

Living Worthwhile Lives

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
Wednesday, 12 June 2013 12:06



[[Master's Teachings](#)]

My first thought each morning when I wake up is always one of thankfulness. I'm thankful that I'm still alive, that I can think clearly, and that I can move my hands and feet freely. My second thought is always to seize the day and live it with pious sincerity.

Likewise, my heart is full of gratitude as I look back at the year 2012. I'm grateful that I was able to live through the year in peace and safety. I'm also grateful that so many people around the world have dedicated themselves to serving others and making the world a better place.

We lose a day of our lives with each day that passes. With each year that passes, we have that much less time to live. Thinking this way, we see that we are constantly getting closer to the end of our lives. The thought makes me a little sad because it means that the time in which I can give of myself is getting shorter and shorter. That's why I always tell myself to work more diligently as I greet a new year. I want to make as much use of the time I have left as I can.

Some say that there is always next year. However, that may not be true. None of us knows for certain if we will live to see tomorrow. The most precious thing in life is time. We cannot predict how long we will live, but we can make the best of the time available to us by contributing to the welfare of mankind. The value of life lies in whether one can use one's time to do what is right and good. Let's not waste our days in idle activity, but instead do our best to increase the depth and breadth of our lives. Let us make each day of our lives a valuable page on the calendar of life.

Hu Huang A-zhu (黃阿珠), 86, is from Sanchong, New Taipei City. She was one of those I certified as a Tzu Chi commissioner at a year-end blessing ceremony held this January in northern Taiwan. She is a good example of the maxim, "You're never too old to learn." She didn't complete high school until she was in her 70s. Though her hearing and memory are not as sharp as before, she does her best to volunteer for Tzu Chi. Although she is advanced in age, she does not think she is too old to serve others and give to this world. She even attends a calligraphy class and takes part in study group sessions. She lives every day so fully that she said, "Twenty-four hours a day aren't enough for me!" Her spirit is truly admirable.

I was also impressed by Li Yue-juan (李月娟), a centenarian recycling volunteer from Songshan, Taipei. At one of our year-end blessing ceremonies, she walked up to the stage with a very upright posture, needing no one to assist her. And when it came time to pray, she knelt with her back straight, her hands holding an electric candle up high. Despite her age, she enjoys good health and is still able to contribute to society. What a worthwhile life she is leading!

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Because our lives become shorter day by day, we must be constantly vigilant lest we let a single second slip by in vain. We must also make it a daily habit to reflect on ourselves to see if we have made the most of the day by improving ourselves and benefitting others. Only when we live each day fully and refrain from idling time away can we help ourselves grow in wisdom with each passing day.

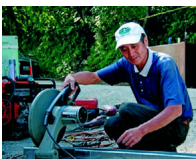
I've heard many newly certified Tzu Chi volunteers share that their family and career were the only concerns of their lives in their past. It wasn't until they joined the big family of Tzu Chi and began serving others that their horizons were broadened. By seeing the unpredictable, underprivileged lives some people led, they further learned to count their blessings and realized what a blessing it is to be able to help others. They say that now they feel they have truly found their life's value.

They're now living out the Tzu Chi philosophy of life: making good commitments every day and consistently carrying them out. This helps them create vibrant, brilliant chapters of their lives. Let us all nurture wholesome thoughts and do our best to do good deeds. That is the way to make a lasting impact and transform a fleeting moment into an eternity.

Nurture wisdom with the Dharma

I've learned of many other moving life stories at our year-end blessing ceremonies. One example is that of Lu Yue-e (呂月娥), who lives in Taoyuan, northern Taiwan.

Lu has cancer. The cancer cells have spread to her brain and optic nerves and severely impaired her vision. But she chooses not to complain about her condition. Instead, she is determined to seize each day she has left to do good. She dedicates herself to recycling to protect the Earth, and she is training to become a Tzu Chi commissioner. She even brought a homeless person to volunteer at one of our recycling stations. With the help of a team of volunteers, this homeless person has opened up his mind and is embarking on a positive chapter in life.



The Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings says, "With a sturdy boat, a boatman who is physically ill can still take people to the other shore." Even though Lu is ill in body, she has a great spirit within her. She has bravely faced her challenges in life and delivered not only herself but others across the river of affliction. She has transcended her physical suffering, and her mind is free and at peace. Another volunteer, Li Jin-long (李金龍), lives in Hsinchu, northern Taiwan. He suffers from a hereditary illness and can't move around easily. Despite his limitations, he has a healthy mindset and a very positive outlook on life. Whatever projects I launch, he helps out the best he can. His wife, Cai Li-qing (蔡麗清), works several jobs to help her husband support their family. Even so, she still volunteers for Tzu Chi and takes good care of her elderly and ill family members. Despite juggling all these tasks, she says she is simply doing what I teach them to do: When you know something is right, just do it.

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The couple does their best to help others and to take care of their parents. Their children have also been a great help to them. What a happy family! Li said that a physical illness isn't something to fear—what one should worry about is an unhealthy mindset. With this attitude, he bravely faces the difficulties life throws at him and tries to overcome them with wisdom. No matter how happy our life is, we are bound to encounter the following sufferings in life: aging, sickness, death, parting with what we love, meeting with what we hate, being unable to obtain what we desire, and all the ills of the five aggregates [form, sensation, perception, impulse, and consciousness]. Even in the course of a single day, different kinds of worries can arise in our minds. However, if we can use the Buddha's teachings to clear out our delusions, then we'll be able to transform our minds and further help and benefit others.

In Tzu Chi, we should not only do good deeds, but also learn to use the Buddha's teachings to nurture our wisdom. Since 1999, to help people understand the Dharma, we have made musical adaptations out of The Thirty-Seven Principles of Enlightenment, The Twenty Challenges to Enlightenment, The Sutra of Profound Gratitude to Parents, and The Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings. In 2011, we put on musical presentations of The Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance. I encouraged volunteers in Taiwan to participate in this event and observe a vegetarian diet in order to allow the Dharma to sink into their hearts and wash away their inner impurities.

Even after the event had come to an end, Tzu Chi people continued to take in the Dharma. Volunteers across Taiwan continued to attend study sessions to read my commentary on Water Repentance. At our year-end blessing ceremonies held in December 2012 and January 2013, volunteers once again put on presentations based on the text. Before my eyes,

people sang and moved in unison. They generated an intense energy of the Dharma. I was deeply moved. I hope all our volunteers will continue to deepen their understanding of the Buddha's teachings and embrace right thinking and walk the right path so that the Dharma will spread far and wide across the world.



Relieving suffering with medical skills

To spread the Dharma, Venerable Jian Zhen traveled from China to Japan 1,200 years ago. At that time Japan had many Buddhists, but still lacked the Vinaya, or the rules of conduct for monastics. Invited by two Japanese monks, Venerable Jian Zhen decided to go to Japan to spread the Buddhist precepts. However, due to human interference, harsh weather, and treacherous sea conditions, the Venerable failed in his first five attempts to reach Japan. Even so, he never wavered in his resolve to preach Buddhism there—even after he became blind. Finally, after 11 years he succeeded, and he eventually helped Buddhism to thrive in that country.

In order to emulate Venerable Jian Zhen's unwavering determination to spread Buddhist

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precepts to Japan, Tzu Chi volunteers reenacted his voyage across turbulent waves at our yearend blessing ceremonies.

At the blessing ceremony held at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, participants formed four ships to reenact the voyage. They put on an impressive presentation—their movements were so synchronized. One of the ships was composed of 47 doctors and 17 staff members. Several participants were already quite advanced in age, but they rehearsed for the presentation just as diligently as the younger participants. They squatted, knelt, and stood up repeatedly, scraping and bruising their knees. Even so, they persisted. Young doctors said the persistence of the seniors truly taught them a valuable lesson of perseverance. The ship formed by the doctors symbolized their wish to deliver patients from this shore of suffering to the other shore of health. Illness is the greatest suffering in life, and nothing in this world is more precious than life. Realizing this, medical workers at Tzu Chi hospitals and members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association do their best to care for and treat every patient. Emulating the unwavering spirit of Venerable Jian Zhen, they soothe patients' suffering and save lives. Every one of them is like a bodhisattva. I am very grateful to them. Without a strong sense of commitment, it's difficult for a doctor to hold on to his or her initial aspiration of studying medicine and remain fully dedicated to their patients no matter how hard the work is. I truly appreciate our doctors and nurses for safeguarding lives with love, and for working willingly and cheerfully even when they are very tired.

Our society cannot do without medical workers. I hope everyone in society harbors gratitude and respect towards medical caregivers and helps create doctor-patient relationships that are full of love and trust. Working together this way ensures that we can help safeguard life and health.

Living frugally to help the needy

We started with nothing when Tzu Chi was established in 1966. Acting on the belief that innate love resides in everyone, I encouraged my followers to save 50 cents (US\$0.02) in a bamboo bank every day to help the needy. We started our mission of charity from this humble beginning.

Today, 47 years later, I hope everyone can continue to plant a seed of love in their heart every day. Many grains of rice make a bushel; many drops of water make a river. Small acts of love when pooled together can become a powerful force enabling our charity work to reach all corners of the world and further activate kindness in all people.

Pulling together the kindness in everyone to form an ever-flowing river of love has been the Tzu Chi way for the past 47 years. Looking back on the events of last year, we see our world afflicted by many natural and man-made disasters. We also see countless people suffering. I hope that in 2013 everyone can nurture their compassion by living a simple, frugal life and using the money saved to aid the less fortunate. That way, we can all help ease suffering in this world.

Living a frugal life is not difficult. All we need to do is cherish all goods and not discard them

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easily. When we use things for as long as possible, we save up money for the needy. Don't chase after fashion or feel that you must wear jewelry to adorn yourself. Love and kindness are the best things to make us look good and dignified. According to a report from the United Kingdom, up to 2 billion tons of food is wasted every year around the world. Some agricultural produce never even reaches the consumers because it is weeded out for lack of shelf-appeal or has expired. When that happens, the precious water resources used to grow the crops have also been wasted.

While the global human population keeps on increasing, the land available to cultivate crops keeps on decreasing. Will human beings have enough food in the near future? It is truly worrisome.

Not only should we stop wasting food, we should go a step further and adopt a vegetarian diet. Raising livestock to satisfy peoples' cravings for meat has left our land severely polluted. Eating vegetarian helps keep the world cleaner, and even more importantly, it purifies our body and mind. As an act of compassion, it nurtures the love and humanity in our hearts.

We cultivate our compassion and nurture our spirituality by adopting a more frugal approach to life, cherishing and taking care of what we possess, and refraining from eating meat to protect lives. Furthermore, let us not think lightly of little bits of strength. Everyone's love, when combined, can have immeasurable impact and do the world a lot of good.



We have just entered 2013 and already many natural and man-made disasters have occurred around the globe. Forest fires have raged in Australia. Afghanistan, a country long plagued by war, has endured the coldest winter in 15 years. Jakarta, Indonesia, has been hit by severe flooding. In the Middle East, days of heavy rain and snow even forced our volunteers in Jordan to postpone their plan to distribute relief goods to Syrian refugees.

Syria has been wrecked by a civil war that has lasted for two years now. To escape ongoing bombing and killing, many Syrians have fled to neighboring countries. To help these refugees, our Jordan branch has been conducting aid distributions for them. In mid-January, a Syrian refugee in the city of Ar Ramtha expressed his appreciation for the love from Taiwan after receiving winter clothes donated by people in Taiwan. He said that the clothes were of very good quality, and he also gave his best wishes to Taiwan and hoped that the island will never experience war like Syria is enduring.

Taiwan has an abundance of love. If nothing else, we can always be proud of the love and kindness of our people. Every time a disaster strikes, wherever it is in the world, people in Taiwan quickly reach out to help the suffering. With so many good people living together on the island, Taiwan is safe and blessed, especially when compared with many other countries in the world. We should all be grateful for the blessing of dwelling in this safe land.

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In many places around the globe, antagonism has arisen as a result of peoples' deluded thinking, leading to social unrest and even war. Families have been torn apart and lives have been lost. I hope that everyone can keep their mind broad and pure to help resolve disputes and conflicts. When people can nurture peace in their hearts, follow the right principles, and do good to help others, families will be able to live in harmony and society will be able to enjoy stability and peace. Let us be ever more mindful.

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen
Translated by Teresa Chang