and serve others, then we will have good memories of "yesterday" to share with people. If we idle our time away right now, we will not have anything to share with people when we look back on our life.

Many people dream about their future. But, in reality, the "future" does not exist. The Buddha tells us that our life hinges on our breath. While we are alive and breathing at this very second, can we continue to draw in our next breath a few seconds later? We cannot really be sure. Therefore, how can we dream about tomorrow, next year, or ten years down the road? If, at the "present", we can make good use of our time, then we will naturally have beautiful memories of "yesterday." Then we will be able to look forward to a bright future.

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* Morning Volunteer Assembly is a gathering of Tzu Chi volunteers and staff from Tzu Chi's hospitals, schools, and cultural center, with Dharma Master Cheng Yen.