

COMPASSION & RELIEF

# TZU CHI USA JOURNAL



- ◆ DHARMA AS WATER
- ◆ ECOVERSE SAN DIEGO



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**DHARMA MASTER CHENG YEN,  
FOUNDER OF  
TZU CHI FOUNDATION**

## **CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM**

thoughts for meditation, contemplation, and reflection from Master Cheng Yen

### **New Seedlings of Love**

Plant a seed of love in the field in your heart.  
Be a diligent farmer and cultivate it  
through watering, fertilizing, and weeding.

When love sprouts and bears fruit in the heart,  
it will disseminate more seeds.  
Then seedlings of love will cover the land.

When there is love in our hearts, when we exercise Great Love,  
there is nothing we cannot accomplish.  
Thus the future of the Earth, of the world,  
will be filled with hope.

*Compiled into English by the Dharma as Water Editorial Team*



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# US TZU CHI 360

## New Episodes Every Sunday

Real-life stories about US Tzu Chi volunteers  
active in their communities and around the world:  
a view from all angles,  
a view from all perspectives:

### US Tzu Chi 360

Watch episodes online at [www.us.tzuchi.org](http://www.us.tzuchi.org)  
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Several stories in this issue  
are also featured on  
US Tzu Chi 360.

Please go online to  
watch the stories  
marked with a  
USTC360 logo!



# A World Full of Bodhisattvas

Han Huang

This past summer, I had an opportunity to attend a retreat in Taipei with hundreds of Tzu Chi volunteers from all around the globe. We shared our experiences with one another and learned from Dharma Master Cheng Yen about her vision for the future.

This year, Master's message focused on Tzu Chi's "human resources." She explained that there is simply too much to be done to bring peace and stability to our disaster-stricken world for any of us to take on the work alone. Many talented people must work together to make a difference.

Master Cheng Yen even provided a detailed description of the talented people needed for the task: modest and not self-absorbed; full of self-respect and self-control; free from selfish love and able to treat all people equally; big-hearted and able to control temper; hard-working but not competitive; dignified in manner and speech; knowledgeable and virtuous with pure intentions; and able to forgo the trivial to focus on major principles.

The description is easy to understand, but difficult to achieve. To build a team of talented people to work toward a more peaceful and harmonious world, I feel there are two tasks that require our focus.

First, we need to grow into the people that Master Cheng Yen believes we should be. We can work toward this by studying the Dharma every day and taking it into our hearts. Many good resources are already available for us: Da Ai Television programs, radio programs, Master's books, community events, and more. Most are even easily accessible in English on the US Tzu Chi website or in Jing Si Bookstores.

Second, we need to find ways to recruit more likeminded people to work beside us in the community. This is a more difficult task, but it is not impossible. Just look at South Africa, where Michael Pan and a small group of volunteers have inspired more than five thousand local Zulu women to become dedicated Tzu Chi volunteers.

At the retreat, one volunteer shared a story which I feel provides a great model for us to follow. Several years ago, recently widowed Ms. Zhang was invited to the home of a senior Tzu Chi volunteer, Ms. Huang. Ms. Zhang knew that Ms. Huang had donated a lot of money to Tzu Chi, so she expected her to be very wealthy. When she found instead that Ms. Huang lived in a small rented apartment, Ms. Zhang was shocked. She asked, "You've given so much to Tzu Chi, why not buy yourself a house first?"

Ms. Huang did not answer the question, but instead responded with two of her own: "You have several homes, but was your late husband able to take one with him? Though you have much money in the bank, could your husband take even one cent?" Ms. Zhang felt as though she were struck by lightning. As she looked over at Ms. Huang enjoying a simple bowl of noodles, she understood what it means to be content. She not only began to donate more generously, but also actively volunteered her time.

Like Ms. Huang, when we encourage others to join us in Tzu Chi's volunteer work, we must remember to always practice the Four All-Embracing Virtues: charitable offerings, loving words, beneficial conduct, and cooperative deeds. By serving as examples through our actions, we can inspire others in the same way that Master Cheng Yen and other volunteers have inspired us, and the number of bodhisattvas will grow. 🌱

# CREATING RICHES

In Buddhism, we say that everything comes from the heart and mind. Our mindset, way of thinking, and perspective create our life. Even if our life circumstances are not good, we do not have to suffer. It is possible to be poor yet feel no hardship. We can even, despite our poverty, experience a sense of great abundance.

Recently, I heard about two children from a low-income family donating money from their coin bank at our Tzu Chi office. The children had saved up this money over the course of the year and the coin bank was heavy from their small change. The children's act of giving made me very happy because it means so much. What is it that I see in their contribution?

Firstly, it is not easy for the children to save up money—in their family there is not a lot of money to go around. But when the children were given a tiny bit of spending money, they chose to save it to help other people. Like any other child, there are things that these children want or would love to have, yet they did not spend the money on themselves.


They made this choice not only once or twice but continually throughout the year, every time they put a coin into their coin bank. Even when the coin bank grew full and they had accumulated a sizeable sum, they were not tempted to use that money to buy something for themselves. Their resolve to let that money help others was very firm.

The children may be materially impoverished, but in their hearts they have already come out of poverty. See, despite being poor they can already give. They do not feel any sense of shortage or deprivation. There is no sense of deficiency. Instead, their hearts are made rich by the love they feel for others. That is why they can be so generous and giving.

With their rich hearts, I see a very hopeful future for these children. This is because a fundamental law of life is that we reap what we sow. This is the principle of karma. Every good thought and kind act sows a seed of good karma. As these seeds accumulate, one day they will ripen into the fruits of blessings and good fortune. When children start from a young age to give and help others, they will plant many, many seeds of good karma throughout their lifetime.

Planting seeds is a very powerful thing. All the crops growing on the land originated from seeds. A tiny rice seed grows into a rice stalk with many rice grains. A fruit seed grows into a tree that bears fruit every year, and each fruit in turn contains many seeds. From this we can see how the original seed that the tree grew from comes to produce a countless number of seeds. This is why I often speak of the power of the seed—one seed can multiply into countless seeds; at the same time, everything originates from a single tiny seed.

The heart of giving is like this seed.



From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks  
Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team

With every kind thought and act of giving, we create riches for ourselves—we create spiritual riches that enable us to transcend poverty; we also create material riches because doing good sows seeds of good karma that will bring about blessings and good fortune one day.

This principle is very simple and we can easily apply it in our daily lives. It is something each and every one of us can do. Just by having the thought of helping others and saving a coin every day, we can do this.

In Myanmar, there are struggling rice farmers practicing this concept. In 2008, when Myanmar suffered a devastating cyclone, Tzu Chi went there to bring disaster aid. We learned that there were rice farmers who were perpetually in debt because their harvests were never abundant enough for them to repay the loans they had taken and still have enough to feed their families. We decided to help these rice farmers by giving them seed and fertilizer. Grateful for this help and inspired by Tzu Chi's origins—when ordinary housewives donated a coin each day to accumulate money to help the less fortunate—these rice farmers wanted to do the same and to give back by helping others.

Because many of them do not have money to donate, every day when they scoop out rice grains to cook for their family's meals, they will set a handful aside in a separate jar. When the jar is full of rice, they give it to the poorest families in their village. This practice of saving

and giving is still going on. The rice farmers are willing to eat a little less at each meal in order to help feed other families going hungry.

Why are they willing to do this? Due to their difficulties, they have few means to help others. It makes them very happy to know that through saving like this they can still contribute despite having little. They cherish it as a precious opportunity to practice giving and to do good.

This is an example of poor people helping other poor people. If even people leading such hard lives can do this, imagine how much good all of us can do if we just decide to do so. All we have to do is to spend a little less money when we buy things and donate the money we save from that to charity. For our meals, we can emulate the rice farmers in Myanmar and eat just enough to be eighty-percent full. Then, through the money we save on our meals or groceries, we can have something to donate to charity. It is a small thing to do, but it can really go a long way.

Just imagine how many people can be helped if everyone can do this. In such small ways, we can really make a difference. It is easy to do if we can recognize it and do it.

This is the great power that arises from our hearts and minds. We can do so much good and it all begins with our having the heart. This is why the Buddha tells us that the heart and mind create everything. 🌱

**A** holistic, grassroots approach to supporting and enriching education for low-income students, Tzu Chi's Happy Campus Program is now active in more than twenty schools across the United States and Haiti.

Tailored to each school's individual needs, Happy Campus provides community outreach programs, school supply donations, food backpacks, environmental education, health education, academic awards, teacher appreciation luncheons, scholarships, family support, and tutoring.

Tzu Chi volunteers engaged in the Happy Campus Program joyfully serve the students, teachers, and educational stakeholders of underserved public schools with gratitude, respect, and love.



San Francisco, CA (pg. 10)

Las Vegas, NV (pg. 34)

San Jose, CA (pg. 30)

Orange County, CA (pg. 20)





Happy 

Campus

Program



Washington, DC (pg. 16)



Houston, TX (pg. 33)



Port-au-Prince, Haiti (pg. 25)

HAITI



# Call Me “Tzu Chi”

Fay Chou

Photo: Lulu Yin

*Volunteers distribute uniforms for the 2011-12 school year at Dr. William L. Cobb Elementary School.*

“Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!” A young child runs after volunteer Jenny Yao on the playground of John Muir Elementary School in the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco, California. As Jenny turns around, the child looks at her and says, “Oh, you’re the other Tzu Chi.”

In San Francisco, the children of the Happy Campus Program have been taught to call all Tzu Chi volunteers by this name. “I want them to identify us by our uniform, not by the individual,” says Roxanne Buchwitz, Tzu Chi’s Charity Lead in San Francisco and Happy Campus Program (HCP) Coordinator for the

whole country. In these children’s unstable lives, Roxanne wants there to be something they can count on: the presence of Tzu Chi.

## **A Program of Love and Care**

Officially launched in 2009, HCP now operates in twenty-two schools across eight cities and five states. Unlike other charity organizations that target very specific areas for their support, Tzu Chi’s HCP takes a holistic approach, helping students and their families in a variety of ways—tutoring, uniform distributions, hot meals, even job training for parents—and tailoring the program to meet

each school's specific needs.

Taking to heart Master Cheng Yen's urging to bridge gaps and conserve resources, HCP refrains from providing aid already offered by other charity organizations, choosing instead to complement their work. "The first thing we ask is what resources they already have, so we can give them something else," Roxanne explains.

At first, Tzu Chi volunteers encountered resistance from teachers and principals doubtful of what they could bring. Roxanne recalls especially strong resistance from an elementary school in East Palo Alto. Though located in a poor city with high crime rates, the school was accustomed to calling on the Silicon Valley tech giants of neighboring Palo Alto whenever they needed support.

"We don't need anything from you," the principal told Roxanne.

"Do those companies give you love and care?" Roxanne persisted, "We have many programs. We can also teach the kids Chinese."

Sensing there might be something different with this unfamiliar charity organization, the principal agreed to give Tzu Chi a chance.

Longbeforetheireffortswereincorporated into a nationwide Happy Campus Program in 2009, San Francisco Tzu Chi volunteers had already been providing afterschool tutoring, giving weekend backpacks loaded with food for kids who would otherwise go hungry, and distributing thousands of pounds of food to families each Friday at John Muir Elementary School and each Monday at Gordon J. Lau Elementary School.

As time went on, volunteers continued all that they had been doing and added more projects. As volunteers became more deeply involved, they found other ways they could add value to the schools. They continue to

adapt as needs are identified.

Today, success stories can be seen across the Bay Area. Thurgood Marshall Academic High School previously had only one student with perfect attendance but now boasts eighty-five. Charles Drew Elementary School, once widely known for poor academic achievement, has been recognized as the most improved public school in the district. The local YMCA invites Tzu Chi volunteers to teach Chinese language during afterschool tutoring sessions and to lead all academic classes during their annual six-week summer camp. San Francisco Food Bank has asked Tzu Chi to continually distribute food to 350 low-income families with a yearly fund of \$20,000. San Francisco's Department of Education, which typically only recognizes the outstanding contributions of individuals, has even given special recognition to Tzu Chi as an organization. How did Tzu Chi volunteers accomplish so much so quickly?

### Getting Them There

Early on, volunteers sat down with school administrators and learned that to truly make a difference, they needed to strike at the core of the schools' problems by making an impact on academic success.

To help the children in their studies, the volunteers needed to interact with them at school. But truancy was a major problem. Not only were children suffering by missing their classes, the entire school was affected, as government funding was determined by daily attendance numbers. So, the volunteers had to start by finding a way to get the children to school each day.

First, they looked to the parents. In addition to giving them food, and later job training sessions, volunteers even helped find furniture and appliances for families who

were living in government housing. Sometimes, volunteers called people selling items on Craigslist

to assist them: "This is for a low-income family; would you be willing to donate your washer?" Oftentimes, people agreed to donate the items they were hoping to sell.

Part of the goal of this assistance was to eliminate any excuses the parents had for not sending their children to school. But the volunteers were also conscious that handouts are not a long-term solution. Seeing the wisdom in the old saying "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime," HCP volunteers implemented the Parent Job Center in 2011. Here, volunteers offer job training to the parents, teach them how to use a computer, sign them up for email addresses, and help them look for jobs online.

As for the children, volunteers designed a smoothie incentive program. Each month, volunteers cut up 150 pounds of fresh fruit to make smoothies for students in five schools who have maintained perfect attendance throughout the month. Those who were tardy

{ Under the influence of Tzu Chi's gratitude, respect, and love, children are transformed. }

or absent can only watch their classmates enjoy their treats.

"Why do you come to school?" volunteers asked some children after a couple months.

"Smoothies!"

"No, you come to learn!" At least the first step was accomplished: more of the children were at school. The rest could still be worked out.

### A Way to Live

Roxanne is often asked, "Why are you so passionate about Happy Campus?"

"Because of the kids!" Roxanne replies. "Each day I go to the schools, I have to fulfill their wishes. Whatever we promise, we have to deliver. We enrich their lives and bring them hope; we cannot fail them."

Roxanne was once head of the IT department at a major company. She had stock options, two secretaries, a housekeeper, and authority over 120 employees in seven countries. But she gave it up to become a full-time volunteer. "I don't need to do this. I don't even need to go shopping for myself." But she does. Now she spends her days visiting several schools, shopping at the Food Bank, and buying clothing for students.

Children need to have an identity to hold onto, Roxanne explains. HCP volunteers want to imprint in the children's minds the idea of Tzu Chi as the reliable caregiver. "The kids become very attached to you," says Roxanne, "Mom may be remarried, Dad may be in jail. They get worried when you don't show up, because they fear you may never come again. When young college volunteers come to help



*Volunteers blend smoothies to reward students for a month of perfect attendance. Photo: Shirley Lee*

with tutoring, the kids love to hold their hands; they long for that intimate touch, for a normal human relationship."

"I need to find them a way to live," Roxanne says, knowing that without care and guidance these children may grow up to be problems for society, rather than contributing members.

Roxanne recalls when Tzu Chi first began distributing school uniforms at the request of the Department of Education. The first time the owner of a local school uniform store went to measure the students for their clothes, she witnessed abusive and violent children fighting and even throwing chairs. She remarked, "Wow, it's life-threatening to come here!"

When asked what they want to be when they grow up, one child replied, "I want to be a robber!" HCP volunteers were shocked, but

they realized that many of the children know only that kind of life. Living in this world, they have a deprived experience. They only know ten percent of life and never get to see the rest. But in HCP, Tzu Chi volunteers can provide them with love and care, and a window to the world beyond. By learning Chinese language and hearing traditional Chinese stories, the children catch a glimpse of another culture and an understanding that they should respect people and cultures that are different than their own.

### Tzu Chi's Teaching Methods

Tzu Chi volunteers have provided weekly vegetarian appreciation lunches to teachers for the past three years. Moved by Tzu Chi's humanitarian endeavors and philosophy learned during these lunches, teachers started to invite Tzu Chi volunteers



Photo: Lulu Yin



Going beyond academic tutoring, volunteers also provide advice on everyday ways to care for the environment. Photo: Lulu Yin



*In the afternoons, volunteers guide Malcolm X Elementary students through math problems. Photo: Lulu Yin*

to speak to their classes and school-wide assemblies.

At the weekly appreciation luncheons, volunteers no longer serve the teachers; they taught the students to do it. Watching students in child-sized Tzu Chi aprons walk around to each table to ask, "Do you need more tea?" or "Would you like more sugar for your coffee?" the teachers were moved to tears. "I've never seen my kids behave this well!" one exclaimed.

When the children do misbehave, many adults feel they have to raise their voices. But Tzu Chi volunteers have demonstrated that there is no need to do so. "I'm just here to tell you what you have to do; I don't have to yell or shout," the volunteers tell the students. Once the students understand that there is a certain way to behave, they can begin to accept the idea of following rules. Then, they can begin to learn.

After school, volunteers tutor math in the computer lab. Students log in and go through tailored lessons at their own pace. If strong in addition, they are taught subtraction; if doing well in multiplication, they are drilled in division.

Frequently, frustrations arise. Some children hit all the keys and complain, "This computer is so dumb; it keeps asking me the

same question!"

"No, the computer doesn't know you are smart, because you keep giving it the wrong answers!"

The volunteers tell the students, "You're smarter than the computer, right? So don't keep pressing all the keys! Think. What is the computer asking you?" By doing this, volunteers foster critical reasoning skills and perseverance.

Volunteers also work with teachers and school administrators to assess results from standardized math tests. Then they create individualized lesson plans within the computer system that will focus on areas in which the students need the most help.

In addition to math, Tzu Chi volunteers also designed simple Chinese lessons that are fun to sing or chant. With these, the children learn Chinese by repetition, the most natural way to learn another language. "Mother is *mama: mama, mama, mama*. Father is *baba: baba, baba, baba*. Monday, Monday: *xing qi yi...*"

At the school's annual talent show in 2012, a group of students recited an American poem and then started chanting, "Mother is *mama: mama, mama, mama...*" They won first prize. Some parents in attendance cried, "I never imagined my son would be able to speak Chinese!"

### **A New "Tzu Chi"**

Most of the students at HCP schools do not have easy lives. Many of them have parents serving terms in jail. Whenever the parent is transferred to another jail, the child has to move too. Others are in temporary shelters which are only available for three months at a time. So feelings of anxiety are strong in many of the children.

Tim is one such child. A very well-behaved boy, Tim diligently dropped a penny into his bamboo bank every day, just as the Tzu Chi volunteers asked him. Some of the pennies he found on the street, others were given to him by his parents. One cold and rainy day, the volunteers did not see Tim at school. But he appeared at the bus stop in the afternoon. He got off the bus and ran toward the volunteers, but he tripped and fell. The bamboo bank he was carrying was knocked out of his hands and pennies rolled everywhere.

"I just wanted to bring this back to you, because I'm going to another school now," Tim told them. His mother was being transferred to a different jail, so Tim was in the process of switching foster homes. "I need to return this to you." Tim held out the half-empty bamboo bank. The volunteers could not help but cry as they helped him pick up pennies from the ground.

"I don't know what to do," Tim said, lowering his head.

"You can still put a penny in the bamboo bank each day," Roxanne told him, "You have just been promoted. You have to be the Tzu Chi at your new school now."

"Huh?"

"You have to tell the other kids in your new school to do good deeds, think good thoughts, and say good things. You are Tzu Chi now."

"Oh, okay." A glint of joy flickered in Tim's eyes.

"I'll go visit you," Roxanne promised him, "I know your principal!"

### Gratitude, Respect, and Love

Gratitude, respect, and love cannot fill stomachs or produce good grades. However, under the influence of Tzu Chi's gratitude,

respect, and love, children are transformed. Many of the children now behave well, come to school consistently, and are willing to learn. Most importantly, they have bigger hearts: they realize that there are other people in the world besides them.

Eversince bamboo banks were introduced to the schools in 2006, children have been saving money one penny at a time. When disaster strikes in the world, they generously donate money from their bamboo banks and from selling recyclables. When Haiti was struck by a major earthquake in 2010, many students even went out on the streets to dance, perform, and sell salads and cookies to collect more money.

For these deprived children to work so hard to collect donations and give so happily to others, it is obvious that the love, care, and respect they have received has taught them gratitude and selfless compassion. Clearly, the Happy Campus Program is leading them onto the right path towards a happy life.

"Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!" A child runs up to Roxanne and eagerly reports, "Another Tzu Chi came to the school today. She's old; I helped her carry her bag."

"Wonderful! Do you feel proud that you helped people?"

"Yes!" Having received his praise, he hops away with a big grin.

"I want them to identify our uniform so when they move away, the feeling of attachment is not disrupted. They don't have to remember that at this school, it's Roxanne; at that school, it's Jenny," Roxanne smiles broadly, "And I'm proud to be called Tzu Chi."

**Editor's Note:** *The children's names have been changed to protect their identities.*



#24|#36|#38|#45

# Love Grows Roots



Ruihung Tsai, Mark Tsai, WinLong Chang, Wendy Chan  
Translated by Mei-li Hamilton

*Photo: Mark Tsai*

**B**road Acres Elementary School is located in Silver Spring, Maryland, one of the poorest communities in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Ninety-five percent of the school's students receive free breakfast and lunch through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs run by the US government, and the school is constantly faced with difficulties: it remains short of books and other materials, and students' grades are far below average.

Every month since the end of 2008, Tzu Chi volunteers have distributed rice, oil, flour, beans, pasta, milk, bread, and more to families in need. Volunteers work with local retailers to purchase the food at wholesale prices and also accept donations from local businesses. The school's social workers evaluate each student's family situation every three months to determine who is eligible to receive food. Since the program began, Tzu Chi volunteers

have become involved with more and more activities in the community, from food distribution to reading programs to medical assistance.

## **Wind, Rain, and Study**

After the food distribution program was shown to be successful and as volunteers became more familiar with the school and its students, they decided that the next step should be to work with students to help them improve their reading ability.

On April, 21, 2009, volunteers attended a "Literacy Night" held by the school. Around forty parents came to the event with their children despite heavy wind and rain. Tzu Chi volunteers interacted with parents and children to help understand their reading levels, abilities, and study environment. The volunteers found that because many parents spoke very little English and had long work



schedules, they often had neither the ability nor the time to help their children learn.

It was clear that many students needed help in order to succeed, so volunteers worked closely with school administrators to organize a tutoring program to help the students. On October 10, 2009, phase one of the Happy Campus Tutoring Program began. School administrators provided books and materials and chose twenty first graders who needed math and English tutoring, while Tzu Chi's DC office gathered twenty high school students and a dozen volunteers to tutor the first graders every Saturday morning.

For the most part, the school and parents were very cooperative, though a few young children were shy and felt insecure working with the "foreign-looking" Tzu Chi volunteers.

For example, one student would not go into the classroom until coaxed by volunteers. Another student, whose father was in prison and mother had disappeared, was very shy and felt inferior to the other students. He needed comforting and encouragement from the volunteers before he could be part of the class.

On April 21, 2010, six months after the tutoring program began, the school held a "Family Reading Night" for students and parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and select new books to read. Teachers from the school then evaluated how the students were doing in class and reported results to Tzu Chi volunteer Ruihung Tsai, the leader of the program.

### Charity and Health Care

Broad Acres Elementary School students are mostly from low-income families, and many of their parents have lost their jobs due to the recession. Because they often cannot afford

medical insurance, they have not had regular physical exams. High blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol are frequently left untreated, leading to major health problems.

In addition to the food distribution and reading programs, Tzu Chi volunteers also began to provide medical advice in 2009. Here is one example of how volunteers helped a family with many different needs:

On April 30, 2009, the monthly food distribution began at six in the evening, but the Du family had already been waiting for an hour. Mr. Du had recently been laid off and Mrs. Du had been ill for a long time, though she did not know what was wrong. They desperately needed food, medical attention, and clothing for their children.

Their daughter wanted to take a pair of black shoes, but they were too small and caused her to limp. Volunteers wanted her to put them back and look for a larger pair, but she insisted that she had to have this pair because she had never had a pair of pretty shoes. Their son liked a pair of name-brand athletic shoes, but they were one size too big.



*Dr. Huang and Joan Tsai test a parent's blood sugar.  
Photo: Mark Tsai*



*Broad Acres students enjoy a Chinese lesson.  
Photo: Mark Tsai*

He refused to give them up, saying, "I can wear them next year."

Dr. Hiro Huang examined Mrs. Du and found that her blood pressure was high and that she was overweight. He told her to eat more vegetables and fruits and to avoid red meat. Mrs. Du told him, "I am not a picky eater, but I don't have much choice in what food I can get." Her problem is common to many poor people: they do not have access to the variety or quality of food that affluent people do.

Every three months Tzu Chi volunteers hold such distributions: giving out clothing and shoes for men, women, and children, as well as kitchenware. Donated items are sorted carefully and displayed as they would be in stores, so that recipients do not feel as though they are sifting through piles of other people's junk.

Each winter, medical volunteers provide flu vaccinations. In the spring and autumn, they provide checkups and consultation. Twice a week, volunteers offer aerobic classes for mothers after they have dropped off their

children at school. And, once a month, nutrition experts educate parents on how to avoid junk food and how to buy and cook healthy food.

After thirteen weeks of these exercise and nutrition programs, participating mothers lost weight and improved their health. In 2011, Tzu Chi's medical group in DC began offering regular physical exams for parents and found gradual improvements in blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol.

### **Sow More Blessings**

The principal of Broad Acres Elementary has called Happy Campus a valuable resource for his school, as he has seen his students achieve great progress since the program began. Faculty members have also recognized that students have become more proactive in interacting with them since Happy Campus began.

One child's father was in jail and his mother had already passed away. Only his grandmother was around to care for him and his sister. When he first started attending tutoring, he was not very interested in learning



Linda, a volunteer and retired teacher, shares a story with the young students. Photo provided by Tzu Chi DC Office



English and math homework each week. They also offer a free nutritious breakfast and other activities including classes on Jing Si Aphorisms, environmental protection, sign language, flower arrangement, and more.

As part of the monthly distributions, volunteers teach environmental protection, encouraging parents to pick up aluminum cans around the campus and the community. These are then collected during the following distribution. Volunteers also collect plastic buckets from restaurants and give them to parents to use and reuse.

Beginning in September 2009, volunteers completely stopped using plastic bags, choosing instead cloth rice bags. They print a Jing Si Aphorism—"Know your blessings, cherish them, and sow more blessings"—on the bags to encourage people to cherish the environment by reusing these bags.

and often had conflicts with his classmates. Visiting his home, volunteers learned that the boy was interested in cars and drawing, so they began to encourage him to develop his talents in these areas. Finally, he started to smile. Not only did he become more willing to learn, he even became more active and attentive than many of his classmates.

Like this boy, many of the children in the program have made very clear progress since the program was started. The high school and college students who serve as tutors see this progress as great validation for their efforts. Each weekend, they sacrifice sleep and drive up to an hour to help children from a variety of backgrounds and ethnicities. In the process, the young volunteer tutors have come to realize that it is not easy to teach and guide children, so they have found greater appreciation for their own teachers and parents. They have become grateful for the opportunity to pass on love and support to the children just as they received from others in the past.

Today, volunteers provide two and a half hours of tutoring and one-on-one help with

Over the years, the volunteers have gradually receded into the background, remaining responsible for planning and purchasing food but leaving more and more of the foreground duties to the families being helped. This helps the families gain new experiences and involves them more deeply in the process.

The work of Tzu Chi volunteers with the Broad Acres Elementary School students and parents is an example of the ability of hard work and persistence over many years to sow the seeds of love in the hearts of parents and students and enrich the entire community. 🌱



Acts of kindness from each one of us are like the nectar of love that can enrich the hearts of many.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen



# Rays of Hope

Emily Chu, Chifēn Lin, Hsiu-Kuo Chen  
Translated by John Ueng

Photo: Emily Chu

On Friday afternoon, students playing on the sports field are brimming with anticipation of the weekend. Suddenly, their attention is drawn to approaching volunteers in blue-and-white. The children break out in an excited scream: "Tzu Chi! Tzu Chi!"

This is the moment that forty-two young students at Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary have waited for all week. To them, Friday is not only the end of the school week and the start of the weekend, but also the day when Tzu Chi volunteers bring them each a blue bag filled with food for the weekend.

Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary School is located in Santa Ana, California, an area with a predominance of low-income households just a few blocks from the affluent city of Irvine. For many years, Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary School has been assisted by volunteers from Tzu Chi Foundation with an annual winter relief distribution that draws many young volunteers from local colleges.

According to Principal Edna Velado, ninety-eight percent of the school's students come from low-income immigrant households. Although breakfast and lunch is provided by the government each weekday, meals are a

constant uncertainty over the weekend. After local Tzu Chi volunteers from Orange County became aware of this situation, it was decided that Romero-Cruz Elementary would be the first school to implement the Happy Campus Program in Southern California. Planning began in May 2011, and the program was implemented in September. Every Friday, volunteers deliver reusable blue bags of weekend food supplies to the students.

The weekly distribution begins with volunteers asking the excited and eager students to sit quietly on the ground as Principal Velado calls out their names one by one. When they hear their names, students take turns standing up and coming forward in an orderly fashion to receive their bags from the volunteers. Once the students have their bags, they each eagerly open them to peek inside. What they find are two to three kinds of healthy instant noodles, cans of beans, fresh fruits, a pack of cookies, a bag of potato chips, a piece of candy, and fresh baked bread.

Preparations for the weekly distributions actually commence on Mondays, as volunteers purchase the foods at the start of the week. On Wednesdays, volunteers gather to divide

the foods and place them in bags. Additionally, volunteer Karis Yu personally bakes bread each Friday morning to add fresh homemade bread to the bags.

More than just food supplies, each bag is also the result of many volunteers' donations of time and effort, including volunteers from other organizations. When the Dharma Masters at the Pao Fa Temple in Irvine heard about the Happy Campus Program, they immediately collected many boxes of canned vegetarian foods and delivered them to volunteers for packing. When students of the community *qigong* class at the local Tzu Chi chapter saw volunteers busily making preparations, they all began to stay after class each week to help. Additionally, three of the chapter's young Hispanic volunteers who used to be aid recipients of Tzu Chi also have taken advantage of the opportunity to give back and help students in their own community.

In following the guidance of Dharma Master Cheng Yen, who teaches that charity work should strive to simultaneously "help the needy and inspire the fortunate," the Orange County Tzu Chi volunteers realized that they need to do more than simply give material goods: they need to instill in the students humanitarian values and inspire their sense of gratitude and charity. At every distribution, the volunteers introduce each food item and describe the gathering of love from many different people that makes them possible, encouraging the students to receive with grateful hearts, so they can learn to help others too.

Before the program began, the volunteers had communicated with the school principal their wish to conduct the distribution personally in order to have more direct interaction with the students and to introduce environmental protection and other virtues through lessons of sign language songs. For the first three weeks, the school principal or other administrative staff member was always present to help with calling names and keeping order. After that, Principal Velado agreed to let volunteers handle the entire distribution themselves.

At first, the students became noisy and boisterous without the school staff present. But

the volunteers quickly employed management strategies to keep order: they divided the boys from the girls and elected leaders from each group to lead fellow students. When the distribution began, students took turns in a clockwise direction, standing up one at a time to come forward and receive their food bags. Since the volunteers were unfamiliar with the proper pronunciation of Hispanic surnames and wished to avoid embarrassment and jeering, they astutely appointed the students with the clearest voices to be in charge of calling names. When handing the food bags to each student, volunteers used both hands and bowed ninety degrees to each student to show respect. In return, students were guided to respectfully say "Thank you!" and bow forty-five degrees while receiving the gift bag with both hands. Using sign language, the volunteers also taught the students to sign "Thank you!" with a gently bending "thumbs up."

In just one month, the students learned to say "thank you," "I love you," and "Tzu Chi" with their hands. They also learned "love," "trust," and "forgiveness" from the song "The Spirit of Great Love." From September through December 2011, the volunteers also introduced environmental protection to the students. To teach energy conservation, Emily Chu wrote true and false tips, such as "when washing your



*Volunteers deliver not just food, but also love and care.*  
Photo: Yi-Juan Lo

hands, you should keep the faucet running until you've finished," on small strips of paper and had students take turns drawing them from a box and reading them aloud. She quizzed them by asking "Is that correct?" Some students said "Yes!" and others said "No!" Each time, she gave the correct answer and explained the reason.

In order to teach the song "The Spirit of Great Love"\* to the students, Tzu Chi volunteer Hsiu-Kuo Chen had to work hard for several days to learn the words and signs for the entire song himself, and then make large cue cards with the lyrics and corresponding signs. Starting in January 2012, the volunteers took a portable stereo with them to the school each week to play the song. Amazingly, the students learned the entire song in just three weeks, and performances of "The Spirit of Great Love" became a shared activity at each weekly distribution. Later, the volunteers also introduced bamboo piggy banks to instill the spirit of saving and frugal living.

After the first year, even students who were afraid of making eye contact became more outspoken and confident. When volunteers played a game with the students, quizzing them about environmental protection and Jing Si Aphorisms, many raised their hands enthusiastically to answer. In May 2012, several students volunteered to stand at the front of the class and tell their classmates about their favorite colors and hobbies and the chores they help their parents with at home. Some students would even come up out of the blue and give volunteers big hugs, making the volunteers feel like family.

Through lessons in environmental protection and Jing Si Aphorisms, the students learned that it is a blessing to be able to help others, and to always be grateful for one's blessings. They learned how to recycle plastic bottles and aluminum cans, and how to conserve electricity and water to protect the environment. Moreover, they also learned kindness and forgiveness from the Jing Si Aphorism "To forgive others is to be kind to oneself."



After the first year, even students who were afraid of making eye contact became more outspoken and confident.

*Backpacks are delivered with both hands and a ninety-degree bow. Children are taught to receive with a forty-five-degree bow and a "thank you."*

*Photo: Jong-Ho Yang*

Seeing the dedication of Tzu Chi volunteers, members of the school staff were moved and inspired. One fourth grade teacher took the time to thank volunteers personally with a thank you card expressing her gratitude for the environmental protection education. A second grade teacher adopted a bamboo bank for her classroom to teach her students to save pennies each day and make good wishes to share their love with others. At the end of the first year, the class gave Tzu Chi \$24.50 and their accumulated good thoughts to help people in need.

The program's success at the Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary School is only the first step for Happy Campus in Orange County. Santa Ana is a small city with a high concentration of low-income immigrants and the highest population density in all of California. Many local elementary school students live on the streets, while others live in cramped quarters or cheap motels. They struggle to find food to eat and shoes and clothes to wear. At school, many have to repeat grades, while others advance to the fifth grade unable to write even their own names. Tzu Chi volunteers in Orange County will continue to expand Happy Campus to bring rays of hope to more schools and more students. 🌱

\* "The Spirit of Great Love" is the "Song of Bodhisattvas" in Issue 31 | Spring 2012.

**Having the strength to help others is a blessing.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

# An Abundance of Hope

Edna Velado

I have the pleasure of serving as principal for two elementary schools in Santa Ana, California. George Washington Carver and Lydia Romero-Cruz Elementary Schools each have approximately one thousand students. Most of their parents are Latino immigrants whose deepest dreams are for their children to make use of their talents and succeed. Their parents realize only too well that education is a bridge for them to change their children's lives. My staff and I strive daily to make sure they have this opportunity.

The neighborhood surrounding our school is an older one. Most of the homes were built in the 1940s and 1950s. Approximately half of our families are doubled-up—often renting a living room or a garage in place of a bedroom. Just as in so many other places, the recession has proven a huge challenge for many of our mothers and fathers who are out of work. However, as is often quoted, "When one door is closed, another is opened."

That opening door—the one leading to hope, and ultimately to life-changing opportunities—has been the Tzu Chi Foundation. At this time, I'd like to share how Tzu Chi has helped so many of my families in different ways.

Martin, Emily, Susan, and their supportive colleagues are perhaps the most optimistic human beings I have had the good fortune of ever meeting. Over the past decade, they have truly understood the mission of my two schools. And that mission is actually a simple recipe for success: study hard, set goals for a better future, and achieve a life that makes use of your best talents while serving others.

What the Tzu Chi Foundation has brought to our campus has been an abundance of hope. We all know that without hope, families become discouraged. Their dreams wither and dry up. And sadly, children fail to seek out their brighter futures. Tzu Chi's donations have kept so very many dreams alive at Carver and Romero-Cruz Schools. Let me provide you with some of my favorite examples:

There was a time just a few short years ago when our campuses were designated as failing schools by the Federal Department of Education. This past year, Romero-Cruz was recognized as a Title I High-Achieving School by that same Department of Education. The schools were honored by the MIND Research Institute and the Orange County Department of Education for achieving the highest math gains in all of Orange County. Finally, last November, the *Orange County Register* nominated both schools as Silver Award winners. Romero-Cruz and Carver placed twenty-eighth and thirty-second, respectively, out of Orange County's 393 public elementary schools.

How did this happen? HOPE. Our children dared to dream that they could achieve. The tutors assisting us weekly and monthly from Tzu Chi and the Family Support Program have provided so much of that hope these last several years. Providing our students with nutritious snacks before the important state testing each year has also played a large role in our school's achievements.

What does this hope look like to our individual children? We all know the example of the small seed which grew into the mighty oak tree. Here

is a similar example: Tzu Chi donated several hundred books to our schools just about five years ago. Today, those books and others we have since purchased have become the heart of our Accelerated Reader Program. Even our students in the special needs programs love reading. They cannot wait to earn their reading points and anxiously look forward to being recognized at an awards assembly for their progress. Our children now look forward to reading. I can remember not long ago when they looked at books as work. Now they see adventure, excitement, and opportunity. That is quite a change, and it began with Tzu Chi's gift of books.

There are many examples of how Tzu Chi's generosity changed the outlook of my families from despair to hope. Mothers have come to my office crying that they could no longer afford to feed their children. In another instance, a father would not allow himself to cry, but had been nearly beaten down with the frustration

The donations that Tzu Chi provided to their families gave them hope again so that both they and their children could continue to dream and to achieve.

of unemployment. He felt himself a failure as a provider for his family. The donations that Tzu Chi provided to their families gave them hope again so that both they

and their children could continue to dream and to achieve. Truly the Happy Campus Program is well-named! As forty-two students leave for home with a backpack full of nutritious foods each weekend, they walk towards their homes with very big smiles on their faces!

Each day we believe that we are making an amazing difference in the lives of our children. Our partnership with Tzu Chi has made our dreams possible too! In education, we often use the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." My teachers, parents, students, and I are all so very grateful that Tzu Chi has been that "village" for us. We are proud of our children's growing achievements, and their successes certainly would not be possible without the Tzu Chi Foundation's incredible support. 🌿



Backpack distributions are an opportunity for volunteers and students to interact and sing together. Photo: Yi-Juan Lo





Colin Legerton

# An Empty Sack Can't Stand

*At the temporary school, Jean Denis inspires students to give.  
 Photo: Mary Keh*

In March 2010, as the initial shock of the devastating earthquake began to fade and the surviving residents of Port-au-Prince started to face the new reality left for them, Jean Denis Petit Pha discovered that the children of his neighborhood, like those in so many neighborhoods across the city, were in dire need of a service that was not being provided: education.

As a teacher, Jean Denis was already a firm believer in the power of education. But, at this moment, in the aftermath of unprecedented devastation and the deaths of 300,000 people, he knew that the children needed more than just education. They needed protection.

If the children of his neighborhood were to have any chance, they would need to be protected from the new dangers of their post-earthquake home: the physical dangers of collapsed concrete, exposed wires, and severed structural skeletons, and the mental danger of picturing their friends and loved ones lying still, rotting, under the wreckage of what were once their homes. They needed a distraction to stay sane. Education would be a bonus.

## Back to School

Jean Denis reached out to another educator, Marie Ange "Mireille" Colinet, to help put together a temporary school. The two had met shortly after the earthquake when Father Columbano Arellano, priest of the local St. Alexandre Church, gathered together trusted community leaders to care for survivors. They had worked side-by-side in numerous charitable efforts, including Tzu Chi's Food for Work street-cleaning project.

Together, Jean Denis, Mireille, and a team of local volunteers began to set up the temporary school. They secured an unfinished home to use for classrooms, covered the open roofs with Tzu Chi tarp, borrowed benches from a local school that was too damaged to operate, purchased a blackboard, and secured sponsorship for food and other costs from Tzu Chi. The school quickly became a reality—classes began on March 22, barely two months after the earthquake.

For Jean Denis, the temporary school was a continuation of his life work. As a young child, one of six in his poor family of charcoal vendors,



A teacher at the temporary school leads a dictation lesson in May 2010. Photo: Shirley Tseng

Jean Denis decided early on that he would become a teacher. By the time he was a young teenager in secondary school, he was tutoring younger children to offset tuition costs. By his senior year, he was drafted into service as a full-fledged teacher at his underprivileged school: he taught fifth graders in the morning, took English classes in the afternoon, and attended school as a student every evening.

When he graduated, Jean Denis found himself in the extreme minority in his poor neighborhood. Looking back years later, he estimated that only five percent of his classmates graduated and went on to become “good men.” The remaining ninety-five percent he described as gangsters, drug addicts, alcoholics, and deadbeats.

Experiencing personally the positive power of education, Jean Denis continued down its path. Before the earthquake, he was teaching at three local schools. After the earthquake, they were too damaged to operate. When Jean Denis realized the dire need for education and a safe, nurturing environment for displaced students, he had both

**For the first time,  
these children  
have hope.**

the knowledge and the time to provide it to them.

Mireille had also been a teacher, teaching kindergarten in Port-au-Prince through much of the 1970s before turning to school administration and later social work. Like Jean Denis, she was an active and respected member of the community, a leader in the St. Alexandre Church and the Girl Scouts.

With their leadership and the hard work of a dedicated team of teachers, cooks, and other volunteers, the temporary school filled the gap before schools reopened in fall 2010. From March to September, the school served more than 120 students between the ages of four and fifteen. Every day, the children attended class and were provided two hot meals. For most, these were the only meals of the day.

Each day, teachers taught the children to count, read, and write; addressed practical necessities of daily life in Haiti; and strove to develop the children’s characters as much as their minds. Children were taught about personal hygiene and how to recycle; they were told the origins of Tzu Chi and the bamboo bank spirit; they were shown how to help and respect each other, their elders, and the environment; they played games to build teamwork; and they participated in field trips and activities to learn more about their country’s culture and heritage. Teachers and volunteers visited the students’ families after school to engage the parents in their education, check



Students file into St. Alexandre for afterschool tutoring. Photo: Phanny Yang



Photo: Lesly Pierre

up on their health during the cholera outbreak, discuss the importance of education, and address the individual needs of each child.

When Port-au-Prince schools reopened in fall 2010, returning to their local schools became the children's best opportunity for education. But for many families, tuition was simply too expensive to afford. So Happy Campus—initiated and run by Haitian volunteers, sponsored and mentored by Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in the United States—shifted its focus from providing education to funding it. Jean Denis negotiated reduced tuition rates at two local primary schools—his alma mater, Ecole Mixte Des Collegiens (EUDEC), and Collège Roussan Camille (ROCA)—and Tzu Chi agreed to pay tuition for ninety-six qualifying former students of the temporary school. Though the temporary school was finished, the Happy Campus Program was just beginning: for while one problem was now solved, more remained to be discovered.

## After School Tutoring

Initially, Tzu Chi sponsored ninety-six temporary school students in their return to local schools. Before long, a second phase was implemented to include more needy students in the area, bringing the total number on Tzu Chi scholarships to 222. To ensure that the generous donations sponsoring these scholarships were not being squandered, local volunteers kept a close eye on all students' academic progress.

When grades were released at the end of the first trimester, the volunteers discovered a serious problem: most of the students were failing. Volunteers spoke with the principals of the two schools, and then held a meeting with parents and teachers to discuss the problem and find a solution.

Through these discussions, the volunteers learned that even though the children were attending school each morning, they lacked a support system in the evenings to reinforce the lessons they were taught. Among many reasons for this, the most fundamental was language.

As Haiti has long suffered from poor education, most of the children's parents were illiterate even in their native language of Haitian Creole. Since schools used French as the language of instruction, the children were at a double disadvantage. As they struggled to understand lessons in a language mostly foreign to them, their family members were powerless to help and support them.

Most children faced other serious obstacles as well. Father Columbano recalled walking out of his church as late as one or two in the morning and seeing young students reading under the floodlights of the basketball court directly across from St. Alexandre. Many of them still lived in tents or temporary shelters that lacked ventilation, electricity, and sufficient space to study. Even those in houses struggled to find an environment where they could focus.

Learning of these difficulties, it became clear to the volunteers that they needed to provide a tutoring program in order for the children to absorb their lessons. So, Happy Campus adapted yet again, this time to offer an afterschool tutoring program for scholarship students falling behind in their studies. In spring 2011, this daily tutoring program was launched at St. Alexandre.

Volunteer teachers were recruited and students were led to the church every day after school to supplement their morning lessons. These tutoring sessions were not without their difficulties. As the two schools used different textbooks, students had to be divided into two shifts: ROCA first, then EUDEC. The students were further divided into three separate groups



Photo: Bornain Chiu



*Fueled by a health meal, students can focus on their studies. Photo: Bornain Chiu*



*Immacula and her team of volunteers prepare a hearty vegetarian lunch. Photo: Bornain Chiu*

by grade-level, but all had to share the same small facility: two groups sat back-to-back in the sanctuary, the third upstairs.

Though challenges remained, the tutoring program also brought distinct advantages. As in the temporary school, the tutoring program again gave teachers and volunteers the opportunity to help children grow in wisdom and character, and to teach lessons of everyday value: such as how to properly brush teeth and how to wash hands to prevent cholera.

Marc Arthur, math and grammar tutor for third and fourth graders, saw the greatest advantage of the tutoring program in the ability to teach the children in their native language. With the afterschool tutoring program, he had a rare opportunity to explain lessons in Creole to ensure that the children absorbed them.

After months of dedicated hard work, the teachers and students were rewarded with steadily improving results. After the first trimester in spring 2011, eighty-five percent of the tutoring students passed their classes. The following trimester, ninety percent passed. But the need for tutoring was just another layer of concern, still not the core of the issue. In 2012, the volunteers again had to dig deeper.

## **An Empty Sack Can't Stand**

In Haiti, two important measures are taken to ensure that donation money spent on scholarships is not squandered. First, tuition funds are paid directly to schools, not individuals. Second, local volunteers visit sponsored schools each morning to take attendance. Students and parents know that if a student misses five school days in a month without a valid excuse, he or she will lose the scholarship.

Though Tzu Chi's strict rules keep attendance generally high, the volunteers noticed in spring

2012 that certain students were still missing school and tutoring too frequently. They also learned from teachers that many students were distracted and lethargic in class, their lack of focus contributing to poor grades.

As volunteers conducted home visits and spoke with the students' parents, they discovered the source of the problem was hunger. Even though Tzu Chi was covering tuition costs, many families remained too poor even to feed their children. Some were eating just one meal a day; others even less.

There is a local saying in Haitian Creole—"an empty sack can't stand"—which illustrates that a person without food lacks the strength to work. Similarly, malnourished and hungry children do not have energy to study and learn. Having uncovered this new obstacle, the local volunteers again took action. With Father Columbo's blessing, one half of St. Alexandre's front courtyard was converted into a small kitchen and a daily hot meal program was launched.

With many years' experience as a caterer, local volunteer Immacula Cadet stepped forward to spearhead the project, and a group of students' mothers volunteered their time to cook and serve. On May 8, 2012, the afterschool hot meal program kicked off, spurring an immediate change in the students. With the promise of a hot meal, attendance improved greatly, and the students became more attentive and engaged.

Just a week later, the program expanded even further. On Father Columbo's recommendation, a daily milk distribution was established to ensure that local infants could also receive their necessary nutrition. Spearheading the project was Celeste Romelus. A trained nurse, she brought her own special talents to Happy Campus just like several volunteers before her.



*In tutoring, students also learn proper hygiene and other life lessons. Photo: Lesly Pierre*



*A young student demonstrates proper tooth brushing techniques to her classmates. Photo: Lesly Pierre*

Happy Campus Program  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Even with rigorous precautions in place to ensure that only those truly in need will benefit, the milk program has grown quickly. Five babies were fed on May 15, 2012, the first day of the program. Just two weeks later, the number grew to nineteen. Ultimately, the goal is to feed fifty babies every day. As Happy Campus grows in response to each layer of need that is uncovered, more and more young people are receiving the education and the nutrition they desperately need.

## Hope for the Future

Every day now, St. Alexandre is a hub of activity: from the moment water is set to boil at seven o'clock until chalkboards and brooms are put away ten hours later, the sanctuary is filled with community services that multiply as each new need is identified.


By the summer of 2012, 161 of 220 primary school students at ROCA were supported by Tzu Chi scholarships. Between ROCA and EUDEC, nearly 150 students attended afterschool tutoring each afternoon. Over time, Happy Campus also began to spread outside the St. Alexandre area, as young students at a third school and an orphanage were added to the scholarship program.

Collège Des Humanistes, the third school in the program, sits at the edge of Cité Soleil, one of the world's largest slums. Here, the impact of the scholarships is particularly powerful. Jean Denis is touched whenever he sees eleven- and twelve-year-old children attending school for the first time. Because of these older children, he is always careful to point out that each grade level does not necessarily equate to a particular age, as it does in the United States. Most students in the fifth grade are ten or eleven years old, but some may be as old as fifteen or

twenty.

For the principal of Humanistes, the impact on his school and his community is even more deeply felt. He thinks not only of the books that are in the children's hands now, but also of the guns that are not. Several years earlier, before the United Nations stepped in to clean up Cité Soleil and before Tzu Chi came to offer tuition assistance, many of these children would have been roped into work as mercenaries by the merciless warlords and drug kingpins that violently ruled the district. Now, the children have an opportunity for education and a refuge from violence. Cité Soleil, like much of Haiti, still has a difficult path ahead but huge strides are already being made. For the first time, these children have hope.

The path of Happy Campus has not always been smooth. Along the way, volunteers have encountered resistance, even from many parents. Some were upset that their children were left out of the program. Others expected to receive tuition fees themselves and were upset to see these go directly to the schools. Some showed no interest in their children's progress and were unavailable even when volunteers went to visit them at their homes. But, over time, most have come to see the positive impact of the schooling, tutoring, and hot meals. Those who once complained now express their gratitude. Some have even joined the effort as volunteers on the cooking team.

With daily hot meals, volunteers strive to ensure that the idiom—"an empty sack can't stand"—will not apply to these young students. But the meaning of the saying, like the work to be done, does not simply end with food. Empty of knowledge, wisdom, and morals, a person cannot stand. And without men and women of character and compassion, neither can a country. 



**With perseverance and courage, the roughest roads can become smooth.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*



# Building a Foundation

Winson Sun, Li-Ting Chen  
Translated by Yi-Cheng Chen

Love Our Earth  
濟平致富  
Photo: Wen Fan

Though known for its affluent high-tech industry, Silicon Valley still contains pockets of poverty and suffering, such as the Franklin-McKinley School District in San Jose, where the majority of students come from low-income families. In each of the district's seventeen schools, more than ninety percent of students qualified for free meals from government programs in 2012. In Daniel Lairon Elementary School, the figure has even reached 98.9% during the economic recession. Of six hundred students in the school, fewer than ten lived above the poverty line in 2012.

## A Precious Gift

Daniel Lairon Elementary School was originally named Seven Trees Elementary School, but was renamed in 2010 in honor of its late principal, Daniel Lairon. Tzu Chi's relationship with the school goes back to April 2004, when Tzu Chi volunteers donated books to all the school's students—most of whom came from low-income recent immigrant families—as part of Read Across America. At the time, Ms. Kan, a teacher for over thirty years, told Tzu Chi volunteers, "Many students here in the school cannot afford to buy books. A book of their own is a very precious gift." Volunteers continued to provide books annually through 2008.

By that time, Tzu Chi volunteer Valerie Tseng was working at Daniel Lairon Elementary as an intern teacher. In addition to her teaching duties, she also helped collect and deliver loaves of bread from a bakery to the school, where they were distributed to the children of low-income families. Valerie and Li-Juin Lee, a long-time volunteer in the Franklin-McKinley School District, also helped teachers gather food and bread during winter vacation and distribute them to students in need. These two passionate volunteers soon found that there were too many families in need of help for just the two of them to make enough of an impact, so they reached out to Tzu Chi volunteers in Cupertino for support. When Tzu Chi officially launched the Happy Campus Program in 2009, Daniel Lairon Elementary School was included from the start.

The San Jose Tzu Chi Bread Team took over bread delivery work in 2010. Volunteers visited sponsor bakeries every Tuesday night to collect leftover bread, and then delivered it to school the following morning. On Thursday, the bread was then distributed to students who needed it. Tzu Chi volunteers also distributed bread during Parent-Teacher Association events, in order to have more direct contact and interaction with both parents and teachers.



## Good Things Are Happening

The vast majority of students at Daniel Lairon Elementary receive government-subsidized meals throughout the week. But when students are at home on break for three weeks at Christmas and two weeks in the spring, they miss out on these meals. Since many of their parents lack the funds to purchase food or are too busy at work to prepare meals, most are left without sufficient food to eat.

To address this problem, volunteers started holding food distributions during winter vacation in 2010: an event that also became an opportunity to connect with and provide love to each family. Volunteer Kuo-Hua Huang explained, "We prepared around ten kinds of food in each large bag. Most of them are foods that children can just open and eat; they don't need to cook. Some other items, like rice and beans, parents can cook first and keep at home." In 2011, Tzu Chi volunteers added an additional food distribution during spring break.

In order to ensure their students' safety, schools typically do not allow outside organizations onto their campuses. However, through their years of selfless contributions, Tzu Chi volunteers have touched the hearts of parents and teachers alike and earned the

school's trust. As a teacher once commented, "When I see the Tzu Chi logo, I know that something good is going to happen."

Fourth grade teacher Michelle Rose, who has taught at Daniel Lairon Elementary for twenty-nine years, told the volunteers, "I just want to say thank you to Tzu Chi for providing so much food. It not only feeds children and families but also helps enrich their minds. I hope that when these kids graduate from college, they can give back to society and create a virtuous cycle."

## Dramatic Improvements

In the impoverished area around Daniel Lairon Elementary, most families rent houses along with other families. Three to four families—often ten or more people—squeeze into homes



*A Tzu Ching volunteer offers one-on-one tutoring to a student. Photo provided by Tzu Chi Northwest Region*



*Tzu Chi volunteers carefully prepare food bags for the students of Daniel Lairon Elementary. Photo provided by Tzu Chi Northwest Region*

designed for one. As the density of residents increases, the total number of students at the schools increases as well. Three-quarters of these students cannot speak English when they start school, which is one of the reasons that Daniel Lairon Elementary School typically scores last among the fourteen elementary schools in the district. These results have raised serious concerns at the district level. As school budgets have been cut and the number of students in each class has subsequently increased, teachers have had an even harder time trying to take care of their students with special needs, further exacerbating their already difficult situation.

Kuo-Hua Huang, who has long been engaged in adolescent care, understood deeply that a strong academic foundation provides children with the prerequisites for success by keeping them off the streets and engaged in learning. In 2011, she called on local Tzu Ching college volunteers and alumni and Tzu Shao high school volunteers to serve as afterschool tutors every Friday. By summer 2012, eight Tzu Ching and four Tzu Shao volunteers were participating as tutors every week. When the program began, only the twelve students with the worst grades were tutored. Thanks to the remarkable success in the first year of tutoring, that number was expanded to twenty. Next, it is expected to grow to thirty.

A poem by contemporary poet Chiang Hsun concludes, "Because it has been loved, it knows

to give back that which has been received; only then will it be complete." This reflects the common voice of Tzu Ching and Tzu Shao who have been tutors for the afterschool tutoring activity. These young tutors have contributed their compassion and patience for two years and have spent their own money to buy gifts, stickers, and pencils for the students. George Nguyen, a Tzu Ching volunteer at San Jose State University, said, "I believe I have benefited the most of all. I was able to work together with a group of Tzu Ching friends every Friday, and we all got along like brothers and sisters. We passed the love we received from older Tzu Chi volunteers on to the kids, so that they could feel the care from our hearts."

In the past, some children had begged their parents not to send them to school because they could not understand their lessons, but they saw great progress in their grades after joining the tutoring program. Their achievements filled them with confidence. Kathy Smith, the school's project specialist in charge of education planning, evaluation, and monitoring, told Tzu Chi volunteers, "There was a child who was lagging behind in his studies. This child made great progress, especially in math, after your weekly afterschool tutoring. His mother came to school and told me that he wouldn't have made such great progress if not for the tutoring program. This is an example of successful academic counseling. You all helped to feed the kids, assisted them with their coursework, and nourished their minds. Do you know how meaningful you are to this school?" As she finished, her eyes filled with tears.

Eight years since the first book donation in 2004, Tzu Chi members continue to care for the students of Daniel Lairon Elementary School. From book donations to food and bread distributions to afterschool tutoring, volunteers have given these children an opportunity to establish a solid foundation for their studies and for the rest of their lives. 🌱

**Giving others blessings is creating blessings for oneself.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*



# When We Give We Gain

Carolyn Chen, Peiching Choong, Karen Soh, Michael Tseng  
Translated by Colin Legerton

Photo: Carolyn Chen

Volunteers serve teachers during a vegetarian appreciation luncheon. Photo: Suchada Shiu



Landis Elementary School is located in a diverse, low-income area of southwest Houston. Most students do not speak English at home, and more than ninety percent come from low-income families. Many of the students' parents are even unable to purchase the required school uniforms. So, on the eve of Thanksgiving 2008, Tzu Chi held a uniform distribution for ninety-eight students, beginning a close relationship with the school that continues to this day.

Building on the foundation laid by that first distribution, volunteers now distribute uniforms every spring and fall. On these occasions, volunteers also show students how to separate papers and bottles for recycling to turn trash into gold to help those in need. The students have been especially impressed with the story of how Da Ai Technology turns plastic bottles into blankets and clothing, a process that seems almost magical. Ever since volunteers first taught recycling methods, teachers have reported that many students very diligently collect and sort recyclables.

One staff member said that the volunteers' recycling presentation opened her eyes to how much she wastes on a daily basis and encouraged her to change her habits. Volunteers also take these opportunities to explain the environmental benefits of a vegetarian diet and demonstrate some simple vegetarian recipes, even inviting teachers to help prepare dishes with them.

For the January 2010 distribution, volunteers also began to "adopt" two or three students. Each visit, the volunteers sit and chat for a while with their small group of "adoptees." Since that distribution came just after the earthquake in Haiti, volunteers showed where Haiti is on

the globe and encouraged students to write their blessings for earthquake survivors on note cards. Volunteers also shared the story of Tzu Chi's bamboo banks, explaining that even a small amount of money can make a very big difference because the combined strength of everyone's love is great.

Since May 2010, Tzu Chi volunteers have organized two teacher appreciation events each year. The volunteers give each teacher a copy of *Jing Si Aphorisms*, which many keep in their offices to read on bad days. One teacher has even taken her copy to church to share with friends there, while others report using the aphorisms to educate their children.

In the May 2012 event, volunteers showed teachers how to make elegant floral arrangements in vases made from recyclables. After completing their arrangements, the teachers visited other stations where they could taste teas, appreciate flowers, and read *Jing Si Aphorisms*.

Four years into Tzu Chi's partnership with Landis Elementary, the impact on the Tzu Chi volunteers has been remarkable. Some who were once too embarrassed to speak English now joyfully greet teachers as soon as they step on campus. Others who struggled with organizing uniform distributions now provide ideas to make each interaction smoother than the last. Those who could not figure out how to introduce Tzu Chi culture to the teachers now see these teachers asking about the meaning of each Tzu Chi activity of their own accord. By stepping out of their comfort zones to support the teachers and students of Landis Elementary, these Tzu Chi volunteers have gained more than they ever imagined possible. 🌱

Acts of generosity are perceived as helping others when we ourselves are the true beneficiaries.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*



Photos: Audrey Cheng

# Food Backpacks in Clark County

Audrey Cheng | Translated by Adam Paiz

Wendy was a typical student at John S. Park Elementary, a school not far from the glittering lights of the Las Vegas Strip. As a special needs child, Wendy suffered from a listening disability and exhibited poor verbal and motor skill development. Unfortunately she, and many like her, also experienced hunger at home.

Although Las Vegas is a relatively wealthy city due to its tourism industry, one out of eight families struggles to satisfy basic dietary needs. In Clark County public schools, fifty-five percent of students have applied for reduced-cost or free school lunches. This situation came to the attention of Tzu Chi after Hurricane Katrina when many former New Orleans residents sought refuge in Las Vegas. Although their short-term needs were addressed, many long-term problems, such as food security, had not yet been resolved. While displaced children received breakfast and lunch at school each day, they often had nothing to eat on weekends. Learning this, Tzu Chi volunteers decided to distribute backpacks full of food each Friday.

In August 2006, several volunteers began participating in weekly distributions held by Corps of Compassion at Whitney Elementary School. A backpack was filled with food each Thursday for students in need, and then distributed to them on Friday. For children who had brothers and sisters not covered by the program, additional food was provided. After a few weeks of learning from Corps of Compassion, Tzu Chi volunteers applied to the school board to begin their own program at John S. Park Elementary. In September 2006, Tzu Chi volunteers began delivering backpacks to eighty-two children there.

After six years of dedicated work, the number of families has now expanded to 110. In addition, many good relationships have developed between Tzu Chi volunteers, school staff, and students. Wendy, for example, received a backpack for three years. During that time, Tzu Chi volunteers never saw her smile or talk. Very unexpectedly, one day she blurted out a single "thank you" to the volunteers, touching them deeply.

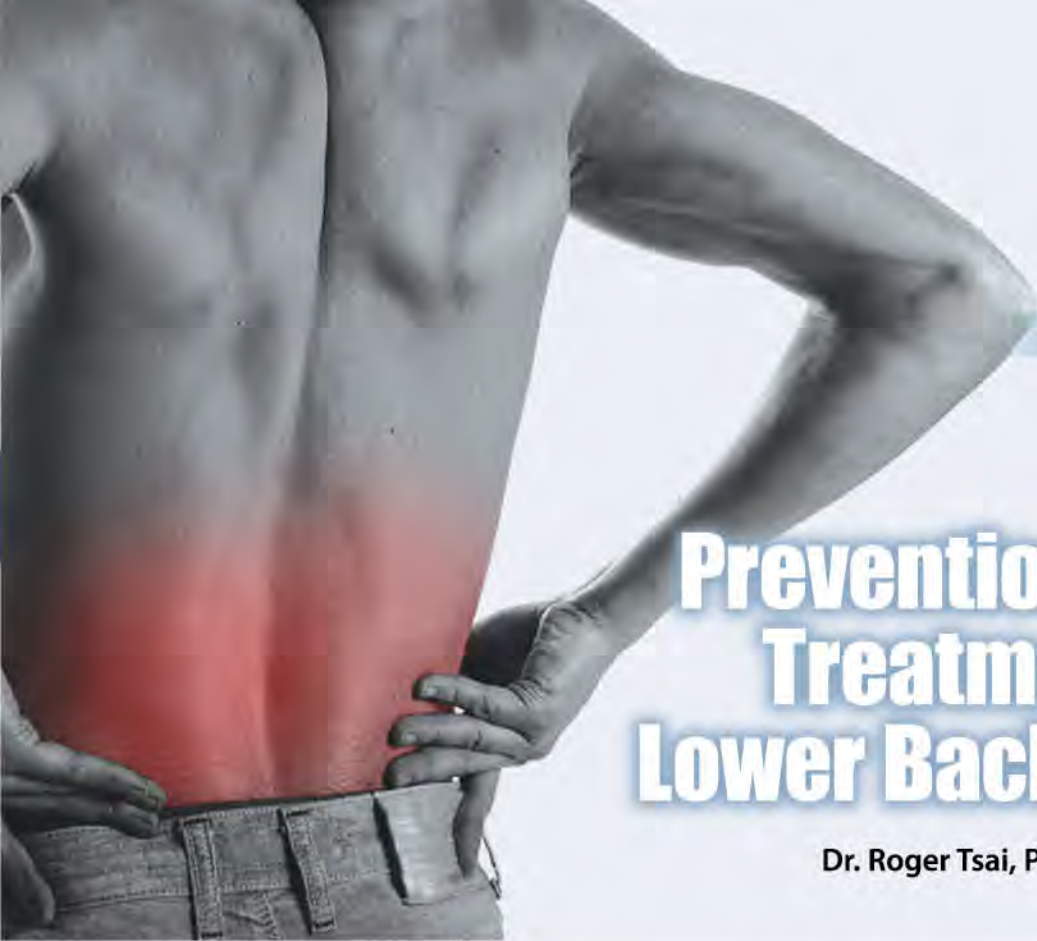
Another girl named Jordan went through a similar transformation. She enrolled in John S. Park Elementary in September 2011 and started receiving a backpack. Her older brothers had participated before graduating, so she had previously been one of the hidden recipients helped by siblings' backpacks. After a semester, her mother sent a note to volunteers indicating that the family's economic situation had improved and the gift could go to another family.

In 2012, when volunteers started a small bamboo bank donation program for students to collect spare change to donate during the backpack distribution, they were surprised to see Jordan approach them with a large coffee can in her arms. They were passionately moved to learn that she and her brothers had collected their spare pennies to give something back for the help they had received.

Despite the success so far, the need in Clark County is still vast. According to an investigation by the Clark County Board of Education, nearly twelve hundred students at fifteen schools could still benefit from the backpack program. Though Tzu Chi volunteers have given out twenty-four thousand backpacks since 2006, the need is still growing. 🌱

Awareness leads to action; action leads to guiding and inspiring others.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen



# Prevention and Treatment of Lower Back Pain

Dr. Roger Tsai, PT, DPT, OCS, MS

At any given time, a quarter of the United States population has suffered from lower back pain within the past three months. Lack of exercise, sedentary lifestyles, long-distance driving, and obesity have all contributed to make lower back pain one of the most common problems in modern society. It is the second most common reason people take a sick day behind only the common cold. The majority of lower back pain is not severe or long-lasting, but some lower back pains persist or recur. They decrease quality of life and may lead to disability.

Lower back pain can be roughly divided into three categories:

1. Non-specific lower back pain: Symptoms are localized in the waist region and aggravated by movement in the waist region.
2. Lumbar radiculopathy (herniated disc): Symptoms are numbness, tingling, pain, and/or weakness in the lower extremities. Bending, sneezing, and coughing make the symptoms worse. Most commonly occurs between the ages of forty and sixty.

3. Spinal stenosis (narrowing of spinal canal): Symptoms may include lower back, buttock, and lower extremity pain and weakness. Standing and walking makes the pain worse. Sitting alleviates the pain. Most commonly occurs after the age of sixty.

Lower back pain may be acute (pain lasts less than three months), chronic (pain lasts more than three months), or recurrent (acute symptoms recur after a period without pain).

Overuse often leads to lower back pain: too much bending, twisting, or lifting; soft tissue sprains or strains; improper body mechanics; or even too much sitting can cause symptoms. Very often, symptoms subside naturally while the cause and actual source of acute pain remain unknown.

## Good Lifestyle Prevents Lower Back Pain

Prevention is better than cure. Instead of passively waiting for a problem to occur and then seeking treatment, we should promote health proactively.

Exercise provides great benefits to health. The United States Department of Health and Human Services recommends two and a half hours a week of medium-intensity exercises for adults. Exercise not only prevents lower back pain but also combats chronic diseases, manages body weight, boosts energy levels, increases muscle strength and definition, improves sleep, improves mood, strengthens bones, and is fun! Adequate exercise will increase the strength of the back and abdominal muscles, as well as the strength and flexibility of muscles in the lower extremities.

According to a *Consumer Reports* survey of fourteen thousand subscribers, Americans consider exercise the most effective self-help for lower back pain. The same survey showed that people who suffer from lower back pain are very satisfied with manual treatment provided by chiropractors, physical therapists, acupuncturists, and massage therapists. In fact, patients are more satisfied with manual treatment than medication for lower back pain.

Maintaining one's ideal body weight may help prevent lower back pain. United States leads the world as the country with the highest body mass index (BMI), as approximately seventy percent of adults in America are overweight or obese. Increased body weight amplifies stress on the lumbar spine and accelerates aging of spinal joints and intervertebral discs. People who are overweight tend to have weak abdominal muscles and excessive lumbar lordosis (forward curvature in the lower back). They have higher risk for lower back and leg pains.

Smoking cessation is another key method to decrease the likelihood of suffering from lower back pain. Smoking is well-known for increasing the risks of many diseases and problems; it also accelerates aging of the intervertebral discs, leading to early pathologies and pains in the spine.

An ergonomic work environment prevents lower back pain. Seat height should be appropriate: feet flat on the ground, with knees slightly lower than the hips. There is less stress on the lumbar spine sitting in this position as opposed to sitting slouched, because of the neutral lordosis attained in a good sitting

posture. Most couches are too low and seats are too deep. Try not to sit in the couch for too long. Sedentary workers should get up to walk every hour. Get out of the car to walk every hour during a long-distance drive.

Good body mechanics lower the risk of lower back sprains and strains. Before moving a heavy object, plan the move well and clear obstacles along the moving path. Divide a heavy load in half or get help. Bend at the knees and keep the upper body relatively vertical: use the strength of the legs instead of bending over to lift. Keep a heavy load close to your body, and avoid twisting while carrying it. Move your feet to change direction. If moving a long distance, use a cart. Push the cart, do not pull.

With a partner, rotate or flip your mattress every three to six months to prevent sagging. To reduce overnight stress on the lower back, put a pillow between your knees while sleeping on your side, and place the pillow below your knees while sleeping on your back. Talk to your physical therapist or physician if your back bothers you while sleeping, especially if you have other discomfort.

### **Individualized Physical Therapy Treatment Plan**

Not all lower back pains are created equal. In recent years, studies in clinical prediction rules help physical therapists categorize patients into different treatment-based classifications. Physical therapists can individualize a patient's treatment and exercise plan based on the patient's symptoms and classification. The best treatment results can only be achieved by discovering the contributing factors of pain and treating accordingly.

In a typical physical therapy outpatient clinic, half of the patients are there for lower back pain. The most effective treatment options for lower back pain include patient education, manual therapy, and exercise. Modalities such as ice, heat, and electrotherapy may temporarily lessen symptoms, but will not resolve the problem.

It is important to educate patients with lower back pain that it is a very common condition and that most patients will get better

soon. People with lower back pain should remain active. Bed rest should not be more than one day; otherwise core muscle strength will diminish significantly. Too much bed rest will also delay normal recovery. If you suffer from lower back pain for more than a few days or the pain gets worse, you should visit your physical therapist or physician.

The clinical guidelines shared by the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society recommend spinal manipulation for both acute and chronic lower back pains. Physical therapists utilize mid-joint range, high-velocity, low-amplitude spinal manipulation. This is different from joint mobilization, or chiropractic adjustment. For patients who are in the “manipulation” treatment-based classification, spinal manipulation helps in both immediate and mid-term recovery.

Physical therapists utilize therapeutic exercises to help patients alleviate pain; improve muscle strength, flexibility, and endurance; and prevent recurrence. Specific exercises target core muscles. For recurrent lower back pain (i.e., patients who are in the “stabilization” treatment-based classification), specific exercises can effectively prevent symptom recurrence. Generalized exercises help strengthen back muscles, abdominal muscles, and lower extremity muscles, and also improve flexibility.

Studies show that lower back pain patients recover faster and spend less on overall medical care when they see physical therapists early. For lower back pain, physical therapy works better than medication, has fewer complications, and reduces the need for pain medication. Physical therapy patients also are less likely to need invasive, high-risk treatments like injection or surgery.

Prevention is better than cure.

**Disclaimer:** *The information above is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician, physical therapist, or other qualified health provider prior to starting any new treatment.*

## Considering Spinal Surgery? Think Again!

In the past two decades, overuse of MRI and spinal fusion surgery has steadily increased in the United States. Lower back pain patients overuse MRI, undergo many spinal surgeries, and increase medical spending with no improvement in patient conditions. The United States has the highest rate of spinal surgery in the world. However, the most accurate predictor of whether a patient will have spinal surgery is not the cause or symptoms, but where the patient lives! If a spinal surgeon owns an MRI, the surgeon’s patients are thirty-four percent more likely to have spinal surgery! Although MRI reports often mention terms like degenerative disc disease, disc bulging, disc herniation, or spinal stenosis; most “findings” on the MRI are not the cause of patient’s symptoms, but rather false positives. In fact, the vast majority of lower back pain patients do not need X-ray, CAT scan, or MRI, unless care providers suspect their symptoms are caused by other diseases.

Although few lower back pain diagnoses may require surgery, among all lower back pain surgical patients, half reported problematic recovery including long and painful recovery, no improvement in pre-surgical symptoms, or worsening of symptoms. According to a study published in 2011, 27% of workers’ compensation patients who underwent surgery to treat lower back pain needed multiple operations, while 36% suffered significant complications (including a higher death rate), and 74% had not returned to work after two years.

For lower back pain, patients should try conservative treatments first. A physical therapist, chiropractor, or family doctor can rule out fracture, infection, cancer, or other diseases as the cause. Care providers will also make sure there are no complications that require surgery before they begin treatment. Only when conservative treatment options fail should patients consider surgery as a last resort. And remember: prevention, prevention, prevention! 🌿



*Working closely with children, the author finds that she gains as much as they do.*  
Photo: Luca Ye

# A Different Life Experience

**Stephanie Liu**

Three years ago, I began volunteering as a teacher's aide for the Tzu Chi Character Education Program at Lytle Creek Elementary School in San Bernardino County, California. I was still very new to Tzu Chi back then. I was working full-time at my dental practice, but my two children had moved away after college. Hoping to do something meaningful with my free time, I began volunteering at Tzu Chi Free Clinic. Before long, I was asked if I wanted to assist at Lytle Creek Elementary.

I still remember how nervous I was on that early morning, when I first climbed into one of the carpool vans to Lytle Creek. On the bumpy ride to school, the Tzu Chi volunteers unpacked the sandwiches and breakfast food they had brought to share. Meanwhile, I tried to imagine what the day would be like once we arrived at the school. It had been years since my own children were in elementary school, and I had never taught a class before.

When we arrived in our classroom at Lytle Creek, I lined up apprehensively next to the other Tzu Chi volunteers. The Tzu Chi teacher began introducing us to the students one by one, until I was the last teacher's aide left. "And this is Miss...?" Understandably, the teacher from the other carpool van did not know my name yet. I introduced myself and shuffled nervously back to the wall while thirty pairs of wide eyes followed me. The confident teacher led various activities with ease, but I felt unsure of where to stand, let alone how to help. By the end of the day, I could hardly remember any of the students' names. I liked the class and was engaged by the students, but I did not feel very useful at all. I decided to call Tzu Chi the next week to ask if I could be replaced.

The following week came and went, but I did not leave the Character Education Program. As anxious as I felt, I still found myself looking forward to the next class. As time went on,



I began to see how much the students enjoyed the class as well. Many of the children come from underprivileged backgrounds, and their parents may not have the time or opportunity to impart lessons about character. Here in these one-hour character education classes, it was clear how much the teachers enjoyed teaching. Through stories, question-and-answer exercises, and hypothetical scenarios, Tzu Chi teachers helped the children reflect upon themselves and guided them to making the right decisions.

Three years have passed since my nervous first day, and I have finally settled in at Lytle Creek. The students seem to genuinely enjoy the classes, and are always asking when we are going back. One day when I was unable to attend class, the students even asked for me, wondering where I was. When the students enthusiastically greeted me at the following class, I surely felt like a valuable part of the Character Education Program.

I am also very appreciative of how valuable the program has been for me. The program highlights basic concepts—such as giving, thankfulness, respect, compassion, tolerance, and courage—that we adults may see as common sense. Yet, observing the classes, listening to the lessons, and working with the students have also helped me reflect on right and wrong.

I still remember vividly the first time I helped the third grade Tzu Chi teacher with the class on giving. Instead of telling the students that one should give, the teacher used a news clip from Haiti to demonstrate how deprived the Haitian women and children were. I have always known that Haiti was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, but I was truly shocked when I saw the video showing how women had to make cookies out of mud to feed some

I find myself becoming more positive, patient, and mindful of my own actions each and every day of my life.

children and how the dilapidated school buildings did not even have lights or windows. The Lytle Creek students were probably as shocked as I was. Without being told, they voluntarily decided that they wanted to help and they wanted to give. Lessons like this not only have an impact on the students but on me as well. I find myself becoming more positive, patient, and mindful of my own actions each and every day of my life.

I once asked one of the Tzu Chi teachers, “Why do you invest so much time teaching character—something that takes so long to develop in a student with results we can’t even be sure of?” Her answer made a great deal of sense to me. She replied that instilling a sense of character will make our society more honorable and safer for everyone—these students and our own children alike. And as for quantifying our results: after five years of the Character Education Program, the teachers at Lytle Creek agreed that they have in fact seen changes in their students. Not only have their students’ overall attitude and behavior improved, their standardized test scores have increased as well. What’s more, this class is one that the students enjoy. I am grateful to be a part of the Tzu Chi Character Education Program, and appreciative of the introspection it has inspired in me. I hope to continue taking these opportunities to make a difference in our children’s lives. 🌿



Photo: Sheng Ping Liu

Good morals provide hope for humanity and are the foundation for happiness.

Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen

▶ Heavy rain in late June 2012 led to severe flooding in County Cork, Ireland. Tzu Chi volunteers later visited the hardest-hit areas to assess damage and provide comfort to affected locals. Here, a Tzu Chi volunteer discusses the situation with other relief workers on July 22, 2012.

Photo: Shunji Zheng



▶ From May 30 to June 1, 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers in Indonesia collaborated with the Sinar Mas Group to distribute eyeglasses to impoverished locals in Tulang Bawang, Lampung.

Photo: Supriyanto



▲ Tzu Chi volunteers in Sarawak, Malaysia, held an athletic competition for the Tzu Chi parent-child class and Tzu Shao high school volunteers on June 10, 2012. The event, in which parents and children competed together, was meant to foster closer relationships between parents and children, and emphasize the importance of cooperation and teamwork. Photo: Zhiwei Huang



▲ At the Edmonds City Fair—held on July 22, 2012, in Burnaby, British Columbia—Canada Tzu Chi volunteers shared the Tzu Chi spirit and recycling concepts with the community. Here, a volunteer demonstrates how to turn used paper into something beautiful. Photo: Yaozhou Xie





Young volunteers in Melaka, Malaysia, participated in the worldwide Tzu Ching twentieth anniversary cleanup project by clearing trash from the beaches of the Portuguese Settlement on July 15, 2012.  
Photo: Haozhen Gan



On July 28, 2012, Lesotho Tzu Chi volunteers distributed rice and cooking oil to locals in Ladybrand, South Africa, to help them through the winter.  
Photo: Meijuan Chen



▲ On June 30, 2012, Dominican Republic Tzu Chi volunteers held a dental clinic in Baní, and also introduced Tzu Chi to the locals. Here, a volunteer shares Jing Si Aphorisms.  
Photo Shiyi Liu



▲ In Zimbabwe, where many schools are forced to hold classes outdoors, Tzu Chi Foundation donated seven temporary classrooms to Rusununguko Primary School in Harare. On July 25, 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers from Hualien, South Africa, and Zimbabwe worked with local students to erect these classrooms. Photo: Liangxu Wei

▶  
 Tzu Ching college volunteers celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Youth Association with a worldwide environmental cleanup marathon on July 15, 2012. In the Philippines, Tzu Chi volunteers, Tzu Chings, and Tzu Chi scholarship students cleared trash from the shores of Dreamland in Rosario, Cavite. Photo: Lini Bo



▶  
 From June 1 to 4, 2012, South Africa Tzu Chi volunteers traveled to neighboring Swaziland to visit and care for local aid recipients. Photo: Brenda Matebula



▲ On May 31, 2012, Indonesia Tzu Chi volunteers held a free medical clinic together with local hospital RSUD Manokwari in West Papua, providing love and care to impoverished locals. Photo: Juliana Santy



▲ On July 15, 2012, volunteers in Manchester, England, cleaned trash from Heaton Park as part of the worldwide Tzu Ching twentieth anniversary cleanup project. Members of the Jordan National Taekwondo Team, in town for the 2012 London Olympics, even offered a hand thanks to Coach Chiu-hua Chen, a long-time Tzu Chi volunteer in Jordan. Photo: Dexiong Chen



# Dharma as Water: Great Repentance

Deeply concerned about the state of our world today—a world facing the crises of climate change, environmental degradation, instability and unrest, and eroding of moral values—Dharma Master Cheng Yen has appealed to her followers to engage in the practice of repentance.

Though the collective problems of today's world seem beyond the control of ordinary individuals, the Master tells us that each of us in fact contributes to the problem in many different ways; that is why each of us needs to return to his or her own heart and mind, and deeply reflect.



# The Obstacles to Awakening: Part II of the Repentance Series

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team

The Dharma is like water that can clean our hearts and minds of impurities. These impurities hinder us. Our afflictions—ultimately rooted in greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt—keep us from developing a pure, sincere mind that can draw close to the Dharma. Having these afflictions, we take unwholesome actions which create negative karma. As a result, we reap retribution, and the retribution makes life difficult for us. We get so caught up in it that we cannot appreciate the importance of the Dharma in awakening our insight and wisdom. Therefore, our actions continue to be wrong ones and we continue to create more negative karma.

This is how affliction, unwholesome action, and karmic retribution obstruct us. Because of this, they are considered three obstacles to awakening.

## The three obstacles

The first obstacle is affliction. We have three main kinds of afflictions: greed, anger, and ignorance. These hinder us on the path of learning Buddhism. With greed, anger, and ignorance in our hearts, our understanding of Buddhism becomes distorted and it is difficult to develop correct faith. For example, when we do a good deed, because of our selfishness, we hope to gain merits or blessings for the good deed we have done. This is not correct faith. Correct faith is about learning to eliminate our selfish desires and greed, as well as anger and ignorance. So, in daily life, we also need to work on our temper. Learning Buddhism, we should strive to develop insight and understanding into life instead of losing our temper at the slightest thing.

The second obstacle is unwholesome action. When we act wrongly, our wrong ways prevent us from doing other good things. There is a Chinese saying that all good deeds begin first with filial piety. If people are filial to their parents, they will naturally have respect for their teachers and what is taught to them. With filial piety and respect, people will naturally be good-natured and kind. On the other hand, if we treat our parents badly, we will likewise do many other bad deeds. When people encourage us to do good, we will not consider it. This is how unwholesome actions create obstacles to the path of goodness.

The third obstacle is karmic retribution. Due to the law of karma, we reap what we sow. The bad consequences of our actions also hinder us. For example, our karmic retribution determines where we are reborn. In the suffering realms of hell, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm, it will be difficult to encounter Buddhism. Though the heaven realm is without suffering, we easily lose ourselves there in pleasure and enjoyment and forget all about spiritual practice. Therefore, it is only in the human realm that we can truly encounter and learn the Buddha's teachings. But, as there is also suffering in the human realm, our negative karma and suffering can still be obstacles to our learning the Dharma.

Because of the three obstacles of affliction, unwholesome action, and karmic retribution, we have difficulty achieving awakening and ending our suffering. So, we have to take very good care of our hearts and minds to avoid giving rise to these three obstacles. 🌿

# The Cure for the Three Obstacles: Part III of the Repentance Series

Dharma as Water:  
Great  
Repentance

From Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Talks

Compiled into English by the Jing Si Abode English Editorial Team

When our mind deviates from Right View, even slightly, we begin to create the three obstacles of affliction, unwholesome action, and karmic retribution. These obstruct our own spiritual growth. So, we have to take very good care of our hearts and minds to avoid giving rise to these three obstacles. But if we have already created them, how can we eliminate them? The Buddha provided a very wonderful teaching—practicing repentance.

Practicing repentance means to feel remorse for our wrongs, to acknowledge them, and to repent for them. If we did something wrong but have no remorse or even awareness of being wrong, we will continue to make the same mistake again and again. In life, there is no one who does not make mistakes or who does nothing wrong. If we repent, however, we can start anew.

Repentance cleanses us. In our daily life, when something gets dirty, we use water to clean it. Without water, we would not be able to clean away the dirt. To clean the impurities in our hearts, however, we need the water of Dharma. The Dharma can cleanse the afflictions and ignorance in our mind; it can remove the source of the unwholesome actions which create negative karma.

Learning the Dharma enables us to eliminate the root cause of our negative karma. We need to take in the Dharma so deeply that it is in the marrow of our being. Normally, when we learn the Dharma, we do so only partially,

with "leakages." For instance, we may be inspired by the Bodhisattva Way and engage in acts of kindness to help others, but we do not cultivate ourselves and work on transforming our unwholesome ways. This is an example of not fully taking in the Dharma and still having holes and leaks.

This is why we must genuinely work on our bad habits and unwholesome ways. To truly change and start anew, we will need to repent and clean our hearts. The way to do this is to openly acknowledge our faults and mistakes and sincerely repent. Having revealed our wrongdoings, we will be less prone to make the same mistakes. If we cover up our wrongdoings and deny them, however, we will continue to make the same mistakes again and again.

It is like when we have a splinter—we may not know we have it until we touch it and feel the pain. Having discovered the splinter, we need to quickly pull it out. It is the same when we discover a mistake or error. Instead of covering it up, which would be like leaving the splinter in our body, we need to openly acknowledge what we have done wrong. That is like pulling out the splinter. When we can openly repent, people will forgive us. It will also help us not to make the same mistake again; otherwise, we will easily fall back into our habitual wrong ways. This is the power of openly repenting, and why it is such an essential part of the practice. 🌿

# Cleansing Myself with Dharma-Water

Shu Jen Kao



The author (back row, second from left) participates in the Water Repentance musical interpretation.  
Photo: Philip Kay

As Tzu Chi celebrated its forty-fifth anniversary in 2011, Dharma Master Cheng Yen encouraged her followers to study the Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance text and her Dharma as Water teachings based on the text. These teachings show that our minds accumulate endless afflictions and disturb the harmony of the universe. To restore balance, we need to repent by expressing sincere regret for our wrongdoings and use Dharma like water to wash the impurities from our minds.

Before we can repent, we must recognize our wrongdoings. Dharma as Water states that all humans unwittingly commit wrongdoings due to greed, anger, and hatred. We become attached to things in the world and constantly covet more. We are covered by afflictions just like a mirror is covered with dust. But we can cleanse ourselves by reflecting on our actions, speech, and minds. Then we can begin to sow good seeds.

I am the only child in my family and was raised by my grandparents, uncles, and aunts. As a single child doted on by so many caring adults, I became indulgent and arrogant, always considering myself superior to my peers. As an adult, I became a very organized and responsible mother and wife, but I ran my family as if I were running a business. When my expectations were not reached, I became furious. I would scream and shout, slam things, and even threatened to commit suicide. I felt that I should be angry when others did not do the jobs I assigned them. My entire family lived under a very intense and stressful atmosphere, but I never thought that what I did was wrong.

When I joined the Tzu Chi study group on Dharma as Water, I was awakened by one of Master Cheng Yen's daily teachings: "a person with a bad temper and foul mouth cannot be considered a good person, no matter how good the heart is." When I heard her say that "temper is temporary insanity," I started to think back to all



*Inspired by Dharma as Water to reflect on her life, the author shares her story with fellow volunteers.  
Photo: Philip Kay*

my behaviors, words, and tones. I finally saw my evil face and cried. What a terrible person I had been. I knew then that I had sown many seeds of negative karma and I finally understood why I was not closer with my children. I deeply regret my past behavior and am working hard to change myself. My words caused evil karmas, so I now strive to avoid the four unwholesome acts of speech—speaking abusively, telling lies, using insincere flattery, and gossiping to create conflicts between people. I do not want to be the thorn that spoils the pretty rose anymore.

In addition to the four wrongdoings of speech, our minds also constantly create greed, anger, and ignorance. We are attached to what we see, what we hear, what we smell, what we taste, what we want, and what we like. The mind is just like a painter. We can paint a big picture filled with our desires and dreams. Driven by desire, we will never reach inner peace. I am not an impulsive shopper, but every time I receive a coupon I am tempted by the illusion of savings. I shop because I think that I lack that one outfit to wear to work or that I need another pair of shoes to match my outfits. Master Cheng Yen says that our needs are few, but our wants are many. So, I have reevaluated my wardrobe and closet to determine what I actually need and what I just want. I have begun to reuse some of my long-abandoned items. By doing so, I realized that not only can I save money to help people in need by reducing my purchases, I can also help the environment by not discarding those items. Now I have greater peace of mind and have also saved myself from the hassle of shopping.

**I do not want to be the thorn that spoils the pretty rose anymore.**

I have always enjoyed eating many different kinds of food including poultry, beef, and all sorts of seafood. I felt that I could never eat too much meat. When I started to have cholesterol problems, my doctors recommended that I eat less meat, but I did not really care. I thought the issue was not urgent. Then, through Dharma as Water, I learned that the retribution for killing is suffering torture and pain by falling into hell or the hungry ghost realm, or illness and early death if reincarnated within the human realm. My high blood pressure is linked to my consumption of meat. Since I do not want to die early, I realized it was time for me to follow Buddha's teachings and sincerely repent for killing. All beings are equal and have the right to live; none should be killed to satisfy my appetite. I decided to follow a vegetarian diet and show compassion for all living animals. I will not kill any creature to satisfy my personal desires.

The opportunity to study and practice the Dharma as Water teachings on the Compassionate Samadhi Water Repentance is a priceless gift from Master Cheng Yen. She constantly reminds us to take care of our minds and cultivate good seeds by showing contentment, gratitude, benevolence, and acceptance of all people in our daily affairs. The purpose of studying Dharma as Water is to help all disciples grow their inner wisdom and enlighten their lives by following a vegetarian diet, practicing the Dharma, cleansing inner impurities, and stopping bad habits. A peaceful mind leads to a peaceful community and, in turn, a peaceful world. 🌿

The act of repentance is tantamount to the purification of the heart, like a clear stream flowing over the heart, cleansing away its defilements.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

# Overture to Dharma as Water: Expound the Teachings of Repentance

法 譬 如 水 序 曲：懺 悔 法 門 廣 演  
fǎ pì rú shuǐ xù qǔ: chàn huǐ fǎ mén guǎng yǎn

The Buddha has compassion for all sentient beings  
諸 佛 慈 憫 念 眾 生  
zhū fó cí mǐn niàn zhòng shēng

Ordinary people act foolishly, are defiled  
凡 夫 愚 行 垢 穢 重  
fán fū yú xíng gòu huǐ zhòng

Master Wu-Da<sup>1</sup> made a grand vow  
悟 達 國 師 宏 願  
wù dá guó shī hóng yuàn

This place of practice is adorned with compassion  
慈 悲 道 場 莊 嚴  
cí bēi dào chǎng zhuāng yán

The Samadhi Dharma-water can cleanse  
三 昧 法 水 能 洗  
sān mèi fǎ shuǐ néng xǐ

Let us focus on eliminating evil and doing good  
攝 心 斷 惡 處 善  
shè xīn duàn è chǔ shàn

So He taught the Dharma of the Water Repentance  
為 說 水 懺 總 道 法  
wèi shuō shuǐ chàn zǒng dào fǎ

And create innumerable wrongs, whether rich or poor  
莫 問 貴 賤 罪 無 量  
mò wèn guì jiàn zuì wú liàng

To expound the Compassionate Water Repentance  
廣 演 慈 悲 水 懺  
guǎng yǎn cí bēi shuǐ chàn

The teachings of repentance are supreme  
懺 悔 法 門 無 上  
chàn huǐ fǎ mén wú shàng

It can cleanse the wrongs of all sentient beings  
淨 盡 眾 生 罪 愆  
jìng jìn zhòng shēng zuì qiān

Fire can transform into a Red Lotus  
火 燄 能 化 紅 蓮  
huǒ yàn néng huà hóng lián



Lyrics: Sixi Wang 作詞：王思熙

Music: Shouquan Li 作曲：李壽全

Arrangement: Zhiyuan Chen 編曲：陳志遠

Translated into English by the Dharma as Water Editorial Team

Master Wu-Da made a grand vow

悟 達 國 師 宏 願  
wù dá guó shī hóng yuàn

This place of practice is adorned with compassion

慈 悲 道 場 莊 嚴  
cí bēi dào chǎng zhuāng yán

The Samadhi Dharma-water can cleanse

三 昧 法 水 能 洗  
sān mèi fǎ shuǐ néng xǐ

It rectifies disorder and confusion

匡 正 顛 倒 荒 亂  
kuāng zhèng diān dǎo huāng luàn

The Sea of Suffering is vast and boundless

苦 海 茫 茫 無 邊  
kǔ hǎi máng máng wú biān

Eliminate the Three Obstructions<sup>2</sup> and all delusions

三 障 諸 惑 應 斷  
sān zhàng zhū huò yīng duàn

To expound the Compassionate Water Repentance

廣 演 慈 悲 水 懺  
guǎng yǎn cí bēi shuǐ chàn

The teachings of repentance are supreme

懺 悔 法 門 無 上  
chàn huǐ fǎ mén wú shàng

It can cleanse the wrongs of all sentient beings

淨 盡 眾 生 罪 愆  
jìng jìn zhòng shēng zuì qiān

It transforms the world with compassion

慈 悲 度 化 人 間  
cí bēi dù huà rén jiān

Yet turn around and the shore is clearly in sight

回 頭 明 明 是 岸  
huí tóu míng míng shì àn

Listen to the callings of all Buddhas!

諸 佛 聲 聲 呼 喚  
zhū fó shēng shēng hū huàn

<sup>1</sup> The story of Master Wu-Da and Water Repentance can be found in Issue 32 | Summer 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Master Cheng Yen's teaching on the Three Obstructions, or Three Obstacles, can be found on pages 44-45.



Young volunteers in Hawaii joined the global twentieth anniversary celebration of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association by cleaning Ala Moana Beach Park in Honolulu on July 14, 2012. The volunteers spent the day removing trash and clearing deadwood.  
Photo: Edgar Wu



Tzu Chi volunteers in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, provided a health lecture for local senior citizens on June 9, 2012, discussing strategies to control blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol.  
Photo: Ximing Jiang, Jiaoyi Huang



▲ Thirty-three Tzu Chi volunteers joined more than thirty thousand others in the Five Boro Bike Tour on May 6, 2012, riding forty-two miles through all five boroughs of New York. Volunteers demonstrated their care for the environment by wearing Da Ai Technology shirts made from recycled plastic bottles and promoting biking to reduce carbon emissions. Photo: Peter Chu



▲ Sixty Tzu Chi University and Senior High School students from Hualien participated in Tzu Chi Summer Camp USA in San Dimas, California, in July and August. When not attending English classes at Cal Poly Pomona, they visited American cultural landmarks and participated in local volunteer activities, such as feeding the homeless in downtown Los Angeles's Skid Row on July 7, 2012. Photo: Michelle Chen



▲ Tzu Chi has participated annually in the San Diego County Fair in San Diego, California, since 2006. This year, 135 Tzu Chi volunteers participated before the event ended on July 4, 2012. Several donned fruit and vegetable costumes to promote the advantages of vegetarianism and the 80/20 Lifestyle to visitors. Photo: Margaret Yeh



◀ On June 22 to 24, 2012, Tzu Chi Medical Foundation once again hosted Care 4 a Healthy IE, an annual free clinic in San Bernardino, California. During the three-day event, more than two thousand low-income and homeless patients were provided medical, dental, and acupuncture care, as well as access to information on affordable healthcare and healthy eating. Photo: Michelle Chen



▲ The small town of Calipatria, California, thirty miles north of the US-Mexico border, was flooded by a storm on July 13-14, 2012. Ten days later, a group of volunteers traveled there to offer support and emergency cash cards. They were unexpectedly greeted by Esperanza Colio, 2002 Tzu Chi Scholar and current Community & Economic Development Manager for Imperial County. Photo: Liliane Yong



▲ In June 2012, Tzu Chi offices around the country presented scholarships to college-bound high school seniors. Since 1998, Tzu Chi Scholars have been selected annually on the basis of their financial need, academic achievement, and community involvement. Photo: Luca Ye



*Extremely dry and hot conditions in Colorado contributed to several serious wildfires in summer 2012, with more than thirty thousand residents evacuated from their homes in June alone. Tzu Chi volunteers visited the most affected regions, working closely with other disaster relief organizations to assess the damage and offer comfort and support to those affected. Photo: Hank Chuang*



▲ On July 28-29, 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers participated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Asian Cultural Experience in Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout the two-day event, they encouraged visitors to Coexist with Earth by distributing reusable cups and shopping bags and discussing the value of recycling. Photo: Joanne Liew



▲ In the midst of the East Coast's historic heat wave, Tzu Chi volunteers and Tzu Chi Academy students and parents visited Rose Mountain Care Center in New Brunswick, New Jersey, on July 21, 2012. They interacted with senior residents and provided nearly two hours of performances, including songs, wushu, sign language, and more. Photo: Cijiong Zhan

▶ On July 8, 2012, Tzu Chi volunteers in earthquake-prone Oakland, California, held a safety seminar to teach the proper earthquake response: Drop, Cover, and Hold on. Attendees were also taught the Heimlich maneuver and proper use of a fire extinguisher, and shown how to prepare an emergency backpack.

Photo: Jiahui Tang





Photo provided by Sandy Lo

Mama Luo comforts a patient during a relief trip to Chile in 2011. Photo: Henry Tuan

## Mama Luo:

# Her Dream and Vow

John Cheng & Susan Su

Whenever visitors arrive at the Tzu Chi office in New York, one of the first people they see is a small gray-haired grandma busily working in the kitchen: Mama Luo. She serves as the office's master chef and has become a second mother to all her fellow volunteers, both young and old.

Early each morning, while most people are still asleep, this seventy-seven-year-old volunteer is already on her way to the Tzu Chi office. Rain or shine, she always arrives at the facility by eight o'clock. As soon as she arrives, she starts her typical busy day of preparing nutritious and delicious vegetarian meals for the volunteers who work in the office and for any visitors who happen to come in.

Mama Luo's warm smile, the healthy and tasty vegetarian food she prepares, and the gardens she maintains have long provided inspiration to the other volunteers. Her hard work has turned an office into a home. Many

To the Tzu Chi New York office, Mama Luo is like warm sunshine in a blizzard.

volunteers stop at the office after a long day at work just to enjoy the warm environment that she has created.

Mama Luo was born in 1935 and grew up in Hualien. In the depressed economy of World War II, her father ran a small noodle stand in order to earn enough to feed his family. As the oldest daughter among eight children, Mama Luo learned to cook and care for her younger siblings at the tender age of eight. She recalls, "Both of my parents worked so hard and went to bed very late at night, so I tried to get up early in the morning to cook for my younger siblings so that they could get to school on time and my parents could stay in bed just a little longer."

Mama Luo was married at the age of twenty-three. She and her husband soon moved to Taipei and, before long, they became parents of two young children. When their son was in the sixth grade, Mr. Luo was accepted at a Japanese university to study Buddhism and film. In



*Mama Luo and her cooking students show off their handiwork.  
Photo: Ko Len Lai*

order to devote her attention to her husband's education, Mama Luo left their two young children with her mother and accompanied her husband to Japan.

After six years in Japan, Mama Luo's brother-in-law suggested that she and her husband join him in the United States to pursue the better opportunities available there. Following a smooth visa application process, they were on their way to the United States within three months.

In 1978, as the Luos ventured to the United States for new opportunities, their son was in college and their daughter was in high school. So as not to disrupt their studies, the Luos once again decided to leave their children behind. Several years later, after their daughter had graduated from high school and their son had both graduated from college and completed his two years of mandatory military service, both children reunited with their parents in the United States.

Mama Luo was forty-two years old when she arrived in the United States. She worked in a Chinese restaurant for a year, and then spent two years cutting and stitching sample dresses

for a Japanese garment manufacturer. With the money she saved, she opened up a Laundromat and tailoring service. Because of the fine quality of her tailoring, she attracted more customers than she could handle. After five years of busy laundry and tailoring work, and the aches and pains they inspired, Mama Luo sold her business. Her fine tailoring skills earned her a management position in a textile company, where she completed the final decade of her career. At seventy, she retired.

In the thirty-five years she has lived in the United States, Mama Luo has always worked hard and viewed life with optimism. She has been successful in all that she has done, whether working in a restaurant or in the clothing industry. She is also an excellent cook, to which she credits the experience she received working in her father's food stand when she was young.

Today, one of Mama Luo's main responsibilities at Tzu Chi is teaching a vegetarian cooking class. Using Dharma Master Cheng Yen's vegetarian and environmental teachings, she shares her vegetarian cooking skills with both Tzu Chi volunteers and community members. By sharing her experiences and skills with



*Mama Luo tends her windowsill garden. Photo: Sean Kuo*

**An enlightened life means knowing how to give and create blessings.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

others, Mama Luo helps more people actively pursue a vegetarian lifestyle.

Mama Luo first became a vegetarian in 2001. After eleven years, she says that the decision has improved her health, calmed her temper, and left her feeling happy every day. She says, "Cooking a vegetarian menu is actually not as complicated as many people think. There are many different ways to cook vegetarian food. We can develop dressings and sauces with varied flavors to match people's tastes. With the right sauces, even simple, lightly boiled vegetables can taste delicious. Sometimes, vegetarians don't get enough of certain vitamins, minerals, and proteins that are found in meat products. However, people can absorb minerals from seaweed, vitamins from various fruits and vegetables, and proteins from tofu, beans, milk, and eggs. As long as our diets contain a variety of vegetables, beans, wheat, and eggs, we can achieve balanced nutrition."

Even with seventy years of cooking experience, Mama Luo continues to develop new recipes to attract more people to the

vegetarian lifestyle. Not only does Mama Luo promote vegetarianism by cooking and teaching cooking classes, she can always be counted on to prepare vegetarian meals for hot meal distributions to needy people in the community. Whenever she cooks, she pays special attention to all details of the food: not only taste, but nutrition and appearance as well. She changes the menu frequently so that recipients can enjoy a variety of healthy dishes. She says, "If we cook vegetarian food that is delicious, then people are more willing to try it and even to join us in the environmental protection movement."

Susan Su, a dedicated New York volunteer, explains, "To the Tzu Chi New York office, Mama Luo is like warm sunshine in a blizzard. She shows her great love to every single volunteer through her dedication and the well-prepared meals that she serves every day. She is every volunteer's mother, and with her selfless wisdom and dedication, she serves as an excellent role model to all of us." The world needs more role models like Mama Luo. 🌱

**Editor's Note:** A more complete version of Mama Luo's story will be available in the forthcoming *Flowers in the Snow: Environmental Protection*.

# SEEK THE NON-CONTRIVING PATH

Dharma Master Cheng Yen

Compiled into English by the Dharma as Water Editorial Team

Contemplate the brevity of the human life. All things are impermanent, causes and conditions are burdensome, and suffering deepens each day. Amassing treasures does not benefit oneself; desire only brings suffering. It is better to seek the non-contriving path. Sutra of Parables, Chapter 21

Once there lived a king who was a devout follower of Brahminism, which encourages disciples to cultivate their minds and do good deeds. This king also had great respect for Brahmin practitioners, much as Buddhist disciples have respect for the monastic community.

One day, he was inspired to hold a great almsgiving. He ordered the state treasury opened so he could give to the poor. Notices were posted, proclaiming that the state treasury would be open for seven days, and anyone could take anything they needed. The king placed items into piles of food, household goods, and jewelry. Many people showed up to receive alms.

On the third day, a young Brahmin practitioner came to the treasury. The king paid his respects to him and said, "I have been hoping for an opportunity to make an offering to one such as you. Take a look and see what you need. Choose any pile you wish."

The young practitioner was delighted. He took a pile of jewelry and put it in his bag. He walked away, took seven steps, then turned back and returned the jewelry to the treasury.

The king asked him, "Why did you come back? I have given you what you needed. Why are you returning it?"

The young practitioner answered, "Originally I took the jewelry because I intended to build a cottage. But, I realized that after it is built, I will need a wife, and this jewelry will not be enough to cover those additional expenses. So it is better

that I do not take it at all. That is why I am returning it."

The king said, "You will need a wife? No problem, take three piles; they're yours!"

The young practitioner opened his bag and put in three piles of jewelry and walked away. He took seven steps, stopped, then turned back again. The king asked, "What is the matter?"

He took the jewelry from the bag and put it back, saying, "It is still not enough; I had better not take it."

"Why is this not enough?"

"If I have a house and a wife, I will need to support my household. I will need to acquire a plot of land to grow crops and hire servants to help me. This jewelry will not be enough to cover those expenses. So, I had better return it to you."

The king then said, "If that is the case, you can have seven piles!"

The young practitioner put seven piles into his bag and started to walk away. Again, he took seven steps and brought them back.

"I need to return this to you."

"Why?"

"If I have a house, a wife, and land, I will be able to support them. But then if we have children, we will have to raise them and arrange marriages for them. After they get married, I will still worry about their well-being. It is hard to make predictions about their life. I will be happy if they are prosperous, but will need to help them if they are not. There are so many things to worry



about! I had better not take this jewelry."

The king said, "If you feel that seven piles will not leave you enough savings to provide for your children's future, then take as many as you think you will need."

The young practitioner followed the king's advice and took more jewelry. He walked away with the wealth, but then came back again as before.

"I had better not take any of this. I came here to beg for alms for myself and to build a cottage. But then I thought about finding a wife, land to support my household, and savings for my future children. What you gave me is still not enough and now there are so many worries in my mind. I had better not take any of this."

After seeing all this, the king was puzzled. "What exactly do you want?"

This young practitioner replied, "Carefully contemplate the nature of life. How long will we abide in this world? Only a very short time. All things are impermanent; we may be here this morning but we cannot guarantee that we will still be here in the evening. Every day we create causes and conditions that bring us suffering. The longer these negative conditions last, the more easily we are influenced by them and the deeper our troubles become. We suffer tremendously.

"Even if you give me a pile of jewels as tall as a mountain, it will not help me. Because in the end, how long will I live? Greed and desire bring only hardship and suffering. When we try to expand our life plans to acquire more things, we

just place more burdens on ourselves. No matter how much we gain, we just keep broadening our ambitions. Ultimately, we only cause suffering. So, it is better for us to still our thoughts and seek the non-contriving path.

"When we are on the non-contriving path, our minds are uncontaminated by the desire for wealth. This is precisely why I do not want anything, why I seek nothing more."

After hearing all this, the king was greatly shaken. Though he believed in Brahminism, socialized with many Brahmin practitioners and accepted Brahmin principles, he had never heard such teachings. He realized that our lives are truly short. Even if we obtain everything we seek, we will never be satisfied. What real benefit is there in mountains of wealth? The king had never considered this, let alone the concept of stilling one's thoughts and eliminating desires.

The king felt that this pure state of mind was truly profound. But before he could make further inquiries, this young practitioner revealed his true identity in a blinding aura of pure light. He was Sakyamuni Buddha, who took on this appearance to expound Dharma to the king.

In receiving the Buddha's teachings, the king was able to feel the vastness of the Buddha's mind, which was able to encompass the universe. Though the universe is filled with all kinds of objects, the Buddha's mind remained undefiled. This so thoroughly inspired the king that he became the Buddha's disciple and spread the Buddha's teachings among the people of his kingdom. 🌿



Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation  
[www.us.tzuchi.org](http://www.us.tzuchi.org)

# The 80/20 Lifestyle

**Be healthy: Reduce your meal portions to 80%**

**Be generous: Use your 20% savings to help the poor**

Improve your health by reducing meal portions to 80% of your normal consumption. With the 20% you save on food, you can help the needy.



# Vegetable Spring Rolls

Recipe provided by Vegetarian Cooking Team  
Tzu Chi University Continuing Education Center

## Ingredients:

1 package Pressed Tofu  
(or: Baked Soybean Cake)  
1/2 head Cabbage  
1 Carrot  
1/2 stalk Celery  
1 Egg  
Spring Roll Skins (square)  
Oil for frying

## Seasoning A

1 tbsp Vegetable Oil  
1 tbsp Sesame Oil  
1 tsp Salt  
1/2 tsp Mushroom Essence  
1/8 tsp Black Pepper

## Seasoning B

1 tbsp Vegetarian Oyster Sauce  
1 tbsp Soy Sauce  
1 tsp Sugar  
1/2 tsp Mushroom Essence

**Respect for life is protecting the well-being of life.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

## Directions:

1. Cut pressed tofu into thin strips. Add a tablespoon of vegetable oil to a heated pan, then sauté tofu with Seasoning B. Set aside.
2. Shred the cabbage, carrot, and celery, then add to a pot of boiling water. As soon as water returns to boil, remove from heat, drain, and pour vegetables into a large bowl. Add Seasoning A and mix well.
3. Beat egg in a small bowl and set aside.
4. Lay flat one sheet of spring roll skin. Place one teaspoon each of tofu filling and vegetable filling in the center. Tightly roll skin diagonally from near to far corner, folding side corners over the center. Seal edge tightly with a dab of egg. Repeat until all ingredients are used up. (Make sure each roll is tight and well-sealed, otherwise rolls may open while frying.)

5. Fill a wok or pot with vegetable oil deep enough to completely submerge the rolls. Preheat to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. One by one, gently slide egg rolls into the hot oil. (Sliding will help prevent oil splatters. Do not overcrowd the oil, as this will lower the temperature.)

6. Deep-fry each egg roll for 3 to 5 minutes until golden brown on all sides. Drain the egg rolls on a deep-frying rack, in a colander, or on a cooking sheet lined with paper towels. Serve hot.

Feel free to experiment with ingredients. Vegetables listed in the recipe can be replaced or supplemented by others, such as bean sprouts or black fungus.



Photo: Joanne You



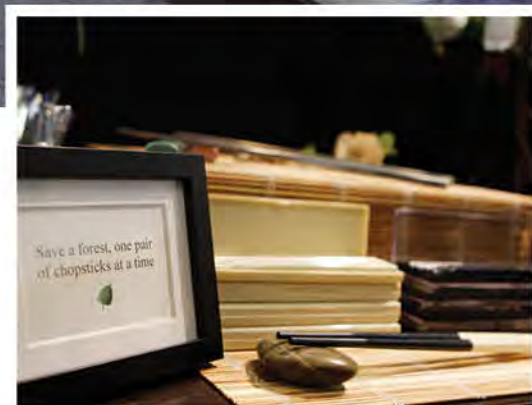
# EcoVerse Opens in San Diego

**EcoVerse: Jing Si Books & Café**  
302-304 11th Ave.  
San Diego, CA 92101

*"I often say that time is running out. It is truly worrisome to witness the rapid deterioration of planet Earth... Our planet Earth and everything and everyone on this planet are all interconnected. We should cherish the precious resources provided by our Mother Earth and reduce our wants. As we protect our environment through cherishing all resources, reducing carbon footprints, and observing a vegetarian diet, we can reduce the occurrence of disasters and mitigate damages to our Mother Earth." – Dharma Master Cheng Yen, in a letter to global Tzu Chi volunteers following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, March 2011*

For more than twenty years, Dharma Master Cheng Yen has been reminding Tzu Chi volunteers that time is running out to save the environment. She has been encouraging everyone to lessen our impact on nature by such simple everyday actions as choosing reusable over disposable products, recycling, not eating meat, reducing water and electricity usage, and so on.

On August 4, 2012, Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in the United States took a major step toward sharing these ideas with the broader



community as EcoVerse: Jing Si Books & Café opened in the Ballpark District of San Diego, California.

EcoVerse: Jing Si Books & Café fuses together two establishments. On the one side, it is Jing Si Books & Café: a tranquil space for patrons to enjoy a variety of organic coffees, teas, and fruit smoothies while reading a book, studying the wisdom of Dharma Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si Aphorisms, learning delicious new vegetarian recipes, or just recovering from the stresses of the world outside.

On the other side, it is EcoVerse: a community center for the environmentally conscious lifestyle that the ailing Earth desperately needs. EcoVerse sells environmentally friendly products for



Environmental protection involves not only purifying the mountains, waters, and land, but also purifying our hearts.

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*



everyday use—such as stainless steel travel mugs, reusable cloth bags, and Da Ai Technology clothing made of recycled plastic bottles—but, more importantly, it serves

as a community center for sharing wisdom to protect the earth.

On EcoVerse's walls, a digital screen streams episodes of US Tzu Chi 360 focused on environmental protection while two other screens display problems facing the Earth and everyday solutions to address them. In EcoVerse, Tzu Chi hosts regular community seminars for patrons and neighbors to learn from experts and discuss strategies for a sustainable lifestyle.

On both sides, EcoVerse: Jing Si Books & Café provides an opportunity for Tzu Chi to draw closer to the community and for all people, regardless of background or religion, to come together to make a positive impact on our shared planet. 🌱



*All Photos: Alex Feng*

# Following in Their Footsteps

Holden Lin

Images of the Texas skyline on that final car ride to the airport still resonate in my mind. I'm trying my best to hold on to this feeling, however ephemeral it may be. Every moment is fleeting as soon as it has occurred, so we need to cherish every minute, every second. We cannot live in the past, however beautiful it may have been. We can only cherish the present and await what is to come. Although we only find ourselves in this space and time once, the interpersonal relationships we have formed are lasting. We are forever bonded by this feeling of family and this sense of duty we have to shoulder the mission of Master Cheng Yen. I left the July 2012 Tzu Ching Leadership Conference in Dallas feeling recharged and full of renewed hope for the future of Tzu Ching. We have a bright future ahead of us on this Tzu Chi path, and the touching moments we experienced should serve as a reminder to strive harder.

From the moment I first heard of the camp, I knew I wanted to be on Curriculum Team, so I could help design a curriculum for the attendees that would move them like I had been moved. To my astonishment, I was drafted. I really cherished my opportunity to be a part of Curriculum Team, so much so that I pushed myself to the limit by attending every single meeting, taking on as many responsibilities as I was allowed, and doing all I could to justify my value as a team member to show the Curriculum Team advisor and leader that they had made the right decision. I worked hard, took the initiative, and proved myself to be a reliable asset to the team. Before long, I was promoted to Deputy Team Lead. I was scared to accept the position because I had no idea how to be a good leader, but the alumni soon showed me the way. I followed in their footsteps diligently observing the wisdom they expounded, not just through their words but also through their actions.



Curriculum Team members lead a sign language dance number—"The First Dawn"—to pump up the spirits of the campers. Photo: David Chang



Carolyn Chen, a Tzu Ching alumna very dear to me, once observed about me, "You sure have a lot of opinions." Although true, it was quite a shock for me to hear that. I really took those words to heart and pursued self-reflection. I wondered why I was so quick to judge others and why I was unable to be forgiving of past mistakes they had made even though I had once been in the same situation myself. I'm a firm believer in second chances, and surely the least I could do was to look at others with non-discriminating eyes.

Another alumnus once said, "In order to become a good leader, one has to learn how to be led." Following was not something I did well, especially if it was taking orders from someone less experienced than myself. My arrogance made people uneasy, but how can you purify a glass of dirty water without pouring the water out? The answer is to pour clean water into the glass until all the dirt filters out, and that's what every single person I met at camp did for me. Every word of encouragement, every undeserved praise, every expression of gratitude, every warm smile, every loving embrace was a glass of fresh water filling my once-contaminated heart. I'm entirely grateful to my Tzu Chi family for taking the time to get to know me, for standing up for me, for holding my hand while I was feeling self-conscious, and for helping me in my endeavors. They have really encouraged me to cultivate myself to become the best version of myself that I can be. I feel transformed, and all in all this has been a humbling experience.

"In helping others to fulfill their goals, we too become fulfilled." I lived by this Jing Si Aphorism during the camp. I love standing onstage while others look up at me from the audience with eyes full of excitement. Tzu Ching is a great platform for that. As much as I enjoy being the center

Every word of encouragement, every undeserved praise, every expression of gratitude, every warm smile, every loving embrace was a glass of fresh water filling my once-contaminated heart

of attention, this aphorism taught me to give others a chance to hone their leadership skills. I no longer get jealous when the focus isn't on me. In fact, I want to let more Tzu Chings have the opportunity to stand on stage and feel that rush of

passion. I especially want to focus on the ones who are more humble and reserved because, like Master tells us, everyone has unlimited potential.

There are so many people that have moved me during this conference, who have showed me kindness and compassion. One small expression of care was enough to warm my heart. Through this experience, I learned to open my heart and to be considerate of others, and I felt my defensive walls crumbling down. I felt like I have really matured as a person these past few days. I am firm in my convictions, and when I find something I believe in, such as Tzu Chi, or someone worth following, such as Master, then I am loyal to a fault. This camp has only reaffirmed my faith in Tzu Chi and my sense of mission towards Master. A year from now, ten years from now, I know I will still be on this Tzu Chi path following in Tzu Chi commissioners' footsteps, following in Master's footsteps. 🌱

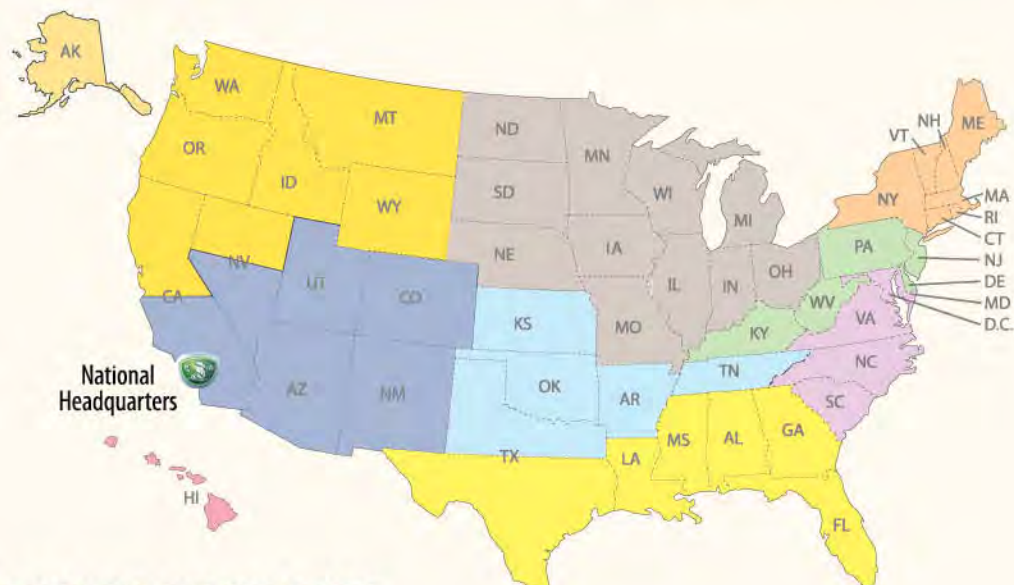


Curriculum Team members Lucy Chiang, Sabrina Wang, Holden Lin, and Tracy Tsai demonstrate Tzu Chi dining etiquette. Photo: David Chang

**In helping others to fulfill their goals, we too become fulfilled.**

*Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*










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# TZU CHI

## A BRIEF HISTORY...

**O**n April 14, 1966, Venerable Master Cheng Yen founded the Tzu Chi Merits Society in Hualien with the support of 30 housewives who each put aside 50 NT cents (about two US cents) of their grocery money every day to establish a charity fund. Their objective was to provide assistance for the poor.

During the first five years, they helped a total of 31 elderly, ill, or poor people from 15 families. As word spread, more people participated and the program gathered strength. It spread beyond Hualien across the island.

Today, Tzu Chi Foundation is a non-profit organization with 10 million members worldwide. The international headquarters remains in Hualien. The United States headquarters in San Dimas, California, oversees nine Tzu Chi regional chapters with more than 80 offices across the country. In keeping with its goal of inspiring volunteers to heal the world, foundation members and a network of medical providers can be found assisting in relief work all over the world, providing assistance to victims of both man-made and natural calamities.

The foundation hopes to instill in each of its members a heart filled with kindness, compassion, joy, and unconditional giving. For 46 years, Tzu Chi has concentrated on its missions of charity, medicine, education, and humanistic culture. Over the decades, the foundation has also expanded its activities to include international disaster relief, bone marrow donation, community volunteerism, and environmental conservation.

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