

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

A School
and Clinic
for Syrian
Refugees

March 2018



Nurturing Wisdom-Life

Translated by Teresa Chang



A scene at a Tzu Chi recycling station. Many recycling volunteers are advanced in age, but they still do their best to serve. They epitomize Master Cheng Yen's appeal to live full, meaningful lives.

When I took refuge with my mentor, Dharma Master Yin Shun, more than five decades ago, he instructed me to work for Buddhism and for all living beings. I have faithfully lived out his instruction over the years, never straying from this path, never shaken in my conviction to give.

I'm grateful every day to our volunteers that help me in working to serve Buddhism and the world. Tzu Chi couldn't have become what it is today without their giving or their love. In the process of giving to others, however, it is inevitable that one will run into interpersonal issues, conflicts, or other problems. At such times, some volunteers begin to waver in their commitment to serve. My heart goes out to them when this happens. I worry that if they cannot untangle the knots in their hearts, they will stop moving forward on the Bodhisattva Path, thus hindering the growth of their wisdom-life [as opposed to physical life]. My heart aches when I think of this.

There are so many needy people in this world. We need the help of many dedicated people who will work hard to relieve suffering. Who can work with me with one heart and mind? Sometimes I feel tired and lonely under the weight of the responsibility on my shoulders.

I set off from the Jing Si Abode in Hualien last November, accompanied by some monastic disciples and Tzu Chi volunteers, to preside over the first round of our year-end blessing ceremonies around Taiwan. It was with a tired heart that I left the Abode. After stopping in Taipei and Taichung, we traveled further south for more blessing ceremonies. In Zhanghua, I saw a performance by more than ten elderly people, all afflicted with dementia. They were members of a memory upkeep class designed to help people with that condition. The illness had caused the performers to lose a lot of their memory. Some were even younger than me. I had never felt old before, but seeing them I suddenly realized that I too was old.

Our next stop was in Yunlin. There I saw some recycling volunteers in their 70s, 80s, and even 90s. Despite their age, they still went all out to vol-

unteer all year round. They pledged to me they would serve until their last breath, saying it was better to wear out than rust out. I was touched to see how determined they were to live a full, meaningful life. They had truly taken in my teachings to do one's best to give.

These living bodhisattvas lifted my spirits. My heart brightened after I witnessed their commitment. Since then, I have constantly reminded myself to keep my back straight, whether I am standing or sitting. I am determined not to let my age get the better of me.

After leaving Yunlin, we traveled all the way to the southern end of the island, stopping along the way for more blessing ceremonies. We ended our trip back in Hualien, where we had begun. Was I tired after a month on the road? Or course! But I told myself I didn't have the luxury to feel tired. If we compare life to a river, I'm getting closer and closer to the end of the river. I have to make the best of the time I have left by doing what I should do.

With age comes deterioration. Stage by stage, we feel our bodies weaken and become more frail. However, we must not let our spirits wilt as well. No matter how old we are, we must continue to work for the good of humanity. Let a day slip by in vain and it is gone for good—we have lost a day to help our wisdom-life grow. Our wisdom-life can only keep growing if we do not slack off.

Many people entered Tzu Chi with shiny black hair, but some now have a full head of grey hair. Time has slipped by imperceptibly. No matter what changes time may bring, however, we must hold firm to the aspirations that set us on our path of charitable work and spiritual practice. Choose a right path and persist on it, that is wisdom. Though it is inevitable that we will encounter problems that cause us to experience emotional ups and downs, we mustn't let that set us back. When you open your arms, how many people can you embrace? Only a few at most. But if every one of us holds the hands of another, we'll be able to widen that embrace to include countless people. Please be ever more mindful. ❀

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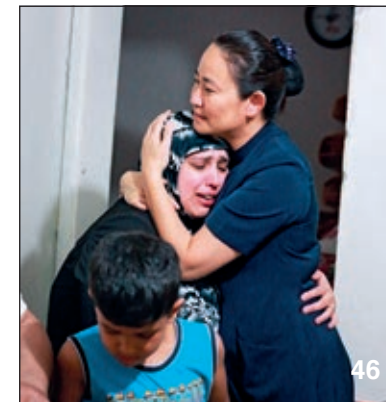
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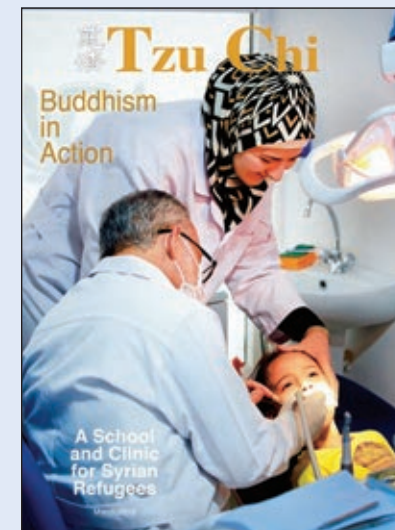
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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* welcomes contributions of personal experiences or reports of Tzu Chi activities. We also welcome letters to the editor containing personal comments or opinions on matters of interest in the Tzu Chi world. We reserve the right to edit the letters for purposes of space, time or clarity. Letters should include the writer's name, address and telephone number.

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The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 2, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.

Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO
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中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

Ripples of Charity

Taiwanese NGOs Reaching Out

In the wake of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, when Western aid organizations were queuing to enter Myanmar to provide relief, one of the first foreign non-governmental organizations admitted into the country was a Taiwanese group called Ling Jiou Mountain Buddhist Society. For many years, Taiwan has been spreading its people's love around the world through the work of its NGOs.

By Hong Wan-tian
Translated by Tang Yau-yang
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Tzu Chi volunteers handle relief goods in Myanmar.

CHEN HONG-DAI



A natural disaster in 2008 tested the willingness of the Burmese government to admit aid groups from other countries. According to *The Economist*, while many foreign aid organizations were still waiting for approval to enter the country, a chartered relief mission from Taipei, led by a Burmese-born Buddhist monk, was among the first to land in Yangon, Myanmar's capital city.

Taiwan was so poor in the 1950s that it received American aid, but it has since grown to stand tall on its own. It is even actively extending its assistance to other countries.

Removing doubt with concrete action

Though the Taiwanese government has official ties with few nations, Taiwanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have won wide recognition from international bodies.

In 2003, the Taiwan Root Medical Peace Corps became an associate member of the Conference of NGOs, which maintains a consultative relationship with the United Nations. In 2010, the Tzu Chi Foundation, based in Taiwan, was granted special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

After Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008, Tzu Chi distributed almost 200 tons of rice, provided by the government of Taiwan, to more than 10,000 families in Myanmar (above). In addition, Tzu Chi volunteer physicians provided free medical service to needy Burmese (below).

PHOTOS BY HSIAO YIU-HWA

Sources within the Taiwanese government reveal that close to 400 aid projects have been launched around the world by Taiwan-based NGOs. More than half of those projects have been carried out in Asian-Pacific countries, due to their geographic proximity to Taiwan. The Noordhoff Craniofacial Foundation, the Field Relief Agency of Taiwan, the Zhi-Shan Foundation Taiwan, Taipei Overseas Peace Service, and the Global Action Association all have deep roots of service in Southeastern Asian countries.

The Zhi-Shan Foundation Taiwan, for example, has worked in Vietnam since 1995. In the beginning, because Vietnam had no diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the Vietnamese government assigned agents to escort and keep an eye on visiting Zhi-Shan staffers. At times, the agents claimed the things that Zhi-Shan had planned to do were illegal, but they were never able to point out exactly why. To make it easier for his foundation to work in Vietnam, Jay Hung (洪智杰), Zhi-

Shan's CEO, studied and worked hard to familiarize himself with Vietnamese laws and regulations that governed foreign NGOs while his foundation continued to provide help in the nation. After a lot of effort on the part of the foundation to make sure it was complying with everything, the Vietnamese government finally allowed it to set up its first work station in Vietnam in 2003. Zhi-Shan became the first Taiwanese NGO recognized by the Vietnamese government. "We couldn't have achieved that without having cared for the needy in Vietnam for a long time—there was no shortcut," said Hung.

Afu (not his real name) was a Vietnamese child with a deformed face. Zhi-Shan sponsored him for reconstructive surgery at Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Taiwan in 1998. His face was so badly deformed that it took three operations to correct it. Afu was the first medical case that Zhi-Shan had ever undertaken, but he was not the last. The foundation has since become involved with the medical care and education of many poor Vietnamese children.

Tzu Chi is a Buddhist NGO based in Taiwan. The word "Buddhist" in its name has sometimes become an extra obstacle that its volunteers have

had to surmount before they can reach the people they intend to help. People often suspect the group has an ulterior motive to convert them to Buddhism. Tzu Chi volunteers must prove that their motive is straightforward: They simply want to help, not proselytize.

Though sometimes working under a cloud of such suspicion, Tzu Chi volunteers push ahead with their task of delivering relief. For example, heavy rains in 2002 caused severe flooding in Jakarta, Indonesia. After assessing the situation, Tzu Chi volunteers executed a multiple-pronged assistance mission. One of their goals was to remove rubbish and waste from the heavily clogged Angke River, the result of years of neglect and incessant dumping of garbage into the river. The Jakarta government, the military, local residents, and Tzu Chi volunteers took part in this momentous project to clean up the Angke. On one day alone—March 24, 2002—more than a thousand people removed 96 tons of garbage from the river.





The Zhi-Shan Foundation Taiwan focuses on child care and scholarships for poor students in Vietnam (left). The foundation also helps Taiwanese businesses sponsor lunches for kindergarteners in Vietnam (right).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZHI-SHAN FOUNDATION TAIWAN

solicits donations. Even so, it can quickly deliver medical aid to disaster victims, often within 12 hours. It carries out an average of 18 free clinics a year, year after year.

Its volunteers take part in its missions on their own time and dime, but that does not seem to dampen their enthusiasm. In fact, volunteers participate in its free clinics again and again. Qiu Mei-ling (邱美鈴), for example, has been on five of Taiwan Root's overseas free medical missions. She pointed out that even if volunteers for such missions meet each other for the first time at the airport just before they ship out, this has never been a problem for them. Not having worked together previously doesn't prevent them from successfully carrying out their work. Once they reach their mission's venue, everyone pulls their own weight and everything gets done properly. They work so well, Qiu believes, because each member works towards the same goal: to satisfy the medical needs of local people.

Since its establishment 22 years ago, Taiwan Root has served in 47 countries and conducted 342 missions, which were staffed by more than 15,000 volunteers. "Our free clinics have always been manned by a full range of medical workers, including doctors, dentists, pharmacists, medical technologists, and nurses," said Liu Chi-chun (劉啟群), a dentist and the founder of Taiwan Root. Even though the organization often carries out its service in less developed countries, it provides quality medical care on a par with that offered in Taiwan, noted for its high healthcare levels.

Generally, a physician may practice medicine only in the country in which their license is issued. This restriction can constrain the ability of aid organizations to offer free clinics abroad. Taiwan Root took a step to address that issue in July 2015



The foundation also built homes for people living in illegally built houses that occupied both sides of the Angke River. In July 2003, a village for 1,100 households was inaugurated. With a safer place to call home, villagers could now focus on working hard and bettering their livelihoods.

Fourteen years have passed since then. Today, the omnipresent scooters and cars in the village show that the residents' lives have greatly improved.

Like the Zhi-Shan Foundation, the Tzu Chi Foundation had to expend time and effort to prove to the people they intended to help that they were simply there to help them, and that all other factors—religion, ethnicity, nationality, or anything else—were of no concern to the foundation. Some residents used to think that the hidden agenda behind Tzu Chi's aid was to convert them to Buddhism, but they later found out that the foundation's help transcended religion and ethnicity.

At another location in Indonesia, Tzu Chi faced similar suspicion when it provided assistance to Al-Ashriyyah Nurul Iman Islamic Boarding School in Parung, Bogor, a school for many orphans and

poor children. Because of the large student body—8,000 students—the school is often financially strained. Elder Habib Saggaf, the founder of the school, sought help from Tzu Chi. As a result, Tzu Chi agreed to donate 50 tons of rice, provided by the Taiwanese government for international aid, to the school each month. Tzu Chi volunteers also taught students how to bake bread and grow vegetables and rice.

When Elder Habib Saggaf first asked Tzu Chi for help, he was concerned that Tzu Chi volunteers might try to convert his schoolchildren to Buddhism. Had he known the foundation better, he would not have concerned himself with such a worry. The foundation never did that, and Elder Habib Saggaf was eventually convinced that his suspicion was unfounded. He later even asked to have pictures of Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, hung in the school's classrooms as a token of appreciation.

Strangers working together

The Taiwan Root Medical Peace Corps, established in 1995, isn't organized around a membership system. Thus, it has no members and it never

when, witnessed by officials from Taiwan and Japan, it signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Japan Medical Association. The agreement provided reciprocity such that, in times of emergency and for humanitarian purposes, members in one country could practice medicine in the other country.

Taiwan Root also has plans to sign an MOU with the Federation of Asian Pharmaceutical Associations and the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia to establish an alliance, which will be headquartered in Taiwan. The alliance will be comprised of members in 37 nations, including Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Pakistan. Under this alliance, should Taiwan Root plan to extend aid to one of the 37 nations, alliance members in that country will provide local support, enabling the aid project to achieve a higher impact. Such local support is reciprocal and therefore multidirectional—all member organizations of the alliance will benefit from the agreement.



In 2002, Tzu Chi launched a campaign to clean up the severely polluted Angke River in Jakarta, Indonesia.

HSIAO YIU-HWA

Children play in a village Tzu Chi built for people who used to live in illegally built houses that occupied both sides of the Angke River.

YAN LIN-ZHAO

Multinational ventures may involve a government, too. In April 2015, Nepal was rocked by a strong earthquake. Indonesian military planes helped Tzu Chi deliver relief goods to Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Why would the Indonesian government get involved? Tzu Chi volunteers have for a long time helped needy people in Indonesia. Volunteers have delivered disaster relief, built new homes for destitute Indonesians, built schools, and established recycling stations to help keep the world a bit cleaner. Impressed by those sustained voluntary efforts, the Indonesian government signed an MOU with Tzu Chi pledging the service of the Indonesian military to help the foundation in any of its disaster relief endeavors.

Good leads to more good

In 2016, the Field Relief Agency of Taiwan was able to build a school in Cambodia with the help of a provincial governor. Before that, the agency had



already built over ten middle or elementary schools in that nation. When Yang Wei-lin (楊蔚齡), the agency founder, was trying to acquire land to build that new school, she encountered some difficulties. Kosum Sareut, then governor of Banteay Meanchey Province, was incredulous when he heard about the impasse. “Yang Wei-lin wants to build a school for us and she can’t get land for it?” the governor exclaimed. “We must help her with all our might. I’ll buy the land for her if it comes to that.” Within a month Yang got the land she needed.

Yang was thrilled to know that the prior efforts of her agency were paying off in such a way. It is

an example that the more good you do, the easier it is to do more good.

Cambodia was engulfed in a civil war from 1967 to 1975. The Khmer Rouge seized control of the country after the eight-year conflict and ruled until 1979. Those four years were time enough for the regime to carry out mass killings—the Cambodian genocide—that claimed two million lives.

People’s lives were hard after such extended turmoil and they needed help. Yang Wei-lin, once a humanitarian worker in refugee camps in Thailand, saw the needs of the Cambodian people. She established the Field Relief Agency of Taiwan

in 1995 to give a hand to Cambodian women and children, promote education, and provide emergency assistance.

Homeless children abounded after the turmoil in Cambodia. Yang’s agency established a shelter that took in 122 children between 1999 and 2011. “Most of those children are grown now. They come back with their children to see us at times,” Yang said like a proud and happy mother.

She knows that education is the only viable way for Cambodians to break out of their vicious cycle of poverty. Her Field Relief Agency has built new schools or expanded existing ones in the nation—



The Taiwan Root Medical Peace Corps and a Rotary club in Taipei jointly sponsored a free clinic in Myanmar (left above). Taiwan Root worked with medical teams in the Philippines to deliver a free clinic in that nation (left below). A Taiwan Root physician examines a patient in Sri Lanka (right).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIWAN ROOT MEDICAL PEACE CORPS



in all, 30 middle or elementary schools. For example, the agency built three of the seven middle schools in O Chrov District, western Banteay Meanchey Province.

Ninety-three percent of the children in O Chrov attended elementary school, but only 20 percent of them could finish and move up to middle school. That dismal rate has increased to 50 percent since Yang's agency built middle schools there.

Yang has changed the landscape of Cambodia in another way, which is part physical and part spiritual. As she worked in Cambodia, she often saw corpses being burned in open fields—people were just too poor to cremate the bodies of their loved ones more discreetly. Yang's heart went out to those children who saw their dead parents being cremated like that. There was another concern: What invariably got scattered around after the cremation might eventually contaminate the water supply of the area.

Yang wanted to help. She built a crematory at a temple—and was soon overwhelmed by an influx of inquiries from 70 other temples. They too wanted Yang to build crematories for them. One monk even walked three days to submit his petition for one.

It was apparent that there was a widespread need for crematories in the nation, but there was no means to satisfy that need. Yang started to build more crematories. She has built over 120 of them, spread across half of the nation. Now more people in Cambodia can bid farewell to their loved ones in a more dignified manner.

Getting paid to clean their own homes

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan devastated the Philippines. The city of Tacloban, Leyte Province, was hit so hard that many residents were forced to desert their city. Among the things that Tzu Chi provided to victims was a work relief program through which the foundation paid victims to clean up their own flooded neighborhoods and homes.

The seemingly counterintuitive idea was met initially with suspicion. Many victims heard the announcement, but only half believed it: "I get paid for cleaning my own home?" They wondered whether the foundation was pulling their legs.

But it was no joke. Each person was paid 500 pesos (US\$10) for working a day under the program. Cash in hand, participants who worked the first day spread the news. That drew more people to take part in the program. For example, while 611 people turned out for work on the first day, 2,310 people showed up the very next day.

Another reason people flocked to the program was that the amount of the daily compensation from Tzu Chi was double the minimum daily wage of 260 pesos in Tacloban.

However, that drew complaints from local businesses and some United Nations officials because Tzu Chi's payments disrupted the local labor market. The foundation contended that work relief was distinct from regular labor compensation. The former contained an element of free charitable distribution for disaster relief that was absent in the latter. The UN personnel eventually accepted Tzu Chi's explanations.



The Field Relief Agency of Taiwan has helped the needy in Cambodia for over two decades. It has built 125 crematories like this one in the country (left). It has also built schools (right above) and vocational training centers (right below) to help local people receive an education and acquire marketable skills.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FIELD RELIEF AGENCY OF TAIWAN

Tzu Chi volunteers had worked in the Philippines for a long time, even before Typhoon Haiyan. Many Filipinos know the foundation and its early history, when volunteers used bamboo coin banks to save money to help the needy. The example of how even small amounts of money can be pooled together and used to do great good inspired some Filipinos to follow Tzu Chi's example. They have used plastic beverage bottles to save small change and then donated the accumulated money to the foundation. Some have even joined Tzu Chi and begun visiting needy people to comfort them and do things for them, and they carry out recycling work in response to Master Cheng Yen's appeal for environmental protection. Tzu Chi has left impressive footprints of charity in the Philippines.

Seeds that give

Tzu Chi has also left deep footprints in another Asian country: Myanmar. Cyclone Nargis pummeled the country in 2008, wiping out much of its rice crop. In response, Tzu Chi distributed rice seed and fertilizer to affected farmers to help them regain their footing.

A recipient farmer, U Thein Tun, learned from Tzu Chi volunteers how the foundation had gotten its start: To help the needy, 30 housewives each put 50 Taiwanese cents (about 1.2 U.S. cents) of their grocery money in a bamboo coin bank before they went out shopping for the day. The donations of

the housewives, small but regular, marked the humble beginning of the foundation.

Copying the idea of saving a little every day, U Thein Tun started saving rice in a container. Rice is a staple in Myanmar; the Burmese cook and eat it just about every day. Each time they cooked, U Thein Tun or his wife put a handful of rice into a "rice bank." When the container was full, he donated the rice to help his fellow villagers. Following his example, many other villagers similarly began saving and donating their rice. The idea that aid recipients can save and give aid to other needy people caught on.

That idea in fact has a wide appeal. Independently, the Zhi-Shan Foundation Taiwan established a foundation in Vietnam for children in that country. "Its purpose is to facilitate a local organization to help local children. Locals helping locals, in my opinion, is a model for durable benevolence," Jay Hung said of his foundation's approach. Hung mentioned a Vietnamese student named Doan Van Dung, who had for 13 years received scholarships from Zhi-Shan and is now providing financial aid for a local fourth grader to attend school. He is among those who perpetuate the cycle of helping others.

Once an aid recipient, now an aid giver

Back in the 1950s, when Taiwan was still a very poor country, the United States gave 1.48 billion American dollars of aid to Taiwan, including





Burmese schoolchildren break into bright smiles after receiving school supplies and daily necessities from Tzu Chi.

LEE MUN KEAT

wheat flour. Many Taiwanese mothers, pinching every penny possible, turned the flour sacks their families received into undergarments for their families. Many Taiwanese of that era still feel nostalgic when they recall that underwear.

The American aid also laid the foundation upon which Taiwan launched many fundamental infrastructure projects that helped lift the Taiwanese people out of poverty and attain much more comfortable lives.

For a time, American troops were stationed in Taiwan. "When I was a little kid, I used to walk by the American barracks," recalled Liu Chi-chun, founder of Taiwan Root. "When I came across G.I.s, they would give me chocolate bars or ballpoint pens." The goodwill he received from American soldiers has been transformed and symbolized in a motto embroidered on the caps that Taiwan Root volunteers wear: "Time for Taiwan to feed its love back to the world."

"We Taiwanese once received aid from others," Liu said. "Now that we are able, it's our turn to give to others in need."

Over at the Field Relief Agency of Taiwan, Yang Wei-lin has stayed true to her commitment to serve needy people in Cambodia. "We don't buy or sell land, we don't invest, we don't engage in any commercial activities, we don't get involved with religions, and we don't have any political agenda whatsoever in Cambodia," Yang proclaimed. "Not for a moment in the last 22 years have we deviated from that principle." Upholding that commitment, she has again and again turned down solicitations or proposals from businesses to involve her foundation in for-profit activities. She just wants to help Cambodians, and nothing else.

With the efforts of people like Liu Chi-chun and Yang Wei-lin, the love of Taiwan is rippling out into the world. ❦

The Hualien Earthquake

By Huang Hsiu-hua
Abridged and translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Long steel beams are used to support the Yunmen Cuiti Building, one of the structures that tilted over during the Hualien quake, so that first responders can more safely search for and rescue trapped victims.



People in Hualien, eastern Taiwan, are generally inured to earthquakes, but this time even they were terrified to the core. At 11:50 in the evening of February 6, 2018, less than ten days before Chinese New Year, a 6.4-magnitude earthquake hit Hualien, shaking it violently for up to 86 seconds. Objects flew across rooms. People, shaken awake from their slumber, screamed and cried. Soon the wail of sirens sliced through the air as fire engines and ambulances rushed to disaster scenes.

In less than two hours, the Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital emergency department received more than a hundred quake victims.

Two disaster sites

The earthquake, originating only 10 kilometers (6 miles) underground, caused four large buildings in Hualien to partially collapse or lean at dangerous angles.

Rescuers work at the partly collapsed Marshal Hotel in Hualien.

Chen Jian-xiang (陳建香), 66, lived in one of the wrecked structures—the Yunmen Cuiti Building, a 12-story apartment building. “The quake lasted for more than a minute and sent things in my home flying,” Chen recalled. “In the darkness, my head was hit by the TV set. I felt my head and my hand came away wet. It was blood.” He didn’t know at the time what had happened to his building, but he used his cell phone to illuminate and guide him towards the rear balcony of his home. Once there, he found a large piece of furniture blocking the door. He didn’t know where he got the strength, but somehow he was able to pry the door open enough to squeeze through to the outside.

When he got out and looked around, he was shocked by what he saw. Though he lived on the sixth floor, he discovered that his balcony was no more than one story above the ground. Four rescuers extended a ladder for him to climb down. When his feet reached the ground, his legs completely gave out and he collapsed. The rescuers had to carry him away from the scene.



A family member waits anxiously at a disaster scene.

The building tipped about 45 degrees in the quake. To make rescue work safer, steel posts were used to shore up the building. Rescuers raced against the clock to find trapped victims. Frequent aftershocks only made the search that much more daunting. Rescuers were successful in pulling out survivors the morning after the quake, but as the day wore on, more and more bad news came out. As corpses were retrieved, the rain picked up and temperatures dropped.

Rescuers, first responders, and volunteers from various organizations braved the rain and cold, working heroically to do all they could. Journalists were on hand, chronicling the efforts of those working hard to help others. Soon everyone was soaking wet and chilled to the bone. Tzu Chi volunteers distributed blankets and hot food and brought in portable stoves to help keep people warm.

The 41-year-old Marshal Hotel was another of

the four badly damaged structures. All of the hotel's guests survived and were rescued, but two staffers were trapped inside. At around 2:40 p.m., almost 15 hours after the quake, rescuers pulled out one of the staffers, Zhou Zhi-xuan (周志軒). Sadly he didn't survive.

The rescue continued, and they soon reached the other employee, Liang Shu-wei (梁書瑋), and helped him get out of the building. By the time Liang was rescued, he had been trapped in the building for over 15 hours, yet he was still able to walk on his own. He was sent to Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for examination.

Liang said that when the quake hit, four pillars around him collapsed, glass doors broke, and the ceiling caved in. He fell by a pillar. Feeling around

Survivors rest on folding beds provided by Tzu Chi in a shelter set up at Zhonghua Elementary School.



A Tzu Chi volunteer wraps a first responder with a blanket to help him stay warm in the freezing cold.

in the darkness, he found he was in a space only big enough for him to lie spread eagle, with just a little wiggling room on either side. He called out to Zhou Zhi-xuan to find out if he was all right. At first he heard faint sounds and knocks in response, but after a few aftershocks, those ceased.

When he heard the sounds of traffic and people calling out for survivors, he kept knocking on hard surfaces to help rescuers locate him. As the human voices got nearer and nearer to him, he knew he was about to be rescued.

The moment he was pulled out, he felt that it was great to be alive. "From now on, I'll be even nicer to my family and girlfriend," he told himself.

"The good heaven spared your life for a reason," Liang's father said to him. "You must do more good in the future."

The aid

Seventeen people perished in the earthquake. Nearly 300 people were injured and many more were forced from their homes. The Hualien county government housed displaced victims in Zhonghua Elementary School and the county stadium, each sheltering about 300 people.

Tzu Chi volunteers provided folding beds to the families in the shelters. Several organizations, including Tzu Chi, provided meals. Many other good-hearted people donated clothes, comforters, and daily necessities.

By February 13, Tzu Chi volunteers had distributed consolation cash to 198 affected families. The aid ranged from 20,000 (US\$670) to 50,000 NT dollars per household, depending on the size of the family and the extent of damage to their home.

Hopefully everyone's work to help the victims will go a long way toward bringing normalcy back to fractured lives. ☸



After the Quake Love Takes Root

Working together, Tzu Chi volunteers from abroad and local Mexican volunteers completed ten aid distributions for quake victims. Their efforts rekindled hope and planted seeds of love.

By Huang Hsiu-hua
Condensed and translated by Tang Yau-yang
Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

This woman in Xochimilco, her home reduced to rubble, cherishes the gift card that she received at a Tzu Chi distribution.

On September 19, 1985, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake badly damaged Mexico City and resulted in the death of thousands of people. On the morning of that earthquake's 32nd anniversary in 2017, Mexico conducted an annual nationwide earthquake drill. Who could have predicted that just a couple of hours later, at 1:14 p.m., the real thing would strike again? This time, a magnitude 7.1 temblor hit just 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Mexico City, also resulting in severe devastation.

Just 12 days earlier, on September 7, a magnitude 8.1 quake had struck off the shore of the state of Chiapas. According to the National Earthquake Information Center of the U.S. Geological Survey, more than 40 earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or higher hit Mexico during the 20th century, four of which were stronger than magnitude 8.0.

Why is Mexico so prone to earthquakes? The country sits on top of three tectonic plates: the Pacific Plate, the Cocos Plate, and the North

A middle school class in session in a makeshift tent in Zacatepec. More than 12,000 schools were damaged in the three major quakes that struck Mexico in September 2017.



American Plate. Mexico City, the capital, was built on an ancient lake bed, which tends to amplify the damaging effect of earthquakes.

Damage assessment

On September 26, seven days after the September 19 quake, Stephen Huang (黃思賢), director of Tzu Chi global affairs, arrived in Xochimilco, a borough of Mexico City, to assess the damage. He was accompanied by five other volunteers from the United States. According to news reports, six people had been killed in Xochimilco, and more than 700 structures and 28 roads had been damaged. The volunteers met Julia Bonetti, a city official who was on site to coordinate aid efforts in the San Gregorio Atlapulco district. She told the volunteers that San Gregorio Atlapulco has a population of 30,000 with an average monthly income below US\$300, and that the earthquake had only served to make the lives of the residents that much more difficult.

The Tzu Chi delegation visited a 170-year-old church, which, though damaged by the quake, remained structurally sound and had continued to serve its congregation. Father Francisco Castellanos appreciated the efforts of the foundation to offer

A street scene in Jojutla, three months after the quake.





Two men work in a chinampa garden, an agricultural technique used by Aztecs for hundreds of years.

aid to his people. The volunteers were touched when the priest told them that the same blood flowed in their bodies, meaning that people should help each other without regard to religion.

The second Tzu Chi delegation to arrive later used the church as a base to carry out aid work. Volunteers obtained lists of affected families from government and private sources and then visited those families to verify that they were indeed in need of help: This is a standard approach that Tzu Chi volunteers take before distributing aid to recipients, a process to ensure that donations are put to the best use and do the most good. The volunteers also enlisted the help of local people in conducting the home visits.

A few more volunteers from Argentina, Ecuador, and Taiwan later joined in the work. These volunteers could speak Spanish. Over the next two months, the visiting volunteers, with assistance from local people, carried out intensive home visits to quake victims and gradually built bonds with local residents.

One of the areas the volunteers visited was the *chinampa* area of Xochimilco (chinampa refers to a type of agriculture). Many residents here are poor

and live in illegal housing, which makes them ineligible for government help.

Having lost his home to the earthquake, Jaime Pérez, a local farmer, was very depressed until volunteers encouraged him not to lose heart and to join them in serving his own people. With a new-found purpose, he rode his bike every day to help verify the lists of needy families. He said, "Everyone here is a volunteer, and we sincerely want to do something for our community."

There were quite a few quake victims-turned-volunteers like him, including Brenda Narciso, who dragged her baby carriage behind her as she helped visiting Tzu Chi volunteers conduct home visits around the town, and Flora Garcia Galicia, who had suffered from depression after the quake. They all helped make the Tzu Chi aid distributions in Xochimilco possible.

The state of Morelos, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) south of Xochimilco, was actually the first stop the first Tzu Chi delegation visited to assess damage after arriving in Mexico on September 24. Volunteer Stephan Huang had learned from news reports that the quake had almost leveled Jojutla, in Morelos, where homes and shops spread across dozens of city blocks were severely damaged. Despite warnings that the area was notorious for bad public security and gangs, Huang took his



group there to survey the damage. They saw severe devastation everywhere. Collapsed buildings dotted the sorry landscape as frightened and displaced residents sheltered in tents.

What they saw at the scene clearly called for Tzu Chi's help. Huang believed that arrangements could be made to ensure that the foundation would be able to conduct distributions there safely, so he decided to include the area on the Tzu Chi aid list.

First distributions: Tláhuac and Xochimilco

More than a hundred Tzu Chi volunteers from 13 countries arrived in Mexico in early December 2017. The upcoming emergency relief distributions and free medical clinics for quake victims were scheduled to extend from December 7 to the middle of the month.

When the Taiwanese delegation arrived on December 4, city officials and Argentine volunteers Hong Liang-dai (洪良岱) and Wang Pei-wen (王佩文), who had been on site for some time, took them to the disaster areas in the borough of Tláhuac, Mexico City. As soon as they arrived, they distributed claim checks to the families on Tzu Chi distribution rosters.

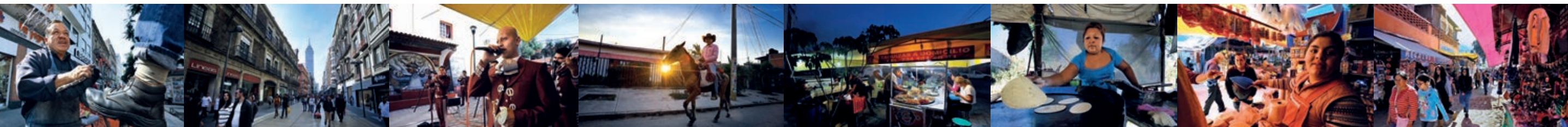
Though two and a half months had passed since the temblor, damage was still omnipresent.

Many Mexican volunteers helped make Tzu Chi's earthquake relief work in Mexico possible.

Many people had to use metal bars or lumber to keep their houses from leaning further. In one neighborhood, notices had been posted on almost every building in an entire row of houses, indicating that they were uninhabitable and would be demolished. Even so, people stayed behind, refusing to leave the homes they had worked so hard to build.

At one place, sections of a road had sunk severely, several meters deep in some places. In the midst of the treacherous terrain, a man in green clothes led the team into his home, where walls had been cracked and the foundation around the entrance had been hollowed out to a depth of 80 centimeters (2.6 feet). The man said that he used to own a shop selling air conditioners, but the quake had wrecked everything and stripped him of his livelihood.

Another victim they visited was a 52-year-old woman. The temblor had also turned her world upside down. Her house had been so badly damaged in the quake that she sent her children to live with relatives. Meanwhile, she and her sick, 80-year-old mother went to live with her sister. Staring at her damaged house, propped up with



lumber, the woman cried. She longed to return to the time before the quake when her family had been whole and living together.

She said that the city government had promised to pay for the materials to rebuild, but the volunteers learned that the federal government had instead declared that the entire local zone was sitting on a fault line and had advised all families to move away. A local lawyer enlisted the services of a building structural expert to help the residents assess the situation, and a college also sent a team of geological experts to study the zone, but it would take eight months for them to arrive at a conclusion.

Whatever the conclusion, rebuilding in the same place would not guarantee that another quake would not wreak havoc again the next time.

The volunteers later met Xlohemi Isabel. She approached the group and greeted them in English. She told them that she and her sister, who lived in another district, had both received Tzu Chi distribution claim checks. To show her appreciation, she gave them a bag of oranges.

On the day of the distribution in Tláhuac, they saw Isabel again at the distribution venue, this time with her sister at her side. They cried when

they each received a gift card and blankets. “I’ve been waiting for this moment, and it’s finally here,” Isabel said. “We’ll always remember your compassion and love.”

Video clips showing Tzu Chi volunteers assessing damage in various disaster areas in Mexico were being shown at the venue, which drove some quake victims to tears. Even so, they smiled and laughed when they took part in group activities led by volunteers.

Cristina Chousal, 70, said that her home had taken such a hard blow from the quake that only the living room was still habitable. She and her 85-year-old husband had been living in that little space. Their life had been rendered difficult by the quake, so despite his age, her husband still had to go out to work as a shoe polisher. “With the gift card you gave us, we can finally buy a few things to brighten our Christmas,” she declared.

The Tláhuac distribution was followed over the next two days by distributions at Xochimilco, where the volunteers mingled with the recipients even better than at the Tláhuac venue.

Xochimilco Mayor Avelino Méndez Rangel was moved to tears by the high spirits at the scene. His administration had been criticized for not

The distribution at Zacatepec was held in a soccer stadium with a capacity of 25,000. The venue was provided by the city government. More than 1,500 families benefited from the distribution.



A couple sitting in their tent in Jojutla hold the gift card and blankets that they received from Tzu Chi.



A policewoman hugs a recipient at a distribution in Jojutla. Though her official responsibility at the event was to keep order, she also helped hand out some goods.



Marie Angelica presents a bouquet of roses from her garden to volunteers at a distribution in Xochimilco.

doing enough to help quake victims. He had even been chased by some angry people during a damage assessment tour. But all of that was a very far cry from what he was witnessing at the distribution.

"I believe that Xochimilco will rise and stand on its own again," the mayor said. "Tzu Chi's aid will help us get through this hard time. Let's work with our hearts united!"

Many people wiped away tears when local volunteer Tani Foncerrada read a consolation letter from Master Cheng Yen. Marie Angelica, 62, approached the stage and gave Tzu Chi volunteers a bouquet of roses which she had grown herself. She is a pediatrician, and her home and clinic had both been destroyed by the quake. "I'm down but not out," she said. "I will rebuild."

She has come to know many people in town during her 40-year practice. After the earthquake, she gave necessities and hot food to others. She also witnessed Tzu Chi volunteers frequenting the disaster zones and doing what they could to help victims. She felt that these volunteers were as fra-

Physicians treat patients in a free clinic with the help of volunteer translators.



grant as the roses, bringing hope and warmth to people around them.

On to Morelos

The volunteers held four distributions for 6,000 families in the state of Morelos: one distribution each in Tlaquiltenango and Zacatepec, and two in Jojutla. Many Mexican volunteers from Mexico City traveled south to Morelos to help with those large distributions. Most notably, Trinidad Jardines took more than ten people with her to help out.

During the distributions, many quake victims warmly expressed their gratitude to Tzu Chi volunteers with smiles, handshakes, and hugs, which were easily understood despite the language barriers.

Tzu Chi volunteers also provided free medical clinics during their trip to Mexico. Ten physicians of Western medicine, four dentists, and several doctors of traditional Chinese medicine worked with physical therapists and nurses to serve patients; these medical professionals were from Taiwan, the United States, and Argentina. They were joined in the free clinics by local medical practitioners.

After the last distribution in Jojutla ended, Tzu Chi volunteers thanked police officers for helping to maintain order.

In a clinic in Jojutla, a male patient complained of a sudden chest pain. Dr. Lee Yi-kung (李宜恭), head of the emergency department at Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in Taiwan, determined that he'd had an acute heart attack. An ambulance was immediately called to rush the man to the hospital, where he was saved just in the nick of time.

A lot of people took advantage of the clinics.

Hypertension, diabetes, and kidney disease were among the most common chronic disorders seen at the clinics, although a fair number of patients saw the dentists and had their cavities or toothaches treated. Dentist Liao Jing-xing (廖敬興), from the United States, suspected that the prevalence of dental problems was a result of the local diet that favors sweets. Local dentist Ana San Martin concurred.

Quite a few patients came for shoulder or arm pain. Volunteers in traditional Chinese medicine and physical therapy worked nonstop to serve them.

At Tlaquiltenango, the distribution and free clinic was held in the vast parking lot of a water park. Eloisa Mejia Hernández, a local psychiatrist, pointed out that the quake had traumatized many people, especially those who had lost loved ones. She had seen patients who broke down and cried, or who were emotionally unstable and looked very edgy. She simply listened, allowing her patients to pour out their hurt and sadness, to cry to their hearts' content, or even to yell and shout. It was better to dump those emotions out instead of bottling them up inside. Only after they had cried it out would she try to comfort them or divert their attention to something other than their trauma. She rarely prescribed medicine for these patients.

One elderly woman told Dr. Hernández that her head and shoulders had been injured when she had tried in the middle of the earthquake to protect



her nine-year-old grandson. Luckily, her injuries were not too serious. The doctor listened to her story and by the time the woman was finished, she was already feeling better. Dr. Hernández then gave a cup of milk tea to the woman, who drank it and left the clinic smiling.

At a free clinic in Jojutla, Dr. Pedro Alberto Serrano Vela, a physician of family medicine, said that his beloved niece had perished in the quake, so he had been giving extra care when attending to young patients, such as saying a few extra words of comfort or encouragement. It seemed to help him heal too.

The delegation of over a hundred Tzu Chi volunteers completed nine distributions and eight free clinics in Mexico. These events were possible only because many local people actively took part. They helped carry out home visits, work out distribution arrangements, and deal with other matters. Their tireless efforts greatly facilitated Tzu Chi's aid work in Mexico after the quake.

Local volunteers continued to visit quake victims to identify more families in need of help, even after the Tzu Chi delegation members had left. Based on the results of these visits, the local volunteers, helped by a Tzu Chi delegation from the United States, held another aid distribution for 487 households in Coyoacan, Mexico City, on January 14, 2018. Besides the distribution, two free clinics served over 500 patient visits. ❀

Does Good-Heartedness Always Get Its Reward?

By Huang Xiu-zhu
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Mao Sheng-li

In order to help an ex-convict to reestablish himself in society, my brother hired him to work at his factory. Much to everyone's disappointment, he stole some expensive machinery from the factory and sold it for money to buy drugs. Out of kindness, my brother decided not to press charges against him, but I couldn't help but feel sad. Why was my brother's good-heartedness repaid with such ingratitude?

In April 2012, a group of fellow Tzu Chi volunteers and I began holding ten workshops a year at a rehabilitation institution in Mingde Minimum-Security Prison in Tainan, southern Taiwan. The primary functions of this institution are the imprisonment and rehabilitation of men convicted of narcotics charges. My work was to record our workshops.

To be honest, I was apprehensive about working with the inmates. I, like many people, had stereotypical images of prisoners. Despite my reservations, I decided to accept the challenge anyway.

The first time we met with the inmates, I found them intimidating. Many were quite burly or heavily tattooed. The atmosphere in the prison was a far cry from that of a typical Tzu Chi event. I remember having my doubts. Would we really be able to make a difference?

However, my uneasiness faded more and more with each workshop as I came to know the inmates and their stories better. I knew that everyone has innate goodness and is capable of being kind and good, and these inmates were no exception.

At first, when we asked the inmates to step onto the stage to share what they had learned from the workshops, or to share any comments they might have, they would just look at each other. None of them was willing to step forward. It was only after repeated encouragement from Chen Long-jie (陳龍杰), the warden of the rehabilitation institution, and our volunteers that some

of the inmates finally let down their guard and opened up. Some voiced their regret at having done drugs and whittling away a good part of their lives in prison. Some expressed worry that they would have nowhere to go after they regained their freedom because their families had turned their backs on them. On the other hand, some were excited about the prospect of embarking on a new life after they finished their sentences. These people would talk animatedly about their plans for the future, such as, "I'll learn to speak and act like a Tzu Chi volunteer and practice the Buddha's teachings. I'll also join anti-drug campaigns and contribute my bit."

Each workshop may not have looked very different in substance and form—the Buddha's and Master Cheng Yen's teachings were shared, talks were given by Tzu Chi volunteers who were themselves ex-convicts, etc.—but almost every time I noticed some reactions on the part of the inmates that told me they had been touched by what the lecturer had said. In those moments, joy would arise in me and I would happily write down my observations.

After we had carried out a few visits to the prison, a magical sense of optimism spread through me. I eagerly shared what I had experienced at each workshop with my family. I began to believe that we might be able to change an inmate's life by giving him a little more love and nudging him toward a better path in life.



Tzu Chi volunteers have conducted workshops at a rehabilitation institution in Mingde Prison for six years. Warden Chen Long-jie (first row, fifth from left) participates in almost every workshop from beginning to end.

The biggest battlefield: your heart

In 2013, the year after we started the workshops, my brother hired an ex-convict, Zhan (not his real name), through a government employment agency. It was the first time my brother had employed a former prisoner. To help Zhan get acclimated to his new job, employees did their best to teach him the ropes. The factory also provided him with opportunities to receive off-the-job education to supplement his training at work. The hope was that when he acquired a marketable skill, he would be able to face his reentry into society with more confidence and further settle into a stable life with his family.

Unfortunately, a drug user Zhan once knew got in touch with him again and, unable to resist the temptation, Zhan fell back into the trap of drugs.

Just before the arrival of 2014, some expensive equipment at my brother's factory was stolen. The police were called in to investigate, and they found out that the culprits were Zhan and an organized theft ring. He had committed the crime to raise money to buy drugs. Out of kindness, my brother decided not to press charges. Even so, Zhan was arrested, tried, and sent to prison. This unfortunate incident cast doubt on the practice of hiring ex-convicts at my brother's factory.

Despite my exposure to the Buddha's teachings, I couldn't accept the incident with calm and poise. I was wracked with doubts: Why was my brother's good-heartedness repaid with such ingratitude? I had been doing what I could to contribute to the workshops, but now I felt my enthusiasm dwindle. I even began to have reservations about our service motto, "Go wherever you are needed."

My heart plummeted as low as it could get. Master Cheng Yen says, "When you know something is right, just do it." But is that really so?

Glimmers of hope

I eventually regained some of my enthusiasm at a workshop we held at Mingde Prison on April 14, 2015.

For three years, Xiong had sat in the front of our class on Buddhism. He took copious notes and often went on stage to share his thoughts. One day, he eagerly said to us: "May I have a few minutes of your time? I'll be out of this prison next month. This will be the last time I can speak up here as an inmate."

His request granted, he went on stage and pulled a large pile of letters from a bulging manila envelope. He told us that they had all been written to him by Tzu Chi volunteers. He didn't know any of them, but still they wrote to him. He used

to hate it when Tzu Chi people came to the prison to preach to the inmates, so he wrote to Master Cheng Yen and told her so. He never expected that he'd get a reply, but a nun at the Jing Si Abode (the Buddhist convent founded by Master Cheng Yen) wrote back to him. The rest, as they say, was history.

Xiong said he once read an article about a little girl who wrote to Bill Gates to ask him for money to buy mosquito nets for destitute families in Africa to save them from contracting malaria. Gates donated a huge sum to the United Nations Foundation for mosquito nets. Xiong said, "I'm like that innocent child. The difference is that her letter might have led her to save 300 children, while mine led me to the path of self-awakening, and to make a pledge to not just cultivate and improve myself but to contribute to the welfare of others as well."

Xiong added that he had learned the importance of repentance at our workshops and had

benefited a lot from what our volunteers and other inmates had shared. He had no illusion that he would accomplish anything great after he was released, but he planned to cherish simple things, such as the simple happiness of dining every day with his family. "Life's value lies in such simple happiness," he said.

With tears in my eyes, I silently wished him the best in putting his good thoughts into practice after he left the prison.

When dream becomes reality

Me being the way I am, it was impossible for me to put that bad memory about Zhan behind me just because of what Xiong had shared in the workshop. I continued to have doubts. During that time, when I reread my notes of what inmates had shared in the workshops, I'd ask myself, "Did they really mean what they said?"

I remained doubtful until one day I heard Warden Chen announce that for two years in a

An inmate copied the *Heart Sutra* in calligraphy and gave it to Tzu Chi volunteer Cai Tian-sheng (蔡天勝, right), an ex-convict, to thank him for visiting Mingde Prison and guiding inmates there to the path of spiritual awakening.



Tzu Chi volunteers conduct prison workshops to help inmates take a step in the right direction.

row—2015 and 2016—the rehabilitation institution at Mingde Prison had scored the lowest return rate (within six months of release) of all prisons in Taiwan. He attributed it largely to the efforts of the Tzu Chi volunteers. He said that many prison inmates had been inspired by our volunteers, from whom they had learned precious life lessons, Buddhist wisdom, and Master Cheng Yen's teachings of "gratitude, respect, and love." That's the main reason why the institution had the lowest return rate. This piece of good news went a long way toward dispelling my doubts about expending so much effort and manpower on our prison activities.

My heart was further buoyed by the updates we had received on how some former inmates were doing after they had been released from the prison.

Xing, having learned great cooking skills at the prison, is now a chef at a restaurant. Zhong runs a clothes shop with his family in southern Taiwan. Lang performs glove puppet shows and runs a stall at a night market on the side; in his free time, he volunteers at a Buddhist center.

Gan also runs a night market stall. Not only that, he has completed training and become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer. Cheng works in a Tzu Chi volunteer's factory, and he often participates in Tzu Chi activities. Long is a delivery truck driv-

er, and he also volunteers for Tzu Chi. Xiong runs a restaurant with his mom, and he takes part in Tzu Chi events too.

These updates on former inmates, on how they had successfully reestablished themselves in society and even taken up charitable work, assured me that we have achieved our goals in our workshops.

Never give up

Master Cheng Yen hopes we can be the "gatekeepers" for prisons and help people stay away from wrong paths so that there will more happy families in our society. It was to fulfill her expectations that we started our work at Mingde Prison. To achieve better results, we have tried to make our activities more varied and engaging. For example, we have recently added a new activity in which inmates can write to a group of Tzu Chi volunteers who are engaged in anti-drug work.

Just because someone once did wrong, it does not mean that he will continue to be bad. What I have seen at the prison over the last six years has proved that beyond doubt. Even if someone cannot turn over a new leaf now, he might still do so one day. We will continue to believe. We also hope that more people will join us in our work of helping inmates and spreading seeds of hope and goodness.



Hand in Hand on the Path of Life

She didn't buckle when hardship knocked on her door. Instead, she emerged from it stronger. She demonstrated an indomitable spirit that has amazed many.

By Chen Mei-yi

Condensed and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

It was a chilly March night in Taipei and the kids were already in bed. Wang Ju (王菊) glanced at the clock: a quarter past ten. She wondered why her husband, Ye Ming-xi (葉明西), hadn't arrived home yet. What could be keeping him?

Just then the phone rang and jarred her from her thoughts. "Hello, is this Mrs. Ye?" the caller asked tentatively. After introducing himself as a police officer, the man on the phone continued: "Don't panic, but I must inform you that your husband, Ye Ming-xi, has been in a traffic accident. He has been taken to MacKay Hospital. Please come quickly...."

Wang hung up before the police officer could even finish his sentence. Grabbing her purse and keys, she dashed downstairs and hailed a taxi. Only then did she realize she had forgotten to put on her shoes.

When she arrived at the emergency room, she saw her husband, his clothes cut away, covered in tubes. His head had been cracked open by the impact of the accident, and blood and a white liquid had flowed from his brain out through his ears. He was immediately admitted to the ICU.

Ye had been discovered lying unconscious on the road. The front end of his motor scooter had been smashed, and his helmet had rolled off to one side. It was unclear if he had been the victim of a hit-and-run, or if he had accidentally crashed into the median island himself.

Tying the knot

Ye was born in 1966 in Kinmen, an offshore island of Taiwan. In 1992, he was posted to China by his company in Taiwan as a maintenance engineer for a hotel video arcade. That was where he met his future wife, Wang Ju.

Wang was born in 1973 in Hainan, the southernmost province of China. Her parents were both farmers, and life was hard when she was growing up. Although she was an excellent student, she had to drop out of school when she was in the seventh grade to work and help pay for her younger siblings' schooling. Later, she was hired by a big hotel in Hainan, where she started at the bottom and worked her way up. Starting out as a warehouse worker, she was head of the Chinese food section by the time she was in her early 20s, managing over 200 people.

Ye courted Wang for six years before she finally agreed to give him her hand in marriage. The hotel's boss said to Ye when he learned that they were getting married: "Wang is the best girl I've ever met. Don't ever let her shed a tear after you get married—I'll never let you get away with it if you do."

After Ye Ming-xi (left) suffered a grave brain injury in a traffic accident, his wife, Wang Ju, stood by him like a rock and took excellent care of him.

After their two children were born, Wang and the children moved to Taiwan. Ye later quit his job in China and returned to be reunited with them.

My kids cannot be without a father

Ye had his accident in March 2005. Their two children were still very young at the time: Jia-jun (家均), their son, was in first grade, and Xiang-yi (湘宜), their daughter, was about five.

The accident left Ye in the deepest level of coma, a 3 on the Glasgow Coma Scale, and his pupils were dilated. The doctors told Wang that if they operated on her husband, he might die on the operating table or end up in a vegetative state. But all Wang could think was that she couldn't let her kids

be without a father. Despite the risks, she opted for surgery for her husband. "We must save him. I know he'll recover."

The surgery went well. A couple of weeks later, Ye had a tracheotomy. Wang's heart broke when she saw how his body convulsed and his features distorted with pain when he underwent the phlegm suction procedure. She even second-guessed her decision to save him, and she wished that she could suffer in his stead. When she went home that day, she tried to insert a phlegm suction tube into her own throat to experience how much it hurt, but she found she couldn't even get it past her throat—it was too painful.

Whenever Wang had a moment alone, she'd dissolve in tears. Ye had been a loving husband before the accident. Being shy, he wasn't the type who said, "I love you" all the time, but he showed his love in other ways. For example, he would wash her hair for her, which Wang had always felt was a very sweet gesture. Thinking of her husband like this made her want to weep. The pressure from an uncertain future made her tear up, too.

In front of others, however, she tried to appear strong. "I mustn't panic or get flustered. I must think of the kids," she told herself.

Back home

Ye returned home after being hospitalized for more than a month, but he was still in a coma. A social worker at the hospital contacted Tzu Chi volunteer Wu Xi-jiao (巫喜教) and told him of the Ye family's situation. Wu arranged for a used hospital bed, wheelchair, phlegm suction machine, oxygen tank, and some diapers to be delivered to Ye's home. "That's the first contact I had with Tzu Chi," said Wang. "I was full of gratitude for their help."

Wang turned her husband over in bed and massaged him every two hours to prevent bed-sores. He weighed about 200 pounds but felt heavier because he was unconscious. This made it even more of a challenge for the petite Wang to take care of him. Sometimes after Wang had turned him over, she would find that he had wet the bed. She'd then have to change the bed sheets and comforter covers. After she was done, she'd turn him back over—only to find that he had wet the bed again.

Sometimes Ye would slip off the bed amidst all the turning over and sheet changing. Wang couldn't possibly lift him back onto the bed by herself, but there was no one around to help her.

The first time that happened, she burst into tears of helplessness. But she later figured out a way to solve the problem. She discovered that she could put his feet on a chair and stuff a comforter cover behind his back. Then she'd stand on the bed and with all her might give the comforter cover a sharp pull. With that, she could move her husband back onto the bed.

She had a trick for moving him from the bed into a wheelchair, too. She would first pull her husband toward her. Then she'd swing his feet off and down the side of the bed and clamp his knees with hers. Then with her hands gripping the waist of his pants, she'd take a big breath, lift him, and wrestle him into the wheelchair.

Before Ye was discharged from the hospital, Wang had learned from the nursing staff how to suction phlegm. Because she had tried to insert a tube into herself before, she knew how painful it was. Even though he appeared unconscious, she made a point of soothing Ye before sucking out his mucus. "Daddy, I'm going to suck out your phlegm now. You'll feel better after this. Don't tense up. Relax. I'll put the tube in slowly." Practice makes perfect, and after a while she felt that her phlegm-suction skills were equal to those of a hospital nurse.

One day, more than a month after he had returned home, Ye suddenly opened his eyes and turned his eyeballs around, as if he were looking for something. Wang was overjoyed. "I kept calling his nickname, 'ABC! ABC! I'm here! Look at me!'" (Because his name—Ye Ming-xi—sounds a little like English "ABC," his nickname has been ABC since he was small.) Wang called his name from different directions and found that his eyes would follow her voice. He was awake! He was awake! Wang hugged her husband and cried tears of joy.

A strong woman

Since Ye now seemed to be awake, Wu Ming-ya (巫明雅), a home visit nurse who visited Ye every two weeks to take his blood pressure and change his tubes, suggested that Wang check her husband into a hospital and start him on a rehabilitation program. The nurse also referred Ye and Wang to a Tzu Chi social worker, saying that the couple's kids were still small and Ye's situation had plunged the family into financial difficulty. No one in the couple's extended family was able to help financially, and they were really in need of support and assistance.

After learning of the Ye family's situation, volunteers Guo Bao-ying (郭寶瑛), Chen Mu-lan (陳木蘭), Wu Ming-gui (吳銘桂), and Lin Su-ying (林素瑛) visited Wang and Ye at the hospital where Ye was undergoing physical therapy.

"The first time I saw Ye," Chen Mu-lan recalled, "he was slumped in a wheelchair. His head hung low, and he didn't seem to register anything of what was happening around him."

Ye could raise his right hand, but only with a lot of effort. His left hand was totally limp. Just getting him into a wheelchair was a Herculean feat, and then he had to be tied to the wheelchair to prevent him from slipping down.

Wang patiently helped him do his rehab exercises. One of his exercises was pushing a ball forward with his hand. Wang would hold his hand in hers and help him push the ball forward time and again. Every time the ball moved forward, Wang would applaud and exclaim, "Wow, daddy, you're doing so great! Come on, let's do it again."

"Ye was as limp as a pile of mud," said Chen. "It was just Wang who was pushing the ball. I was really impressed by her—she was so positive and encouraging during the whole process."

Wang told the volunteers that though they had always lived a frugal life, what little savings they had put away had quickly diminished after her husband's accident. Even so, she was determined to help him recover. "I'll do my best to help him. I believe he'll get well."

The group of volunteers admired Wang's positive and optimistic attitude despite what had happened to her. They felt that there was a great chance that the husband would recover with a wife like her. After assessing the couple's situation, they decided to enroll the family as a long-term care recipient. Chen began delivering NT\$10,000 (US\$340) to Wang every month.

The first thing Ye does every day is exercise on the balcony of his home in Hainan.





A caring world

Chen's heart went out to Wang because she knew what a huge burden she was shouldering, and so she often delivered daily necessities and food given away by a temple. She also compiled for Wang a list of resources for which she could apply. Wang was very thankful. She said to Chen in tears, "We've been living off people's donations. I feel very uneasy about that." Chen just hugged her and reassured her: "Our society is full of love. You're in need now, so you're receiving help from others. When you've gotten through the rough patches, when your kids have grown up, you can pay back society by helping others." With tears streaming down her face, Wang nodded and promised she would.

After another operation on his brain, Ye finally became fully conscious. He underwent active rehabilitation afterwards, and two months later he was able to walk out of the hospital hand-in-hand with his wife.

Ye returned to the hospital three days a week to do rehab exercises. On the other days, Wang

Whenever Wang is home, she attends to the daily needs of her husband: She gives him his medicine at the right times, bathes him, massages him.... This has been her life not just for one or two days, but for the last ten years.

helped him exercise at home or took him out for walks. She knew that the key to recovery was working hard on physical therapy.

An in-home care provider hired by the social welfare department of the Taipei City government came to the couple's home twice a week to wash Ye and help him exercise so that Wang could take a breather and go out to run errands. When Wang learned that an in-home care provider was paid by the hour, she was tempted to become one herself. "If I train, pass the exam, and qualify as a care provider, I'll be able to better help my husband. What's more, when I have time, I can go serve other people and make some money too."

She started training in November 2005. One of Ye's older sisters helped look after him when Wang was attending the courses. The training



was rigorous—anyone who was late or left a class early for a total of six hours was cut from the training program. Because Ye was hospitalized again for a blood clot in his brain, Wang soon exceeded the maximum allowable absences, but her teacher was moved by her determination to finish the training and made an exception for her to stay in the program. In the end Wang passed the exam with flying colors. Her husband was also discharged from the hospital soon after.

In late December that year, they received a letter from the government informing them that they had passed the eligibility screening for low-income status and would begin receiving a monthly subsidy of 17,000 NT dollars the following February. Wang quickly called Chen and asked her to remove her family from the Tzu Chi

list of care recipients and to give the money to other needy people.

Remember how good he used to be

Ye suffered from another serious complication after the traffic accident—he could never feel full. He tended to eat too much, and as a result he put on a lot of weight and his blood sugar spiked. What was worse, he often grew violent when he was denied food.

"He didn't use to be like this," observed Wang. "He was a good husband and father—very thoughtful and gentle." To prevent her husband's behavior from alienating their children, she often told them: "Daddy used to be a terrific person. It was only because of his brain injury that he became like this. We must make allowances for him."

Chen suggested that Wang take Ye to the recycling station at the Tzu Chi Guandu Complex to volunteer. She

said that the benign atmosphere there might have a good effect on his emotions. It may sound strange, but Ye did gradually become more peaceful and less susceptible to violent bursts of temper after he began serving as a recycling volunteer. It might be that food stopped dominating his thoughts when his attention was engaged by sorting recyclables. When he did sometimes lose his temper, Wang would hold him tight and say softly to him, "Okay, I know. Relax. Come on, let's take a deep breath."

She said with a wry smile, "It was no use getting mad at him, but it worked when I tried to soothe him. So instead of losing my temper, I was gentle with him and tried to calm him down."

When the couple went to do recycling, Wang would patiently teach her husband how to sort stuff: "Put the newspapers here. This is for printed paper. This is for blank paper." Ye gradually

learned to properly sort out recyclable material. His cognitive and thinking abilities were improving.

Wang enjoyed volunteering. She appreciated the chance to give. So she asked Chen to let her know when there were other volunteer opportunities. Consequently, Chen often invited her to take part in different volunteer work events, such as cleaning up the Tzu Chi Guandu Complex and chanting sutras for the deceased. Wang was always happy to help out as long as she was free.

Seeing how much she liked volunteering, Chen asked Wang if she was interested in becoming a Tzu Chi commissioner. [A Tzu Chi commissioner must receive training and establish a roster of people who make monthly donations to the foundation.] "I'd like to recommend you to train as a commissioner. You need to train for two years to receive your certification. What do you think?"

"Me?" Wang was taken by surprise. "How is that possible?!"

Chen Mu-lan (right) treats Wang like her own daughter.



Chen told Wang that she believed she would make a good commissioner with her admirable character, can-do spirit, and positive outlook on life. "Besides, you already do a lot of volunteer work. Why can't you become a commissioner?"

"In addition to taking care of my husband and children, I do handiwork at home to make money. I also work part-time as a cleaning lady and as an in-home care provider...."

"Do you know what my family situation is like?" Chen said. It was the first time she had talked about her family. "My husband and I are both tailors. One of our children is your age. He's seriously handicapped and can't take care of himself. My mother-in-law lived with us before she passed away, and she had dementia."

Wang couldn't believe what she had just heard. The two of them had a long heart-to-heart, crying and laughing in turn. When Wang found out that Chen was as old as her mother, she asked, "Can I call you 'Mama'?" "What?" It was Chen's turn to be surprised, but she immediately said, "Sure you can!" The two hugged each other with tears rolling down their cheeks.



Wang, Ye, and their two children, Jia-jun and Xiang-yi, at their home in Hainan

Bringing the seed of Tzu Chi home

Wang was certified as a Tzu Chi commissioner in January 2010. In March that year, she volunteered for three days at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in eastern Taiwan. One day she shared her story at the daily volunteer morning meeting presided over by Master Cheng Yen. She told the audience that she was from Hainan and had settled in Taiwan after she married a Taiwanese. She recounted that she had two kids, that her husband had had a traffic accident five years earlier, and that though his life was saved, his intellect was reduced to that of a five-year-old.

"When my life was at its hardest, Tzu Chi extended a helping hand to me. Now I've become a commissioner. In order to volunteer at the Tzu Chi hospital this time, I especially asked my mom to come from Hainan to Taiwan to look after my husband and children for me."

She continued and said that she had learned that Tzu Chi did not yet have a branch office in Hainan. "I vow that if I ever return to Hainan, I'll take the seed of Tzu Chi there and help it take root and sprout."

Wang took her family and moved back to Hainan in August 2010. Her mother had urged her to move back so that she could help look after her husband and children. But a bigger reason that had motivated her to move back was that Wang hoped to promote and carry out Tzu Chi work there.

Some time after she returned, Wang started up a business of her own and was quite successful. In a few years, she was able to build a building and provide the second floor to be used as a Tzu Chi office.

Her husband continues to be a challenge to take care of, but she continues to hold his hand tight on the path of life.

Make the Best of the Situation

By Ye Wen-ying

Condensed and translated by Tang Yau-yang

Photos by Yu Zi-cheng

Tzu Chi has established a school and a free medical clinic for Syrian refugees in Turkey. The facilities provide an education for refugee children and job opportunities for Syrian adults. They live their days the best they can and look forward to returning to their homeland when the civil war ends.

Rihan and Rama, both 17, are 12th graders at El Menahil school in Sultangazi, Istanbul, Turkey, a school established by Tzu Chi for Syrian refugee children. Neither of the girls can forget the sight, the sound, or the fury when airplanes took over the sky and began to drop bombs over their home towns in Syria. They were only 11 when the Syrian civil war erupted in 2011.

At first, Rihan was curious and went out to see what was going on, but the falling bombs and the sound of machine guns drove her back inside. She was badly frightened. Rama was just as badly frightened. Afterwards, whenever she heard the sound of airplanes dropping bombs, she'd promptly take cover and hide in a closet or under a stairwell.

Rihan's father was hurt by a stray bullet, which left him unable to work. Her mother took Rihan to live with her grandmother so that she could stay in school. It would have been a short trip if they had not had to detour to avoid fighting zones—a 30-minute walk in peacetime turned into a 15-hour trek.

Rihan's uncles had both been conscripted to fight, and they had not been heard from for some time. Her mother went out to ask around, but she came back leaning on a walking stick because a stray bullet had hit her leg. She also brought back the sad news that one uncle had been killed. The other uncle's squad had been attacked, but there had been no other news. Perhaps he too had been killed. Rihan's grandfather went insane fearing for his son's safety. He called his boy's name every day.

"The war destroyed my home, forced us to flee our homeland, and took our loved ones from us," Rihan said. She hates how the civil war has turned her world upside down.

Rama's brother was shot and injured by a sniper. To seek treatment for him, her whole family decided to smuggle themselves into Turkey, Syria's neighbor to the north. During the journey, Rama witnessed throngs of adults leading their children toward an uncertain future, just like her own family.

Sensing that it could be the last time that she would ever see Syria, Rama knelt down and kissed the Syrian soil to say a solemn goodbye before crossing into Turkey.

In a foreign country

Rihan, on the other hand, took a different route into Turkey. She and her parents took a bus from Aleppo, where they lived, to a border city in Turkey. Their passports were officially stamped, and they were admitted into Turkey. They then went to Istanbul, the largest city in the country. Her parents contacted Rihan's three older brothers, who had reached Istanbul earlier.

Instead of being thrilled that their family had made it out of Syria safely, the three brothers were very worried because they did not have enough space for the whole family to live together. Eventually the family moved to a larger place in the Sultangazi district, which enabled them to live together again.

Volunteer Zhou Ru-yi hugs a Syrian woman on a home visit. The woman risked her life to flee her home country only to come face to face with a hard life in her host country.

Compiled from information provided by Da Ai TV, Zhou Ru-yi, and Yang Jing-hui.





The Tzu Chi free clinic is staffed by Syrian physicians and nurses.

graders at a Turkish school—after a hiatus of over three and a half years.

Being new kids in a school would have been tough enough, but being refugee students turned out to be quite unpleasant for the twin sisters. The children at the school weren't kind to them. They discriminated against them, wrote mean things on pieces of paper, and then threw the paper at them.

Rama and her twin sister were not the only Syrian children facing such taunts at school in Turkey.

The Syrian civil war has raged unabated for seven years with no end in sight. Statistics as of the end of 2017 showed that about 5.5 million Syrians have fled their home country. Of those, 2.9 million have taken refuge in Turkey. Have they been able to get along well in their host country?

Tzu Chi's assistance

Tzu Chi has been working to help make the lives of Syrian refugees easier in Turkey. The foundation's aid to Syrian refugees in Turkey started in 2014 with distributions of daily necessities and financial aid. Today, the foundation regularly distributes aid to over 6,500 families every one or two months. At the same time, emergency assistance is given to an average of 150 families each month. Every day, refugees seek help at the Istanbul Tzu Chi office.

Lacking the scale and capacity to help all refugees, Tzu Chi has focused its relief work mostly in Sultangazi. In January 2015, the foundation started El Menahil school for refugee children. The physical facilities were provided by the Turkish government. Tzu Chi hires and pays qualified Syrians to teach. The school is thus semi-official and confers legitimate diplomas.

In March 2016, the foundation established a free medical clinic for refugees and hired Syrian physicians and nursing staff to serve patients.

The doctors and nurses serve nearly 10,000 patient visits a month.

These Syrian teachers, physicians, and nurses, though qualified professionals in their motherland, were previously unable to work in Turkey, but now they are able to make a living in their areas of expertise at the Tzu Chi free clinic and school.

El Menahil grew from one campus to six, but Tzu Chi secured a new building in September 2017. Now the 2,300 students from the first five campuses have been moved to study in the new building, where a high school division has also been added. The sixth campus, with a student body of more than 500, remains at its original location.

Rama and her twin sister have transferred to the high school division at El Menahil. Rihaan also got to spend her high school senior year at the school. Rihaan and Rama are both preparing to go to college, and they both want to be physi-

Volunteers Faisal Hu (right) and Yu Zi-cheng visit the home of a Syrian refugee family to learn about their needs.

COURTESY OF YU ZI-CHENG

cians. "I want to help rebuild my country," Rama declared. She said that this dream has kept her going forward.

Professor Cuma Serya

Professor Cuma Serya, from Syria, is one of the most important people in Tzu Chi's effort to help Syrian refugees. He used to teach at a university in Syria but fled to Istanbul after the civil war broke out. A Taiwanese student who had studied under the professor in Syria connected him with Faisal Hu (胡光中), a Tzu Chi volunteer living in Turkey. That's how the foundation began working with the professor to help Syrian refugees.

Hu visited the Tzu Chi headquarters in Taiwan and explained the difficult situation of the refugees in Turkey. He also presented his idea to help them, and the foundation agreed to support him. Through Professor Cuma, over a hundred Syrians signed on as volunteers and helped visit needy families in preparation for aid distributions.

They have helped countless Syrian refugees over the past three years. With the large number of refugees needing help, the professor quit his



job at a Turkish college and began working full time for Tzu Chi. He organizes aid work for his fellow Syrians and helps manage El Menahil. The help of the professor and the other Syrians is essential because there are only three certified Tzu Chi volunteers in Turkey.

Because of the war, Cuma has been separated from his own family. His wife and two sons originally came to Turkey with him, but then the younger son, 16 at the time, decided to smuggle himself into Germany to seek a better future. The other son developed mental issues, so the professor decided to let his wife take that son back to Syria, to the countryside of Damascus, where the professor's mother still lived and where there was little impact from the war, in the hope that the familiar surroundings would help his son heal. But after they went back to Syria, the border was unexpectedly sealed. Cuma ended up being able to stay in touch with his family only via phone.

Cuma observed that Syrians are a family-oriented culture. Being separated from his own family makes him feel as if his head and limbs have been cut off from his body. On important Muslim holi-

days, he always feel so sad. Only when he is helping his fellow Syrians can he forget his own pain.

Professor Cuma and Syrian volunteers have visited one Syrian family after another to choose the ones that are most in need of help. They establish files for the chosen families and, based on their needs, decide on the kind of aid for them—daily necessities, cash cards, money for heating in winters, or subsidies for children who have given up their jobs in order to go back to school.

To help support their families, many refugee children have no choice but to drop out of school to work. Tzu Chi has helped some of these children return to school by giving financial aid to their families. As a former teacher, Cuma realizes the importance of education. He is happy to see Syrian children back in school at El Menahil, where they receive their due respect and care as human beings. He is the one who gave the school its name: the spring in the desert.

Tzu Chi free clinic

Every day, Dr. Abduljwad Kasab happily goes to work at the Tzu Chi free clinic in Sultangazi.

In November 2014, Tzu Chi volunteers started to round up Syrian children and help them go back to school. They opened El Menahil in 2015 with 578 students. Now the school enrolls around 3,000 students.



Professor Cuma Serya (right) leads his fellow Syrians in prayer at a Tzu Chi distribution.

Though a full-fledged family medicine doctor back in Syria, he was unemployed in Turkey for three years before he started to work at the free clinic. It's apparent that being able to work as a doctor again is very important to him. "Now I do what I used to do in Aleppo," he said. "Serving others has made me feel that I'm a man again." Although he sees patients ten hours a day, physical fatigue from such long hours does not diminish the joy that he gains from working and feeling useful again. He feels wonderful.

Dr. Kasab appreciates Tzu Chi's efforts to help him and his fellow countrymen. "Though we're in transit," he said, "Tzu Chi has helped us feel that we belong here."

The free clinic takes up two stories with a total floor space of 1,830 square feet. It offers services in ophthalmology, dentistry, internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, and family medicine. Tzu Chi has furnished the facility with basic equipment like ultrasound machines, and it pays the medical staff a monthly salary of between 1,500 and 4,500 lira (400–1,200 U.S. dollars). Doctors at the clinic write prescriptions for patients, which can then be filled at public hospitals or clinics free of charge—a reflection that Tzu Chi volunteers have earned the trust of the Turkish government.

The clinic does not have a full complement of diagnostic and treatment equipment, so the staff sometimes needs to refer and, if necessary, help transport more seriously ill patients to local hospitals. If such patients need financial assistance, Tzu Chi lists them as aid recipients.

In Turkey, public hospitals offer free medical care to refugees, but according to what Tzu Chi volunteers learned from some Syrian refugees at Tzu Chi distributions, Syrian patients and Turkish doctors cannot understand each other well enough for the doctors to arrive at an accurate diagnosis, much less an effective treatment. On the other hand, private clinics operated by Syrians are too expensive and effectively price many refugees out. There was therefore a need for a free clinic where the care providers and patients spoke the same language. Such a need led to the establishment of the Tzu Chi free clinic.

Though the free clinic is not big, it treats a large number of patients, some from as far as 15 miles away. The clinic logs 300 to 400 patient visits a day. Its main draw is undoubtedly the Syrian physicians and nurses on the staff. There is a sense of kinship and shared roots among doctors, nurses and



Zhou Ru-yi, Faisal Hu, and Professor Cuma Serya (front row, fourth, fifth, and sixth from left) pose with some Syrian volunteers, including teachers from El Menahil, in the new school building. COURTESY OF YU ZI-CHENG

patients. “That’s the kind of feeling that a Syrian refugee longs to experience,” said Professor Cuma.

Allah’s design

Tzu Chi volunteer Faisal Hu has run his trading business in Istanbul for almost 20 years. He, his wife, Zhou Ru-yi (周如意), and Yu Zi-cheng (余自成) are the only three certified Tzu Chi volunteers in Turkey. Hu looked back on what had led to Tzu Chi’s aid for Syrian refugees, including the establishment of El Menahil school.

In October 2014, at a large-scale distribution held by the foundation, some Syrians indicated they wanted to sell the blankets they had just received for cash to send their children to school. That helped the three volunteers realize that refugees needed to have their children educated as well as fed and clothed.

“We’d just started our aid work for Syrian refugees at that time,” Hu reflected, “but that incident led us to ponder if we should seriously consider launching into education.”

Reflecting on the past three years, Hu admitted that they did not have a master plan of action along the way. They just did what they felt they should do.

Hu thanked the Tzu Chi Foundation and donors around the world for helping make their work in Turkey possible. As a Muslim, he attributed the whole thing to Allah’s grace and design.

Now El Menahil is up and running, and it is doing very well. The school employs over 70 teachers, selected from 450 Syrian applicants. Hu and Zhou even went to Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and pleaded with government officials to issue work permits and grant insurance coverage for the teachers at the school.

Originally the school had six campuses, but 2,300 students from the first five campuses were relocated to a new building that has a floor space of 96,900 square feet in September 2017. Each floor of the new building houses up to 11 classrooms, each of which contains up to 30 students.

Zhou said of the students at the school, “We hope to keep them company during this tough time in their lives.”

Hatred and animosity have torn asunder the lives of many Syrian people. Only love can patch up their broken hearts. ❀

CONFINED BODY, Freed Mind

Text and Photos by Lin Ling-li
Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Huang is paralyzed from the neck down, and she has been confined to a bed for over 20 years. Despite this, she has a heart full of gratitude and the power to give to others. Living this way keeps her heart lighter and her mind free.

Her room is small and dim, the only light coming from a tiny window. Outside the window is a kitchen garden, where flourishing vegetables sway in the wind. Though the garden is so near, she has never set eyes on it. She is confined to her bed, paralyzed from the neck down. The only thing she can see from where she

lies is the ceiling directly above her. Even if she weren’t bedridden, she still wouldn’t be able to see much. Her optic nerve is injured, resulting in blurred vision.

Her abilities to see clearly and move freely aren’t the only things of which she has been deprived—she can’t breathe on her own either. To

With the help of her mother and a Tzu Chi volunteer, Huang Pei-hong deposits some money into a coin bank to help the needy.



keep her alive, she had to have a tracheotomy, which allows a ventilator to breathe for her. Because of the tracheotomy, she can only make hoarse, aspirated sounds, and only with effort.

Huang Pei-hong (黃配鴻) has lain quietly in her bed like this for 22 years. She can only feel above her neck, but that isn't always pleasant; sometimes she feels an itch or painful tingling in her face, but she is unable to reach up and scratch it or rub it to make herself more comfortable. All she can do is crinkle up or twitch her face to try to find some relief, even though that often doesn't work.

"Why me?" "Why do I have to lie here?" She has shed countless tears since tragedy struck her in 1996. Yet no matter how much she blames fate for the unfairness of it all, she can't undo the tragedy.

Dr. Ji Bang-jie talks to Huang during a visit.

Huang was 22 when she had that fateful traffic accident. Enjoying life and feeling invincible like many other young people, she never expected what was in store for her. After the accident, she arrived at the hospital with no vital signs.

"I kept praying to the bodhisattvas," said her mother, Shen Bei-zhen (沈倍禎). "I prayed hard for their blessings." Her prayers were answered—her child's life was saved. But she would have to lie in bed for the rest of her life, unable to even breathe on her own.

"All you can do is accept what has happened," her mother said to her as a way of comforting her. Shen was not yet 50 at the time, and she did her best to care for her daughter. It seems but a blink of an eye, but 22 years has flown by. She and her husband are now in their 70s, and her daughter has become a middle-aged woman.

Over the years, the couple has taken turns tending to their daughter's needs. They turn her



A vibrant, youthful Huang (front center) poses with her family.

COPIED BY ZHANG TING-XU

started to feel less helpless. It was as if she had finally seen a ray of light after walking in the dark for a long time.

The biggest change for Huang was that she began listening to Master Cheng Yen's televised Dharma talks every day on a TV in her room. Though her eyesight is bad, she can listen to the talks. Over time, the Master's teachings sank in and a change came over her.

"Mom, the Master...has...a cold," Huang said to her mom one day as she was listening to a talk.

"How do you know?" Shen responded in surprise. "You can't see her."

"Her voice...is different...today."

"The Master has doctors to take care of her. Don't you worry about her," Shen said and launched into one of her lectures. "You should think of yourself instead. You haven't yet learned to breathe on your own. Your dad and I are getting old. What if..."

"Mom, eat the...Four-Magic...Soup."

"Four-Magic Soup?"

"The Master teaches us...to be content..., grateful..., understanding..., tolerant," Huang said with effort.

Shen felt for her daughter because she knew how much energy she had to expend to say those words to her, but she was touched at the same time because she also knew that her daughter was trying to ease her worries with the Master's teachings. For the first time since the accident, the daughter was comforting her mom instead of the other way around. Moved beyond words, Shen hugged her daughter tight.

The power of gratitude

As had happened many times before, Shen entered her daughter's room with a man in a white coat and a group of uniformed Tzu Chi volunteers in tow. "Dr. Ji is here to see you," Shen said to her daughter. Ji Bang-jie (紀邦杰) is a TIMA doctor who visits the family every month to check up on Huang. He has done this for a long time, and he is now like an old friend to the family.

As soon as he was at Huang's bedside, the physician picked up her hand, held it in his, and said to her, "Hmm, you look good. You should thank your dad and mom for taking such good care of you."

Huang smiled brightly. The doctor's and volunteers' visits add variety to her monotonous life

over in bed, slap her on her back to help her blood circulation, and change her bladder control pads every two hours. At night, the father usually sleeps first, and his wife wakes him at midnight to take over from her. They never sleep at the same time. Their daughter always has a pair of eyes watching over her.

"Your father and I are getting old," Shen often says to her daughter. "We'll leave this world before you one day. You must at least learn to breathe on your own." Unless a medical breakthrough happens, Huang is unlikely to breathe on her own again. But her mother is unable to accept this reality, and she still hopes her daughter will learn to breathe. Feeling her age and laden with worry, Shen can't help nagging her daughter like this.

The couple's other children have either married or are working out of town, leaving the parents to care for their bedridden daughter alone. Life is no bed of roses for them.

The Master comes into their home

Ten years ago, in 2007, one of their television sets broke down. A repairman was called to the house to fix it. When he was done, he said to Shen, "It must be hard work for you to care for your bedridden child day in and day out like this. I happen to know some Tzu Chi volunteers. How about me asking them to come over and see if they can help in any way?"

That was how Tzu Chi volunteers became regular visitors at the household. They couldn't do anything to reverse Huang's condition, but they could at least talk with Shen and give her emotional support. Members of the Tzu Chi International Medical Association (TIMA) also began visiting the family regularly to check on Huang. With care from all these people, Shen





In mid-December 2017, Huang and her parents attended a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony, during which the family went onstage to share their story with other attendees. Shen thanked Master Cheng Yen for allowing her love to flood into their home, and Huang, with tears rolling down her cheeks, thanked her parents for taking care of her.

CHEN QUN-CHENG

and lift her spirits. She feels energized every time they come.

"My daughter asked me to speak less when you visit," Shen said with a smile to the group of visitors. "She wants to hear you talk."

"She has been bedridden for over two decades, and yet she hasn't developed a single bed sore," said Dr. Ji to the mother. "That's really something. A large credit goes to you." While checking up on Huang and talking to her during his visits, the doctor makes a point of extending emotional support to the mother too.

"Remember to thank your mom," he reminded her again.

Shen looked at her daughter and then said, "She wants to talk." She dexterously removed the

tracheotomy tube and suctioned water from it so that her daughter could speak.

"Thank you...for taking care...of me," Huang said.

"She's thanking her mom," a volunteer observed. A few people in the room took out their handkerchiefs and wiped the corners of their eyes.

"Blessed are those...who derive joy...from doing good," Huang spoke up again. "Wise are...those who attain...peace by being...understanding toward others." With every breath, she could only utter two or three words. This short sentence took her a lot of effort to finish.

"Awesome," someone else said. "She's sharing with us what she has learned from listening to the Master's talks." The people around her bed broke

into applause while some allowed their tears to flow freely down their cheeks.

Serving as a bridge

Before they left, the Tzu Chi volunteers sang a song to the family: "May you have a long life and endless blessings, may you have a long life and endless blessings...."

The expression on Huang's face changed. "I... don't want...a long life." She strained to utter the words.

The volunteers immediately realized that they had made a faux pas. Short of a medical miracle, Huang would have to continue to lie on that bed for as long as she lived. It was no wonder she didn't want a long life. The volunteers blamed themselves for not having been more thoughtful when they sang that song.

"Okay, let's redo this," a volunteer said. "This time we'll wish you peace and happiness."

"May you have peace and happiness, may you have peace and happiness...." the volunteers sang. In their hearts, they were thanking Huang for teaching them an important lesson. They told themselves to be sure to put themselves in a care recipient's shoes when they conducted home visits in the future.

Later, in a regular group meeting, the volunteers reviewed their work for Huang and her family and discussed what more they could do for the family. One volunteer said that she felt that Huang had become more cheerful with the help of the Master's teachings. Her mother, on the other hand, often looked a little down.

Another volunteer followed and said that Shen had once told her she had been bothered by the way her neighbors looked at her—it was as if they felt that her family must have been jinxed to have a patient like that at home.

"Then perhaps we should visit the neighbors, serve as a bridge between them and Shen, and help resolve the situation?" someone else offered.

A newer volunteer raised her concerns: "But if we visit the neighbors uninvited, wouldn't we be disturbing them? Would we make them unhappy?"

"The neighbors may feel disturbed, but I still think this is worth trying."

Most of the volunteers agreed with the last volunteer, so they decided to call on the neighbors and invite them to visit Shen with them. They then settled on a date to do that.

The volunteers reached another decision in the meeting. They felt that although Huang couldn't

move, she shouldn't be deprived of the ability to give. They decided to suggest to Shen that she hold her daughter's hand in hers and drop money into a coin bank, which they could then use to help the needy.

Reconnecting

On the day they had selected to visit the neighbors, the volunteers arrived at the alley where Shen and her family lived, broke into groups, and rang the doorbells of Shen's neighbors.

"Hello, we're Tzu Chi volunteers. May we have a few minutes of your time?" volunteer Lin Gui-xiang (林桂香) said to a woman who had answered her door.

"Certainly," the woman said. "Hey, I know you! You run a beauty salon in this community."

Lin exchanged a few pleasantries with the neighbor, and then asked if she knew the family living next door.

"Yes, of course. We've been neighbors for over 20 years. Our kids used to play together when they were little, but we've sort of grown apart. After a daughter in that family had a traffic accident and became bedridden, we rarely visited them. We didn't want to intrude or disturb them"

Lin encouraged the neighbor to visit Shen and her family every once in a while. Doing so would bring warmth to the family and help them feel cared for and less alone. "We're just about to pay them a visit," Lin said to the woman. "If you're free, why don't you come along?"

Just like that, the volunteers succeeded in getting quite a few neighbors to visit Shen with them. The family's usually quiet living room became alive with all the visitors and the cheerful conversation among them.

"It wasn't that I hadn't thought of visiting," a neighbor said to Shen. "But I had second thoughts because I was worried you might have had your hands full taking care of your daughter."

Shen thanked the neighbor and the others for dropping in. Seeing her living room filled with visitors, her eyes became red and tearful.

Just a few steps away lay Huang's room. Seemingly oblivious to the noise from the living room, she listened attentively to a program being aired on Tzu Chi Da Ai TV. She had learned earlier from that channel that Vietnam had just been hit by a typhoon and that some areas had been seriously flooded. With her mother's help, she had deposited some spare change into a coin bank that morning to help disaster victims. ♣



Face Your Emotions With Ease

By Wu Deng-shan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Hsiao Yiu-hwa

Night follows day, day follows night. To us, this is one of the most natural of rhythms. No one would try to stop day from giving way to night or vice versa. No matter our desire or determination, trying to alter this natural cycle would prove utterly fruitless.

Our moods often follow a pattern, like night follows day. We feel up one moment, down the next. While each of us might encounter different circumstances in life, it's impossible for things to always go our way. As a result, positive and negative emotions knock on our door, each in their turn. There is no escaping it. Yet while no one would try to stop night from following day, some people seek eternal happiness—a pain-free life. It is a vain quest, like trying to stop a wave from breaking on the shore.

Being unattached helps us face a life in which there is no escape from the ups and downs of circumstances and the rise and fall of feelings.

When happiness arrives at your doorstep, enjoy it without vainly trying to hold on to it. Happiness is like a breeze. It comes into our house through a window, bringing us fresh air and coolness, only to leave through another window.

Likewise, when pain befalls, raging at it will only bring you more suffering. It is better by far to practice acceptance so that it does not affect you as negatively as it might. Pain is like a cloud. It may hide a patch of clear sky from view for a time, but it never stays in one place for long. It is gone with a sudden gust of wind.

It takes practice to be able to face the inevitable ups and downs in life with poise. It's not something you can attain in a short time. However, such an ability is worth cultivating. Will you allow a mishap to make tall waves in your heart or just some minor ripples that soon dissipate? It all depends on how well you cultivate yourself.

Don't let happiness go to your head or allow yourself to be caught in a downward spiral of difficult emotions. Think of your cycle of emotions as natural as the rotation of night and day, like waves that come and go. The ups and downs of your emotional life are like the sun—as they rise, so shall they fall.

When you can embrace this truth, your life will surely be more deeply grounded and peaceful. ☸

The Illustrated JING SI APHORISMS

The Buddha says:

The most important thing I teach is to cultivate the mind. You should work hard to control your desires, keep your actions, thoughts, and words proper, and avoid greed, anger, and delusion. Always remember that everything will pass away.



The mind should be like the bright moon. Wherever there is water, there is the reflection of the moon.



The mind should be like the sky. Whenever the clouds part, there is blue sky.



The mind should be like a mirror. Although the reflections of everything around it keep changing, the mirror itself never changes. In the same way, our minds should be steady in a constantly changing world.



The Christian God guides us on the way of love for all, while the Buddha guides us on the way of compassion. Whether it is love or compassion, we are all walking on a proper way of spirituality. The aspirations of religious leaders should be as broad as the ocean. Every current, stream, brook and river join together in the ocean. I certainly expect that we can emphasize our similarities and not our differences, and constantly encourage each other.

Translated by E E Ho and W.L. Rathje; drawings by Tsai Chih-chung; coloring by May E. Gu

Tzu Chi Events Around the World



Portugal

After forest fires ravaged central and northern Portugal in June and October 2017, Pedro Alves, a deputy at the Portuguese national parliament, requested assistance from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center (TECC), Lisbon, the equivalent of Taiwan's embassy in Lisbon. In response, Representative (Ambassador) Raymond L. S. Wang (王樂生) wrote two letters to the Tzu Chi Foundation headquarters in Taiwan requesting aid for fire victims.

With the help of Ambassador Wang, Tzu Chi volunteers from France, England, and the United States went to Portugal in early December 2017 to survey the damage, visit victims, and talk to government officials. The victims of the forest fires were mostly farmers. Their farms, implements, and livestock—things that they needed to make a living—had gone up in flames. After the visits, the volunteers decided to distribute gift vouchers,

Tzu Chi held three distributions in February for victims of forest fires in Portugal.

which the recipients could use to pay for daily necessities and implements. With the assistance of local governments and the TECC, the foundation obtained a list of victims and began to plan and prepare for distributions in Portugal.

On February 24 and 25, 2018, 68 volunteers from Germany, England, France, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, the United States, and Portugal held three distributions for 492 affected families in Tondela and Vouzela. Four volunteers licensed to practice medicine in the European Union provided health consultations on site.

Ambassador Wang took part in all three distributions. He pointed out that though Portugal and Taiwan were geographically very far apart, the distributions had brought the countries much closer, thanks to Tzu Chi volunteers and donors.

Vietnam

Tzu Chi Vietnam has awarded scholarships to students from impoverished families in District Nine of Ho Chi Minh City twice a year since 2009. The award ceremony for the latest round of scholarships, for more than 550 students, was held on January 14, 2018, at Phuoc Binh Secondary School. A distribution of daily goods was held at the same time for the students and their families.

Eighty-five volunteers worked together at the ceremony to serve the attendees. As people began to arrive, volunteers lined up at the entrance, singing and clapping to welcome everyone. Other volunteers helped students sign in, and then guided them to their seats in the auditorium. Many students had brought their coin banks to donate to Tzu Chi. Volunteers gave each of them a pen as a token of appreciation. Parents sat in a separate area, entertained by other volunteers.

During the ceremony, volunteers talked about the importance of environmental protection and promoted recycling, which is an important part of the work of Tzu Chi. They also introduced how the foundation began and explained that the donations to the foundation come from many good-hearted people. After the students were awarded the scholarships and were leaving the auditorium, volunteers gave each of the students a coin bank to encourage them to save money to help the needy.

Next, students picked up their distribution goods, including cooking oil, noodles, and rice. Because each sack of rice weighed 10 kilograms and was heavy for some smaller children, volunteers helped carry the rice to the children's parents.

Le Nha Thanh, one of the scholarship recipients, is a tenth grader. She said that she drops money into her coin bank when she wakes up

every morning. Doing that makes her happy. It allows her to help needy people and become more frugal in the process.

Duong Nguyen Khoa, a sophomore at a teachers college, said that Tzu Chi has helped him for five years and that the scholarships have reduced the burden on his parents. As a beneficiary of other people's kind-hearted help, he will do his best to help those in need after he graduates.

Paraguay

Hogar de Anciano San Agustin is a nursing home in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. Forty-three seniors currently live there and are cared for by three sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict. The nursing home receives no funding from the government; all of its operating funds come from charities and kind individuals.

Tzu Chi volunteers learned from Sister Maria of the nursing home that the three sisters were spread thin taking care of the seniors, and so they wanted to do something to help. On January 28,

18 volunteers visited the nursing home to serve the residents and give the sisters some relief.

Sister Maria asked the volunteers if they could help cut the residents' fingernails and shave male residents. Volunteers happily set to work. For the event, Cai Min-wei (蔡敏薇) said she searched the internet for tips on how to shave elderly people. She hoped she could one day shave her own grandfather in Xiamen, China.

Volunteer Zhang Min (張敏), who once suffered from depression, said that she liked to participate in Tzu Chi events. She massaged some residents and trimmed their fingernails on this day. She was happy she could bring some cheer to the older people.

Volunteers also put on a song and dance performance and led residents in exercises.

The group donated four bathroom wheelchairs, 51 boxes of medicine, 200 kilograms of vegetables, and 400 adult diapers to the nursing home on this visit. They also agreed to pay for some repair work to the facility.

A volunteer carries a student's rice for her. Tzu Chi Vietnam held a scholarship award ceremony for students in District Nine of Ho Chi Minh City on January 14, 2018. A distribution of daily goods was held at the same time.



WEN TAN-LIANG

Cai Min-wei, a member of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association, shaves a resident at the San Agustin nursing home, Ciudad del Este, Paraguay. Tzu Chi volunteers visited the nursing home on January 28, 2018, to serve and bring some cheer to the senior residents.



SONG JIN-SHENG



Children participate in a game of musical chairs at a monthly relief distribution in Bangkok, Thailand.

Thailand

Tzu Chi volunteers in Bangkok hold a monthly distribution of goods and financial aid for care recipients. At the distribution on January 7, volunteers also celebrated the upcoming Children's Day with the children of care recipients.

Volunteers rented vehicles, as they do every month, to bring attendees to the venue at the Bangkok Jing Si Hall. The event soon kicked into high gear as volunteers led participants in group activities and games. Gifts, including toys, school supplies, daily goods, and even bicycles, were awarded as part of the fun and games. People young and old were in high spirits as they participated in the activities.

After all the gifts had been given out, volunteers brought out delicious Thai dishes for the attendees to enjoy. The people who had prepared the food, consisting of Tzu Chi volunteers and care recipients, were invited to line up at the venue to receive thanks from other participants. Volunteers and care recipients alike called out "Thank you" in gratitude.

Sarai, one of the care recipients, said that Tzu Chi has helped her family for 19 years. Her husband is ill and cannot work, so she does odd jobs to scrape together a living. Without the foundation's help, she wouldn't have been able to afford her husband's medical bills. She referred particularly to her husband's cataract surgery, which the foundation had paid for. Once his eyesight was restored and he could care for himself, she could go out and work with an easier mind. Sarai liked coming to the monthly event. Participating in the cheerful activities each month allowed her to temporarily forget her worries and cares.

Seventy-eight-year-old Jamnian, sitting in a wheelchair, watched people dance with a smile on her face. Even though she could only sit and watch people dance, she was happy and content. She and her husband, who collect and sell recyclable garbage for a living, have received care from Tzu Chi since 2006. They do not have children, but Jamnian said they were not lonely because the volunteers were like their children. She enjoyed meeting people each month at the event.

Tzu Chi volunteers in Thailand will continue to bring love and relief to needy people and help brighten their worlds.

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To regard ourselves lightly is prajna (wisdom). To regard ourselves highly is attachment.
—Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY LI BAI-SHI