

## The Substance of Compassion

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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### [Master's Teaching]

I often call doctors "living buddhas" because they have great compassion. What is great compassion?

There is a story from the Buddha's time. One time, the lay practitioner Vimalakirti took ill. Learning of this, the Buddha asked Manjusri Bodhisattva to pay Vimalakirti a visit. When Manjusri Bodhisattva saw Vimalakirti, he thoughtfully asked him if he was feeling any better and how he had gotten sick. Vimalakirti replied, "It is because living beings are ill that I have become ill. When living beings are no longer ill, I will naturally regain my health." Such is the great compassion of Bodhisattvas. When others suffer, Bodhisattvas feel for them deeply, just as if the suffering were their own.

Doctors are also like this. Doctors give of themselves to make a difference in another's life, trying to save lives and alleviate pain and suffering. Doctors and other medical personnel in [Tzu Chi International Medical Association](#) (TIMA) often go on medical outreaches, providing free medical care to those in need. However, they also join Tzu Chi volunteers in providing charitable aid, such as delivering blankets, warm clothing, and hot food to the homeless in the middle of the night.

When they go into the streets to care for the homeless, they go around with flashlights, looking for people huddled in the corners. Some of the homeless are wrapped in blankets or buried in sleeping bags; others shiver in a makeshift home made of cardboard and paper. Along with Tzu Chi volunteers, these TIMA members gently wake the sleeping people to give them a warm scarf, even wrapping the scarf around their necks for them with loving care.

Their actions not only warmed the people's bodies, but also their hearts. One homeless person was very touched and asked one of the TIMA doctors, "It is so late. How come you're still out?" The doctor replied, "It's so cold out. I'm sure you can't sleep in such cold. Knowing that you won't be able to sleep, I can't sleep either."

This is the true spirit of compassion that Buddhism teaches. It is to feel others' suffering as one's very own. The TIMA members have taken upon themselves the mission to help relieve others' suffering. This is the spirit of a bodhisattva. It is to find peace in knowing that others are safe and well.

Source: Medicine with Humanity