

## The Power of Joy and Happiness

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Tuesday, 31 December 2013 15:02

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Time truly passes quickly – it is already the end of the year. During the final month of the year, everyone is busy preparing for the New Year. We should take this as a reminder; it is not only during the year's end, but every moment of every day, that we wish to be mindful and bring forth the power of love, which enriches and brings meaning to our life.

On November 8, typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines and caused severe devastation in the central island of Leyte. In a moment, thousands of families lost their property and their homes, and many also lost family members. As if thrown down from Heaven into Hell, the wealthy lost everything they owned, and happy families were shattered forever.

When Tzu Chi volunteers first stepped into Tacloban City, nothing was there but ruins and mountains of debris. All they could hear and see was the dismal devastation. Those with resources had fled from the disaster area to stay with relatives elsewhere; for those without any means, all that was left to do was to roam about where their home used to be, dazed and wordlessly.

To encourage the disaster survivors to come out from their despair, Tzu Chi started a cash-for-work program. The participants were encouraged to join together to clean up the debris from their streets and neighborhoods; in 19 days, the program provided more than 280,000 day shifts, and during the peak of the program over 30,000 people participated every day. Every day, Tzu Chi provided each participant with 500 pesos in relief fund; it was not a salary, but a symbol of the power of love – an encouragement to rise from the ruins and use their own strength to maintain a living for themselves and their families. While rebuilding their homes, they got to rebuild their own lives at the same time.

Of the images from Da Ai TV's remote-controlled helicopter, the most spectacular sight was how hard everybody was working to clean up their neighborhoods – the streets, which were covered with debris from destroyed homes, uprooted trees, and broken furniture, were gradually restored until they were accessible again. At the same time, the participants themselves went from utter hopelessness to bright smiles.

The Tzu Chi volunteers gave of themselves with compassion, respect and love, and used kind wisdom to guide the residents. In only forty days, this lifeless disaster area was revived, and once crestfallen faces were again uplifted and smiling. The selfless service of the volunteers brought dignity to the disaster survivors' bodies and souls, turning their depression into joy and gratitude.

The survivors learned how the money for the cash-for-work program, as well as the cash aid to help them rebuild their homes, came from individuals' small donations, how Tzu Chi was raising funds and inspiring love all over the world. Many wanted to contribute a drop of water into this ocean of virtue and blessings, and started saving coins in plastic bottles that they brought back

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to Tzu Chi. There were even some who worked a piece of bamboo into a “bamboo bank,” and carved the words “I wish to dedicate myself and work for Tzu Chi” on top of it!

This all shows the goodness and purity of human nature! Tzu Chi volunteers give of themselves with both compassion and wisdom; they do not only give material aid, but also inspire intangible spiritual wealth, helping people feel at peace in body and mind, arousing hope and pointing out a direction in life. With comforted spirits, the survivors can stand up again, and steadfastly move forward.

As Christmas drew near, Tzu Chi completed the large-scale relief cash distributions to 44,000 families. The emergency relief phase, including cash-for-work, free clinics, and distributions of relief cash and other material aid, as well as the building of temporary classrooms, is already at its end; after this, we will progress with our mid- and long-term relief plans.

Tzu Chi volunteers have been staying at the disaster area for over a month, and need to go back home, but they are reluctant to leave; the locals are also sad to see them go, and many told the volunteers “The money we have received will be used up, but the love you have given us will always stay in our hearts!”

Life is impermanent and full of unfortunate events, but it can also contain such long-lasting Great Love. After creating such a lasting and deep affinity, we hope that this beautiful bond will stay in their hearts, and that they will forever remember how Tzu Chi brought them this power of joy and happiness.

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