

The Way to Enjoy Life

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Wednesday, 19 October 2011 14:50



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

In mid-July, four months after the great earthquake jolted Japan, Tzu Chi volunteers returned to the disaster areas to distribute a second round of cash gifts to survivors. The distribution lasted three days and benefited over 6,400 households.

I saw video footage of the event. In one instance, I saw our volunteers gently helping elderly aid recipients upstairs. The sincerity, respect, and love they showed must have warmed the hearts of the survivors more than the money did.

July was very hot in Japan, and some volunteers suffered heatstroke as a result. But that didn't stop them from giving. After being treated, they returned to the front lines and continued to give of themselves cheerfully. Such is the love of real-life bodhisattvas.

Tzu Chi volunteers always give with respect and gratitude. For them, the biggest enjoyment in life is to see suffering people forget their sorrows and break into smiles. The smiles on the faces of the survivors in Japan made our volunteers feel that whatever hard work they had to go through to deliver aid to the disaster areas was well worth it.

Energy restrictions

The damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan this March was enormous. There still remains much to do to bring about a complete recovery. To this day, not even half of the rubble in the disaster zones has been cleared away. Over 20,000 people remain homeless, living in temporary shelters. A total of 40,000 households lack adequate water to meet their basic needs. To make matters worse, the shutdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant has resulted in a shortage of electricity. For the first time in 30 years, the Japanese government has had to impose energy restrictions.

Most Japanese people are used to living in comfortable air-conditioned rooms, but the disaster has turned life upside down. Even though this summer has been unusually hot, the Japanese government is urging people to conserve energy and refrain from using their air conditioners. As a result, the number of people suffering from heatstroke has spiked; over 10,000 people have had to be sent to hospitals this summer, and more than 20 people have died.

Energy-saving measures have even been adopted in Tokyo, the capital of Japan. Subway stations are cutting down on their use of air-conditioning. Train lights are turned off as much as possible. Companies are even discouraging people from using elevators. They've put up posters that say, "Please take the stairs if you are going up three floors or going down five floors."

How hard it must be to live with insufficient water and power! Seeing other people suffering from disaster and enduring hardships should prompt us to take a critical look at our own lifestyles

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and choices. We should refrain from wasting natural resources and indulging in excessive comfort. Living wastefully results in larger carbon footprints. It also exacerbates global warming, triggers erratic climate conditions, and induces natural disasters.

According to media reports I've seen, some Americans are changing their daily habits and lowering their levels of materialistic enjoyment. They've started by eating less and cutting down on their needs. They carry reusable water bottles with them and bring home-made lunches to work. I'm happy for them. If everyone could live an eco-friendly lifestyle, we would be able to keep our environment from continuing to deteriorate.

Happiness comes from a heart full of love

The United States has been hit by historic heat waves this summer, with temperatures in 40 states soaring as high as nearly 40 degrees Celsius (104°F). As in Japan, the American government has urged people to conserve energy and restrict the use of air-conditioning.

The U.S. isn't the only place experiencing abnormal heat waves this summer. In many places around the world, it's as hot as a furnace. Blazing temperatures have led to crop failures and the deaths of livestock. Yet, despite the decrease in food production, the global population has been rising and is expected to hit 7 billion by the end of October. A food crisis seems inevitable.

Such a crisis is already occurring in North Korea. Chronic food shortages coupled with flood damage to crops have left millions of North Koreans starving. Due to the dire situation in the country, the North Korean government, which had long been reluctant to seek aid from the international community, is now asking international NGOs for help.

The situation in North Korea brought to my mind another country—Cambodia—where Tzu Chi delivered aid eight times between 1994 and 1997. During one distribution, a mother holding a thin, feeble baby came to receive rice. Her baby was running a high fever. Seeing the helpless, lifeless expression in the mother's eyes, our volunteers went up to her to see if she needed help. To their dismay, they found that the baby had died in her arms. They asked the mother if she knew her baby wasn't alive anymore, and she answered, "I know, but I cannot leave because I need to take food back to my six other children who are waiting for me at home."

How heartbreaking this story is! Our world is so full of suffering. When we see people suffering, we should realize how blessed we are and act to put our love in action. Only when all of us combine our love and kindness and give timely aid to the needy can the sorrow in the world be alleviated.

As we can see, disasters around the world are intensifying in frequency and magnitude, causing many people to suffer. However, we can help the disaster areas recover more quickly if we can rein in our wants and desires and pool our efforts and financial resources to help the victims. Sadly, many people are slow to understand this. Too many in this world cling too tightly to their selfish attitudes and continue to indulge in pleasure and excessive consumerism.

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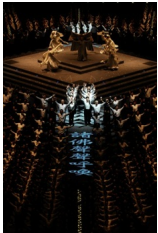
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Happiness comes from a heart that is full of love and is happy to give. People who do not have love in their hearts will never be genuinely happy. Only when we can curb our desires, avoid over-indulging in enjoyment and consumerism, repent of our past wrongs, and live in vigilance and sincere piety will we help our world become a safer and more peaceful place.

The mind, the world

In mid-July, three bombings occurred in Mumbai, India, in a matter of just 15 minutes. Many people were wounded or killed. In Libya, the anti-government rebellion is becoming more and more intense. The Libyan leader, Gaddafi, has proclaimed that if rebels seize the capital, he might even use missiles and explosives to blow the city up.

How frightening the mind of a person can get! However devastating a natural disaster is, if people can help one another with love, the damage done will eventually be soothed. But if people's minds are out of balance and harmony, conflicts and wars will continually arise. The resulting calamities will never end.



Once war breaks out, famine and pestilence will follow. The sutras speak of these as "the three minor calamities," all caused by the actions of human beings. If the three minor calamities are compounded by the "three major calamities" of fire, wind, and water, which are brought about by the imbalance of nature's Four Elements, the consequences will truly be catastrophic and threaten the very survival of mankind.

That's how an evil thought in someone's mind can lead to ruin and destruction. Therefore everyone must carefully reflect on themselves and take good care of their minds.

In recent months, forest fires have raged in Russia, fueled by extreme heat waves. Because it was impossible for vehicles to reach fires in the mountains, firefighters had to climb up on their hands and knees. One firefighter said that it was very hard work. He said that crawling up the mountain was like a punishment from heaven and that humans needed to repent.

I've been urging Tzu Chi volunteers to practice repentance to purify their hearts and minds. Unexpectedly, the word "repent" also came out of the mouth of a firefighter in far-away Russia.

The first step in preventing erratic weather conditions in the world is transforming human hearts and minds. Everyone must reflect on themselves, repent, and take good care of their minds. They must lead diligent and frugal lives and clean impurities and afflictions from their minds. Only when people's hearts are full of compassion and love will nature function well in a world full of hope.

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Two things that cannot be stopped in life

When people can't change their bad tempers, they tend to blow up whenever things do not go their way. How can one change such a bad habit? If we listen to the Buddha's teachings without taking them to heart, the Dharma just goes in one ear and out the other. The message doesn't do us any good. Only when we let the Dharma enter our hearts, and when we repent of our wrongs and correct them, will we truly change for the better.

In recent months, Tzu Chi volunteers across Taiwan have been diligently rehearsing for the musical stage adaptation of the Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance, written by Dharma Master Wu Da. As they repeatedly sing and sign the lyrics, the teachings of this ritual sink into their hearts.

Xu Mei-xue (許美雪), 72, is one of the volunteers participating in this stage adaptation. It is difficult for her to memorize the lyrics because she is illiterate. Even so, she feels that the opportunity to take part in the event is so rare and precious that she decided she must not let the chance go by. How can she remember the lyrics if she can't even read? She said, "I just have to work hard at it. Even if I can remember only a word at a time, in time I'll eventually remember everything."

Everyone who will participate in the musical is required to attend study groups organized to study my commentary on the Water Repentance text. In her study group sessions, Xu sits by volunteer Bao Shu-yan (包舒彦), who explains the text to her. Xu is very grateful to Bao for helping her. "Where there's a will, there is a way," she observed. "So long as we have the will, there will be people to help us along the way." Thus, despite being illiterate, Xu will be able to take part in the event. Her determination to conquer her difficulties is truly admirable.

Through preparing themselves for the musical, many Tzu Chi volunteers have been immersing themselves in the Dharma. The Buddha is the Great Awakened One of the Cosmos. The truths that he discovered 2,500 years ago have been proven by modern technology. We must therefore have faith in his teachings and uphold them with pious sincerity.

Some people say, "I believe in the Buddha's teachings and I vow to uphold them, but it's not time for me to put them into practice yet."

We must know that there are two things in this world that we cannot stop. One is the passing of time, and the other is the impermanence of the world. No one can stop even a second from passing by; likewise, when our karmic retribution comes to bear, it happens in an instant without any warning.

Dong Jing-wen (董景文) is a Tzu Chi volunteer who lives in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan. Last year, her father was beaten to death by a drunk person for no apparent reason. Sorrow and hatred filled her heart. At one point, she even contemplated ending her life. But she couldn't find the heart to leave her family and her mentally challenged younger siblings behind, so she could only bury her hatred deep in her heart.

Then, as Jing-wen prepared for the stage adaptation of Water Repentance, she came across the lyrics: "People have different karmic retributions due to the negative karma they created,

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and everyone's karmic retribution follows them like their shadow." She then realized that everything happened due to the karmic law of cause and effect. There was no escape from it, and harboring hatred would not help things. So, just like that, the knot in her heart was undone. She opened her heart and was liberated from her misery.

Many people study Buddhism to seek liberation from suffering. But if we get caught up in such mental afflictions as anger, greed, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt, how is it possible for us to attain real liberation? Nobody can liberate us except ourselves. We must wash away all the impurities in our minds and open our hearts. Only then will we attain true liberation.



Live with wisdom

Today, many people's belief systems or values are distorted. This makes it all the more important that we learn to tell right from wrong. "Right" refers to the ultimate truths, which we must mindfully learn; "wrong" refers to turbulent, crazy, and bad influences, which we must not fall under.

In modern society, people's lives are heavily influenced by the knowledge they have acquired. But knowledge used improperly may confuse us and cause us to lose our way.

All people are born with an innate buddha-nature; it's just that many people's buddha-nature is concealed and tainted by ignorance. In a world where ignorance and confusion rule, we must learn to transform knowledge into wisdom and let that wisdom guide us so that our bright, enlightened innate nature can shine through.

One part of the lyrics sung in the stage adaptation of the Water Repentance text says something to this effect: In a time when people's value systems are distorted, it's important to develop the ability to tell right from wrong; in a time of great upheaval and turmoil, it's important to repent and nurture great compassion; in a time of great ignorance, it is important to cultivate great wisdom. The Buddha's teachings are a wonderful antidote to turbulent times. We should therefore live out his teachings and purify our minds with them. Let us not rely only on knowledge to guide us in life, but couple it with wisdom.

When we do what is right, we are using our wisdom. When we refrain from doing what is wrong, we are also using our wisdom. The Thirty-Seven Principles of Enlightenment teaches us to remove any evil that has already started, prevent any evil from starting, begin doing good deeds, and continue to do good deeds. We must never postpone doing good deeds or put off correcting our wrongs. We must avoid all that is evil and do all that is good.

A day is made up of 86,400 seconds. Each second can be a threshold between life and death. If we can pass each second safely, we ought to be very grateful. At every second, let us embrace a heart of gratitude and prevent our thoughts from going awry so that spiritual impurities do not taint our gratitude.

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Life is as short-lived as the morning dew, as fleeting as a dream, and as fragile as a bubble. Since our life is as transient as the morning dew that gathers on the tip of a blade of grass and disappears once the sun rises, what is there to compete and haggle about?

I hope that everyone can heighten their vigilance, pray with the most sincere piety, practice compassion and wisdom, give to others, and sow seeds of kindness in the minds of all people. Doing so will bring harmony to the world and restore the balance of the Four Elements. Let us be part of the positive force that allows all mankind to live in peace, safety, and blissfulness.

This article is combined from a series of speeches delivered by Master Cheng Yen from July 13 to 20, 2011.

By Master Cheng Yen

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