

慈濟

Tzu Chi

Buddhism in Action

The Vitality of Plants

Nature's Healing Power

November 2023



Bodhisattvas Among Us

Translated by Teresa Chang

A life lived to the full embodies true worth. For a while now, I've been encouraging everyone to examine and take stock of their lives. When I reflect on my own, I feel how rewarding it has been. I am surrounded by good-hearted people every day. Everything I see, hear, and come into contact with in Tzu Chi is rooted in love. I walk the same path with and am supported by many real-life bodhisattvas who share my mission. They selflessly give without expecting anything in return, elevating their acts of kindness beyond the ordinary.

Helping the needy is not restricted to the wealthy. Anyone who is willing to contribute can make a meaningful difference. In fact, I've found that seeking donations from wealthier individuals can sometimes be more challenging than from those with limited means. The wealthy may feel uncomfortable giving too little yet find it hard to part with a large sum. In contrast, individuals accustomed to financial constraints willingly save what little they have to contribute to charitable causes, despite the effort it might require of them.

There is, for example, a couple who runs a stall making and selling pan-fried stuffed buns. Their profits are small, but they consistently set aside money to support Tzu Chi's missions, a practice they continue even in their old age. There was also a dedicated volunteer who wished to help Tzu Chi build a hospital in Hualien, eastern Taiwan. She was of limited means, so she worked hard to make money, selling fruits during the day and getting up at one a.m. to sweep a bridge. Similarly, another volunteer who was already working as a domestic help for several households sought additional work in order to donate more to Tzu Chi. Witnessing the kindness and dedication of these individuals, it is impossible not to be deeply moved.

Many people scrimp and save to fulfill the dream of owning a home, but there are those who prioritize charitable giving. I remember that when we were building Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, a couple in Banqiao, northern Taiwan, generously donated a significant sum initially intended for their future home. They deemed Tzu Chi's work more important, so they redirected their savings to support the hospital's construction. Although

they lived in a shabby rental, their act of giving filled their hearts with joy.

We can find such kind-hearted people not just in northern Taiwan, but in the southern regions of the island as well. During the construction of Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, when I traveled to Pingtung, Taiwan's southernmost county, a couple approached me with a bag. "Master, can you spare us a moment?" they said to me. Unwrapping layers of newspaper and old cloth, they revealed pieces of gold jewelry, which turned out to be the wife's dowry and gifts from relatives and friends when their children were born. (In Taiwan, it's customary for people to give gifts of gold on important occasions.)

This couple sold freshly made puffed rice cakes from a cart each day, living a life far from affluent. I asked them, "Why are you offering me these pieces of jewelry when you have to work so hard to sustain yourselves?" They replied, "Our material life may be challenging, but finding inner joy is more important to us. We realize that Tzu Chi has a lot of work to do, and we wish to contribute."

After they happily fulfilled their wish, they left. I've never crossed paths with them again. I have no idea what they are doing now or whether they have become Tzu Chi volunteers. It is unlikely for them to come forward from the crowd and say, "Master, we are that couple." However, they have left an indelible mark in my memory.

I am grateful to everyone, past and present, who has contributed their love over the years. I see more and more people giving without seeking recognition. They may expect nothing in return, but surely, all the spiritual merits they deserve will be theirs. Furthermore, by joining forces with like-minded people to alleviate suffering, they form good affinities with many others.

It has been more than 50 years since Tzu Chi was founded. Looking back, I see how our foundation, with everyone's support, has progressed step by step from our humble beginnings. The light from a single firefly may be weak, but when many fireflies come together to give light, their collective brilliance illuminates even the darkest of nights. The smallest acts of kindness can lead to profound change. ❀

Tzu Chi

Bimonthly

November 2023



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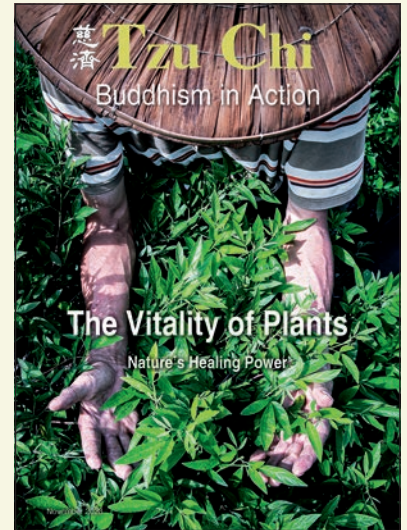
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Photo by Huang Xiao-zhe



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

Address: No. 8, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.

Telephone: 886-2-2898-9000 ext 2001

E-mail: 004741@daaitv.com.tw

Tzu Chi Bimonthly

Publisher

Shih Cheng Yen

Managing Editor

Wu Hsiao-ting

Senior Editor

Douglas Shaw

Volunteer Editor

Steven Turner

Volunteer Translator

Teresa Chang

Designers

Yi En

Liu Pang Chih

The *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* is owned and published by the Tzu Chi Culture and Communication Foundation, No. 8, Lide Road, Beitou District, Taipei City 11259, Taiwan.

Wang Tuan-cheng, CEO

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中華郵政台北誌字第910號執照登記為雜誌交寄

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A Dietary Approach

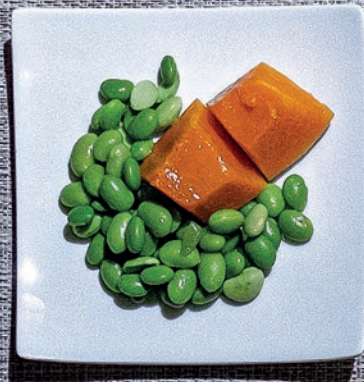
Fortifying the Immune System

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ling

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

The gut can be considered the largest organ in the immune system, and we don't need advanced weaponry to strengthen this fortress against disease. Everyday foods like rice, legumes, vegetables, and fruit can do the job very well.





The COVID-19 pandemic has eased, restrictions have been lifted, and masks in most places have become optional. We are now coexisting with the virus. But new infectious diseases will continue to evolve, and the next virus over the horizon could pose a global threat within just a few days. How can we fortify our immune system to combat potential infectious diseases in the future?

“Since the 1970s,” explained Vice Superintendent Lin Ming-nan (林名男) of Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital in southern Taiwan, “our world has witnessed numerous outbreaks of new infectious diseases. Over 70 percent of them have been zoonotic, meaning they are transmissible between humans and animals, and they have often been connected to our dietary habits.” He emphasized the need to adjust our dietary behaviors to enhance disease resistance.

Our body is engaged in a defensive battle every day, and the gut plays a crucial role. Dr. Lin explained that approximately 70 percent of the body’s immune cells reside in the intestines. Nutrients from the food we eat are absorbed into the bloodstream through the intestines, but pathogens—bacteria and viruses—can also hitch a ride into the digestive system with our food. It’s at this stage that the immune defenders in the gut, including T cells, macrophages, and natural killer cells, start devouring these invaders.

To boost our immune system, Dr. Lin highlights the importance of taking action to foster good gut bacteria. Plant-based diets, rich in dietary fiber, provide vital nutrients for these beneficial microorganisms. As they metabolize or ferment dietary fiber from the food we eat, they produce short-chain fatty acids and other bioactive compounds. These short-chain fatty acids can in turn bolster immunity, combat pathogens, and mitigate inflammation in the body.

Therefore, eating foods which are abundant in dietary fiber, such as whole grains, vegetables, and fruits, is one of the keys to maintaining the body’s immune system. “A whole-food, plant-based diet has a positive impact on our gut microbiota, providing numerous benefits,” Lin declared.

Plant-based protein: another great ally

Protein is another essential building block to enhance the body’s resilience, serving as a valuable ally to the immune system. Beyond its core role in tissue construction, encompassing muscles, skin, and neurotransmitters, Dr. Lin pointed out that proteins also make up antibodies, vital for maintaining health. Antibodies, also known as immunoglobulins, combat bacteria and viruses, playing a pivotal role in preserving the immune system’s proper function. Moreover, proteins constitute the key components of enzymes, which are essential for catalyzing numerous chemical reactions within the body.

When it comes to foods rich in protein, there’s a traditional belief that animal-based proteins are superior to and more nutritious than those that are plant-based. But is this truly the case from a scientific perspective?

Dr. Lin countered this belief, stating, “Animal-based proteins may contain substances that affect the immune system and potentially increase susceptibility to inflammation.”

He referred to a 2007 report published by the American Institute of Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund. According to the report, processed meat and red meat have been classified as Group 1 and Group 2A carcinogens, linked to the development of colorectal cancer.

This report was a meta-analysis of 87 studies. (A meta-analysis is a statistical technique used in research to combine and



PHOTO BY HUANG SHI-ZHE



Unleashing Gut Health

Whole grains, legumes, nuts, vegetables, and fruits are rich in dietary fiber. Dietary fiber is indigestible by the human body, but it does protect intestinal mucosal cells and promote intestinal motility—the movement and contractions of muscles in the intestines.

Beneficial gut bacteria also love to feed on dietary fiber, so a deficiency in this vital nutrient can result in a reduction of the good bacteria and an increase in harmful bacteria. This in turn may compromise the integrity of the layer of mucus that lines our intestines. Given that the mucous layer serves as the first line of defense for the intestinal wall, its inadequate strength can make it easier for pathogens to infiltrate intestinal epithelial cells, triggering inflammation and negatively impacting the immune system.

analyze the results from multiple independent studies on a specific topic.) The unanimous conclusion was that increased red meat consumption heightens the risk of colorectal cancer. Red meat raises the risks of other cancers too, such as pancreatic, esophageal, and stomach cancers, as well as cancer-related mortality and cardiovascular

disease, all of which have been confirmed in numerous scientific publications.

Yeh Chia-chou (葉家舟), the superintendent of Sanyi Tzu Chi Chinese Medicine Hospital, explained that consuming meat also entails the ingestion of various toxins that may have accumulated in the bodies of animals, including heavy



Bean products, such as tofu and dried tofu, when paired with grains, provide a rich source of protein for the body. Although legumes and mushrooms contain purines, research has indicated that purines from plant-based sources do not increase the incidence of gout and are metabolized more efficiently compared to purines found in meat.

metals found in deep-sea fish. These toxins can also contribute to various illnesses. He recalled a specific incident from his graduate school days when, during a dinner gathering, someone ordered a bowl of pork liver soup for everyone to share. A pathologist examined the soup for a long time before eventually deciding not to eat it. When asked why he had decided to pass on the dish, he explained, “This pig had liver cancer; I observed nodules in the liver.”

Clearing misconceptions

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a study involving 2,884 healthcare workers from six countries found that their likelihood of contracting the virus was similar, regardless of whether they followed a vegetarian or non-vegetarian diet. However, further analysis showed that vegetarians had a noteworthy 73 percent lower risk of developing severe symptoms in the event of infection.

“Food not only serves as sustenance for the body but also influences physical and mental well-being and contributes to disease prevention,” says nutritionist Gao Yun-jun (高韻均), a proponent of whole-food, plant-based diets. She emphasized that a well-balanced whole-plant diet is fully capable of meeting the body’s various nutritional requirements, thus enhancing overall health and resilience.

The human body requires 20 amino acids. Nine of these are categorized as essential because the body cannot synthesize them internally—they must be obtained from dietary sources. Proteins from different foods break down into these amino acids. Understanding the concept of complementarity, or combining different foods, helps us have a well-rounded and healthy diet.

For example, common staples like rice and wheat are rich in methionine but low in lysine. Both are essential amino acids. But legumes such as chickpeas, red beans, mung beans, and lentils are just the opposite. They are low in methionine but have an abundant amount of lysine. Pairing legumes with grain-based staples allows the foods to complement each other, increasing and enhancing the quality of protein intake. It is not even necessary to eat these foods together in one meal; you can spread them out over the day and reap the same benefits.

One of the primary sources of protein for vegetarians is soybeans. Dr. Lin dispels some misconceptions about plant-based diets, saying, “There may be misunderstandings surrounding plant-



Red bean soup served warm is a beloved winter treat in Chinese societies. Combining legumes with grains can boost their nutritional benefits, as they complement each other nutritionally. You don’t have to eat them together; having them within the same day works just as well.

based diets, such as the myth that people with gout cannot eat soybeans. That is incorrect.” He cited a 12-year study from Harvard University involving nearly 50,000 middle-aged men without a history of gout. The study found that those who



consumed more meat and seafood had a higher risk of developing gout. Specifically, increasing meat consumption by one serving per day led to a 21 percent higher risk of gout, while adding one serving of seafood per week raised the risk by seven percent. The study also noted that, after developing gout, the impact of meat consumption became more pronounced as kidney function for removing uric acid declined. On the other hand, people who ate a plant-based diet high in purine, such as from legumes and mushrooms, actually showed no higher risk of acquiring gout. Plant-based purines are metabolized more efficiently than those from meat sources.

Traditional Chinese dietary wisdom

As previously mentioned, a diet consisting of minimally processed, whole plant-based foods fosters a favorable environment for beneficial gut bacteria. Once you grasp this principle, you can enhance it by tapping into the wisdom of traditional Chinese medicine to customize your dietary choices, aligning them with your unique constitution and the season.

Superintendent Yeh Chia-chou explains that the foundation of health in traditional Chinese medicine lies in nurturing righteous *qi* within the body, which serves as a defense against external pathogenic influences. Qi is often translated as "energy." You can maintain a state of righteous qi, thereby promoting overall well-being, by identifying the dietary approach most suitable for your constitution.

The superintendent recommended opting for a diverse range of food types and colors to achieve a balanced diet. He went on to explain that in traditional Chinese medicine, foods are generally categorized into three main groups:

1. Cooling and cold: These foods have a calming, heat-clearing, and detoxifying effect, making them suitable for people with a hot body type, such as those who feel warm or hot more often than others. Such foods can alleviate symptoms such as insomnia, bloating, and inflammation. Examples include millet, mung beans, bitter gourds, loofahs, tomatoes, and grapefruit.

2. Pungent and hot: These foods have a warming effect, making them beneficial for individuals with a cold body type, such as those who are sensitive to cold and find their extremities easily

chilled. Such foods can improve functions affected by weakness, stagnancy, and anemia. Examples include glutinous rice, leeks, coriander, longans, and lychees.

3. Light and easily absorbed foods: These foods are considered neutral and suitable for the general population, irrespective of body types. Examples include corn, red beans, spinach, and broccoli.

Besides taking your constitution into account, aligning your eating habits with the seasons and following the natural cycles is beneficial for overall health. Liao Chen-kai (廖振凱), a practitioner in the Traditional Chinese Medicine Department at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, emphasized that consuming foods associated with the five colors that correspond to seasonal changes aids the body in syncing with the natural environment, thereby maximizing the benefits of dietary therapy.

In traditional Chinese medicine, each season is linked with an organ system, meaning that that particular organ system is more susceptible to the effects of the seasonal transition. Furthermore, each organ system is associated with a color. For example, autumn is associated with the lungs. In autumn, consuming white foods, such as yams, lilies, snow fungus, and Chinese cabbage, benefits the lungs. In winter, consuming black foods, such as black beans, black sesame, shiitake mushrooms, laver, kelp, and black fungus, nourishes the kidneys. When spring arrives and the world is bursting with life, green foods like spinach, mung beans, edamame, and asparagus support your liver. In early summer, consuming red foods, such as carrots, red beans, red quinoa, beets, wolfberries, and red dates, can be beneficial for heart health. In late summer, incorporating yellow foods such as soybeans, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, chestnuts, and lotus seeds into your diet can strengthen the spleen. (It is important to note that traditional Chinese medicine has different concepts for the organs when compared to Western medicine, viewing them not only in terms of their physiological functions but also in a broader, holistic context that includes their energetic and emotional aspects.)

Bacteria and viruses are all around us, underscoring the importance of building a strong body that can fend off sickness and bounce back from illness effectively. One way to achieve this is by making wise food choices. Support your immune system by reducing meat intake and increasing your consumption of vegetables. With each bite, you can fortify your body's defenses and pave the way for a healthier, more vibrant life. ❀

Pairing grains with a variety of vegetarian ingredients meets a person's nutritional needs.

The Vitality of Plants

Nature's Healing Power

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

The Earth's vegetation nourishes our bodies as food, but its therapeutic properties can keep us healthy in other ways too.

Around 60 Tzu Chi volunteers formed neat rows, their hands clasped in reverence, facing a lush herbal garden in Shengang, Taichung, central Taiwan. Volunteer Zhang Shu-juan (張淑娟) spoke on behalf of the group, addressing the plants in the garden: "Dear herbs, we're here today to harvest you. We're very grateful for your abundance, which will allow us to have a bountiful harvest. This harvest is meant to save people. We hope you unleash your utmost goodness."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, in an effort to help the world combat the infection, Dharma Master Cheng Yen instructed Tzu Chi healthcare professionals to develop a health drink based on the wisdom of traditional Chinese medicine. A collaborative team made up of traditional Chinese and Western medicine specialists was subsequently formed at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital in eastern Taiwan. By harnessing the potential of eight herbal plants, they successfully formulated an anti-coronavirus health drink, which they introduced as Jing Si Herbal Tea in December 2020.

After the product had been developed, the Tzu Chi Foundation sent it, along with other COVID-19 aid, to over 40 countries and regions. In the midst of these efforts, however, the supply of the herbs essential for making the tea ran short. Tzu Chi volunteers around Taiwan promptly mobilized and began cultivating the required herbs, including Chinese mugwort, *Desmodium caudatum*, and perilla, to contribute to the fight against the pandemic.

Zhang Shu-juan recalled that Tzu Chi volunteers in Taichung managed to collect 50,000 *Desmodium caudatum* seeds within a week in February 2021. From these seeds, they successfully cultivated 20,000 plants using natural farming techniques on land generously provided by two landowners in Shengang. "Previously, we only knew of this herb's folklore reputation for warding off negative energies or being used in purification baths," she said. "Now that we understand its potential to save lives, our hearts are filled with even more reverence for it!"

"The herbs cultivated by our volunteers grow up amidst the chants of the Buddha's name, the recitation of the *Heart Sutra*, and aphorisms from Master Cheng Yen," said Lin Zong-min (林宗民), another volunteer, expressing the care that he and his fellow volunteers have for the plants. "We believe that plants can sense, so when we work in the fields, we ask the herbs, 'Are you comfortable here? Are you thirsty?'"

Medicinal benefits of Chinese herbs

"Chinese medicinal herbs have the ability to regulate the immune system and inhibit acute inflammation in the body," said Superintendent

A volunteer works in a herbal garden planted with *Desmodium caudatum*, one of the ingredients of Jing Si Herbal Tea. The garden is located in Shengang, central Taiwan.



Yeh Chia-chou, of Sanyi Tzu Chi Chinese Medicine Hospital in northern Taiwan. He explained that although the effects of Chinese herbal medications may not be as rapid or potent as chemically synthesized Western medicines, which often focus on a single target, the herbal medications are composed of natural small-molecule compounds and operate with a multi-organ and multi-target approach. This enables them to effectively moderate acute inflammation, thus preventing the harmful consequences of an “immune storm.”

Yeh mentioned that the inspiration Master Cheng Yen drew from the traditional uses of Chinese mugwort and *Desmodium caudatum* for purification and disease prevention significantly contributed to the research at Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital for developing Jing Si Herbal Tea. Similar research and applications have also been explored with various other Chinese medicinal herbs in the medical field.

Yeh cited the example of honeysuckle, a commonly used Chinese medicinal herb easily found in low-altitude areas and plains of Taiwan. This plant is often employed in traditional Chinese medicine to alleviate heat and detoxify the body. Yeh has studied the herb for over 15 years. He explained that it can stimulate the body to produce interleukin-10, an anti-inflammatory cytokine. It can also generate microRNA2911, which operates within the human body by binding to the RNA of the novel coronavirus, enterovirus, and rotavirus, thereby impeding their extensive replication and the onset of disease.

Another example is sweet wormwood (*Artemisia annua*). Chinese pharmaceutical chemist Tu Youyou (屠呦呦), a 2015 Nobel Prize laureate in physiology or medicine, highlighted artemisinin, derived from sweet wormwood, as a gift from traditional Chinese medicine to the global medical community. Malaria has remained a significant infectious disease from ancient times to the present day. During her research to combat this disease, Tu Youyou discovered references to the anti-malarial properties of sweet wormwood in an ancient Chinese medical text from the Jin Dynasty (266 to 420 CE). This discovery led to the isolation of artemisinin from sweet wormwood, revolutionizing the treatment of malaria. Artemisinin is readily accessible and has saved countless lives in poor countries.

The concept that “food and medicine are from the same source” has been around since ancient times in China, so it’s no surprise that some

medicinal herbs also serve as culinary ingredients. Yeh Chia-chou provided the example of lily, a commonly used Chinese medicinal herb often incorporated into dishes. It can aid in promoting sleep when there is dryness in the respiratory tract and restlessness of the mind. Another example is *Gastrodia elata*, employed to treat dizziness, enhance blood circulation in the brain, and improve symptoms of depression. It is also suitable for preparation as a soup. Yellow chrysanthemum can clear heat from the stomach, while white chrysanthemum can dispel lung heat. Both can be brewed as tea.

From the standpoint of traditional Chinese medicine, illness signifies a battle between the body’s righteous *qi* and pathogenic factors. When external pathogens invade, the primary aim is not to eradicate the pathogens through medication but to bolster the body’s righteous *qi*, thus establishing an environment unfavorable to pathogen growth. Both Western immunology and traditional Chinese medicine underscore the importance of prevention.

Yeh offers a piece of advice regarding the use of patented Chinese herbal medicines, which are ready-made products typically in the form of pills, tablets, or powders. He emphasizes that these patented formulations are medicines and cautions against their prolonged use. He recommends that if extended usage is necessary, it should be done only under the supervision of medical professionals.

Nature offers an abundance of cures

While traditional Chinese medicine has a rich history in the East, “today’s Western European and American countries have also developed their own herbal medicine, which shares similarities with traditional Chinese medicine,” said Erica Kuo (郭姿均). She is a licensed aromatherapist in both the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as a registered clinical herbalist in the United States. She explained that Saint John’s Wort, a perennial plant, was recognized as early as Greek and Roman times for its ability to alleviate tension and anxiety, while lavender was used in baths to help soothe and relax the body. Archaeological experts have also uncovered ancient Egyptian herbal formulations.

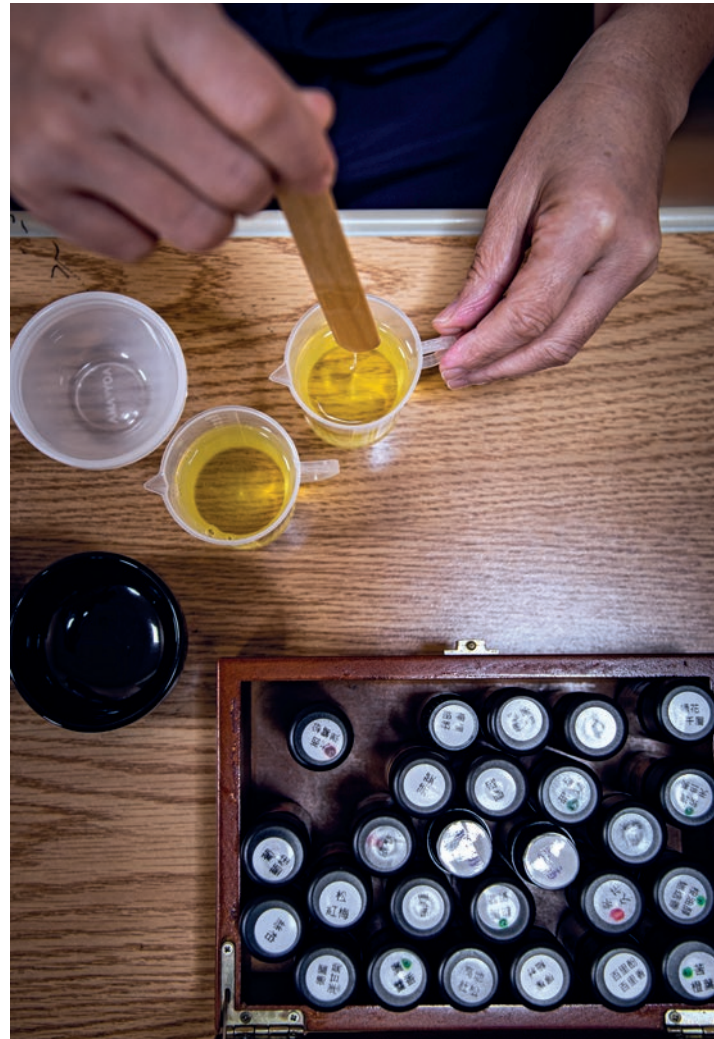
“Excluding surgical procedures and dental extractions,” Kuo added, “many forms of physical discomfort can be alleviated using herbal or medicinal plants.” She pointed out that access to medical treatment in Taiwan is convenient and

affordable, which has led to a heavy reliance on Western medicine. Conversely, people in the United States, who must contend with high healthcare costs, have tended to focus on preventive medicine and self-healing. Integrating herbs with healing properties into daily health practices can reduce unnecessary medicinal usage and minimize the risk of drug allergies, aligning with this shift toward self-care and prevention.

Different herbal or medical plants possess varying natural healing powers. Kuo offers a few examples: dandelion can reduce swelling, purify the blood, and enhance liver and kidney detoxification. Elderberry effectively alleviates cold symptoms, while the well-known ornamental garden plant, echinacea, also known as purple coneflowers, is renowned for its immunity boosting qualities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many turned to echinacea as a dietary supplement to strengthen their immune systems. Kuo explains that it contains alkylamides, which can bind to and activate CB2 receptors on immune system cells. However, alkylamides cannot be extracted through distillation, so the most effective way to harness the benefits of echinacea is by infusing it to create a herbal essence or boiling it to create a concentrated tea.

Western herbal medicine also follows principles of seasonal health. “We can enhance the health and vitality of our organs by aligning our diets with the changing seasons,” Kuo said. She underscores the significance of detoxification in spring, nurturing the liver, and suggests incorporating young dandelion leaves into salads. In summer, the focus shifts to energy replenishment, heart health, and immune system enhancement. She recommends consuming red-colored foods, like hibiscus and rosehips, during this time. Lung health and respiratory well-being are emphasized in autumn, with lemon balm being a representative plant known to boost immunity and prevent flu. In winter, the attention turns to nourishing the kidneys and supporting the endocrine system; nettle leaves, beneficial for kidney health, can be used to prepare soup.

Kuo provides a crucial reminder: essential oils and herbal remedies are complementary therapies. They should be customized by professional herbalists, using certified herbs, to align with individual needs and constitutions. For instance, Chinese mugwort is generally harmless when used in small quantities in food or as a herbal remedy. However, since it can promote menstruation, it should be avoided by pregnant women



Herbal or medicinal plants have diverse applications, ranging from tea and cooking to essential oil massages and more. They can be used not only for their healing potential but also to enhance overall health.

and individuals with uterine fibroids. Moreover, highly concentrated Chinese mugwort extract, such as in the form of an essential oil, can trigger adverse reactions, including cramps and tremors, in patients with Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy, or a history of brain injuries. As a result, it should not be used on people with these medical conditions.

The Earth abounds with vibrant flora. By learning about and utilizing the power of such gifts from nature, we can help our bodies prevent illness in a more natural way or recover more effectively when we become unwell. ❀

Stress Less, Live More


The Power of Mindfulness

By Hong Jing-jing

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Incorporating mindfulness into your daily routine has been proven to reduce inflammation and strengthen the immune system. Ground yourself in the present moment to nurture your overall well-being.



“When was the last time you saw the blue sky and white clouds? I often ask my audience this question during my lectures and find out that over half of them haven’t looked up at the sky that day. Also, can you recall the sequence of traffic light colors at an intersection?” These words were spoken by clinical psychologist Shih Shih-ming (石世明). He often uses simple questions like these to encourage people to become more attentive in their daily lives.

In the bustle of our lives, our minds are in a perpetual race. While we’re doing A, our thoughts jump to B, and when we’re engaged in B, our minds wander to C, all on autopilot. As our attention drifts, our thoughts frequently become entangled in past memories or future worries. Moreover, when faced with stress or negative experiences, our emotions can become overwhelming and difficult to manage.

Miss A, a physical therapist in her 40s, was diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer a year ago. She faced this formidable challenge with resilience, enduring ten grueling rounds of chemotherapy. However, the constant fear of a relapse cast a heavy shadow over her life. Anxiety gripped her on the eve of every follow-up appointment, robbing her of precious sleep and necessitating the use of sleeping and anti-anxiety pills.

In April of this year, she enrolled in a two-month course on mindfulness and initiated a daily mindfulness practice. She paid deliberate attention to the present moment, employing techniques such as mindful breathing and walking. Whenever negative emotions surfaced, she refocused on her breathing, reminding herself: "Thoughts are just thoughts, not facts; don't take them seriously." Every evening before bedtime, she listed ten things that had brought her happiness and gratitude during the day.

During the two-month mindfulness course, she gradually reduced her nightly dose of sleeping medication from a full pill to a half, and finally to a quarter. Previously, she would often wake up several times during the night, but now she could enjoy a full six and a half hours of uninterrupted sleep. More significantly, her emotional well-being improved markedly. She no longer experienced persistent anxiety throughout the day, nor did she struggle with motivation. Additionally, her follow-up medical reports provided reassurance by confirming that her cancer was under control.

The body, mind, and spirit have a mutual influence on each other. When the mind frees itself from distress and anxiety, the body undergoes a corresponding positive transformation.

Mindfulness incorporated into traditional therapy

In 1979, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist with a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, established a stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School's affiliated hospital. Combining mindfulness meditation practices with a Zen-inspired approach, he created an eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. The program aimed to help patients effectively manage stress, alleviate pain, and address the psychological challenges associated with illness. The program's outstanding effectiveness transcended the limitations of conventional medical treatments available at the time, earning widespread recognition and acclaim.

Mindfulness therapy has since become a medical treatment option. More than 700 hospitals and medical centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other countries now offer MBSR.

Shih Shih-ming, the clinical psychologist mentioned earlier in this article, has received professional training in mindfulness-based stress reduction under the guidance of Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn. He explains that British clinical psychologists have incorporated mindfulness into conventional cognitive behavioral therapy for depression. After two decades of research, they confirmed the preventative effects of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for individuals experiencing recurrent depressive episodes.

Dr. Linda E. Carlson, a professor in the Division of Psychosocial Oncology in the Department of Oncology at the University of Calgary in Canada, developed her Mindfulness-Based Cancer Recovery program based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction. This program has demonstrated its effectiveness in alleviating various physical and psychological symptoms experienced by cancer patients. It has also exhibited a positive impact on the immune system, resulting in reduced inflammation markers.

What exactly is mindfulness, and why is it capable of reducing stress and even influencing the immune system?

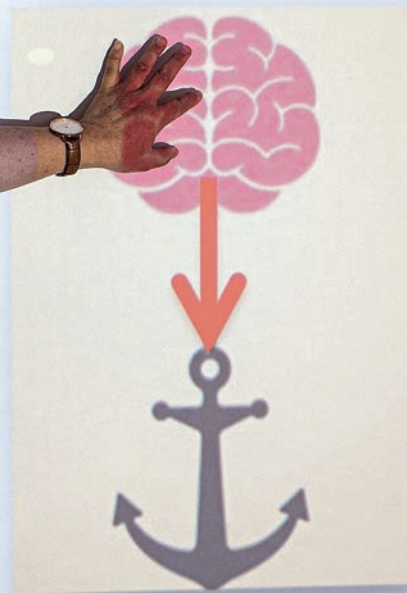
Chronic pain alleviated

According to Kabat-Zinn, mindfulness is "the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment."

Shih Shih-ming further elaborated by saying, "Mindfulness isn't about positive thinking or attempting to alter thoughts; it revolves around observing things as they are and gaining insight into how the mind shapes our experiences." He added that mindfulness training comprises practices such as seated meditation, mindful breathing, body scans, eating mindfully, and walking with awareness. The primary objective is to anchor attention to the breath or engage the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) to cultivate mental discipline and foster heightened awareness. This approach helps prevent the mind from being carried away by the swirling currents of habitual emotional reactions.

In response to stress and negative emotions, people tend to resort to various coping mecha-

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nisms such as suppression, avoidance, or positive thinking. However, as underscored by Shih, the approach advocated by MBSR emphasizes acceptance. In the practice of mindfulness, thoughts and sensations are observed without resistance or pursuit. One of Kabat-Zinn's famous teachings emphasizes that if your mind wanders from the breath a thousand times, your task is simply to gently guide your attention back to the breath each time. Over time, these practices gradually help rewire neural connections influenced by past life experiences.

"Mindfulness helps people understand how their minds operate," Shih said. "It can be integrated into existing treatment methods for addressing mental and physical health issues to improve treatment outcomes." A clinical study supported by the U.S. National Institutes of Health explored the effects of mindfulness-based eating practices on conditions such as anorexia and bulimia. The results showed that these practices could change unconscious and unhealthy eating patterns by promoting mindful awareness with every bite, thereby contributing to improved health.

Our thoughts often wander in our daily lives. Here, clinical psychologist Shih Shih-ming explains the concept of mindfulness practice and recommends dedicating ten minutes each day to anchoring your attention to a single focal point, like your breath, and following its natural rhythm to help train your mind to remain steady.


Engage all five senses to fully grasp the sensation and taste while eating a raisin. Similar practices are employed in mindfulness courses to enhance concentration and awareness.

Dr. Lee Jia-fu (李嘉富), a psychiatrist at Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital, offered further evidence of the positive influence of MBSR. He pointed out that neuroimaging research in medical literature has revealed that mindfulness can lead to structural changes in the brain, enhancing the function of regions like the prefrontal cortex, which is associated with conscious awareness, the hippocampus, responsible for memory and learning, and the sensory cortex and insula, which are connected to bodily and visceral sensations.

"Mindfulness practices can also reduce the intensity of chronic pain," Lee added, "and the effect can persist for a period after participating in a mindfulness program." He further noted that studies have also shown that mindfulness courses and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy can influence various physiological markers, such as blood pressure and stress hormones, effectively alleviating stress, depression, and anxiety levels in cardiovascular patients and improving some symptoms in rheumatoid arthritis patients.

Embracing life's beauty

In 2014, Taipei Tzu Chi Hospital introduced an MBSR program to help sufferers of mental health conditions and patients in daytime wards navigate

A woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a white lab coat and dark trousers, is walking towards the camera in a hallway. The hallway has a wooden floor and concrete pillars. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights. The woman is centered in the frame, and the perspective is from a low angle, looking down the hallway.

Mindfulness can be seamlessly woven into everyday life. According to clinical psychologist Chen Yi-jia, practicing mindfulness during activities such as walking involves a heightened awareness of the sensation with each step on the ground. Extend this attentiveness to everyday tasks like eating, drinking, doing laundry, and even driving, all of which can become opportunities for mindfulness practice.

their way toward emotional and physical equilibrium. Chen Yi-jia (陳宜家), a clinical psychologist at the hospital, pointed out that common clinical conditions like depression and anxiety often keep the body in a constant state of heightened alertness. Through mindfulness practices, patients can reset their long-established automatic stress responses, reducing unnecessary activation of the sympathetic nervous system and allowing the parasympathetic nervous system to reinstate a sense of relaxation, stability, and security.

Chen highlighted that depression is often accompanied by detrimental cognitive patterns, such as self-deprecation and self-blame, coupled with feelings of helplessness and despair about the future. Patients with anxiety disorders tend to overestimate and obsess over potential dangers and threats, leading to intense concerns about their safety and the safety of others. As a result, they may misinterpret ordinary physiological responses, such as a rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, or dizziness, as signs of severe illness, thereby exacerbating their anxiety and panic.

Chen shared that she has guided many patients in practicing mindfulness over the years. The feedback she received indicated that patients experienced increased self-confidence, decreased inner anger, improved sleep quality, and a healthier appetite.

Mindfulness practices stress the importance of being fully present in the moment, including being attuned to one's bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts. With the practices, individuals become more aware of what they are experiencing and find better ways to respond to various situations.

For example, picture yourself engrossed in household chores or rushing to prepare dinner when your child arrives home wearing a gloomy expression. Your initial thoughts might tend to be, "He's in trouble again!" or "I'm already so tired, and he's only making things more difficult." These thoughts can quickly escalate into conflict.

When confronted with such situations, try to distinguish if your negative emotions are provoked by your physiological sensations, like hunger or fatigue. It's crucial not to let these momentary bodily sensations, emotions, or thoughts dictate your responses. This reduction in emotional turbulence enables you to maintain your focus on the present, continue with the task at hand, or pause and listen to the other party with a non-judgmental attitude. As Chen aptly noted, "By objectively assessing a situation, you can uncover more effective solutions and manage stress in a healthier way."

She added, "One of the goals of mindfulness practice is to foster a greater awareness and presence in both the present moment and one's overall life." This shift, she highlighted, allows individuals to more deeply cherish and relish the beauty of the present moment. Engaging in mindfulness practices, which can involve all five senses, helps people to, for example, better savor the taste of food, enjoy the sound of rain, and feel the breeze on their skin, fostering an increased appreciation for the richness life offers.

When one can fully appreciate the taste of every bite of food and remain mindful while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, they can reconnect their disengaged body and mind. In this way, everyone can make strides toward improving their physical and mental well-being. ●●

What Is Mindfulness?

The mindfulness taught by Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, is not about positive thinking, and it is unrelated to religion. Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment."

This practice often involves anchoring your focus on your breath, sensing the inhalation and exhalation, the rise and fall of your abdomen, and maintaining an awareness of your bodily sensations. If your thoughts wander, gently guide them back to your breath.



Srijana's Smile

By Goh Lam Kia, Leong Yit Yu, Lee Lay Sim, Li Zhi Cheng, and Wang Yu Chan

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Wang Yu Chan

Tzu Chi volunteers are making an impact on the lives of families struggling to make ends meet in Lumbini, Nepal, as shown through the story of 11-year-old Srijana Kahar and her family.

A vehicle loaded with rice trailed behind a group of Tzu Chi volunteers as they made their way along a muddy path in a rural village in Lumbini, Nepal. The houses in this area were predominantly constructed from earth or bricks, with roofs covered in straw or weathered tiles. The aftermath of heavy rains was evident in the partially collapsed walls of some houses.

The first Saturday of every month is Tzu Chi Lumbini's Charity Day. On July 1, more than 40 volunteers divided into groups to deliver lentils, salt, cooking oil, sugar, and rice to 18 local households. One of the groups arrived at a shabby earth house with no door, the eaves so low the volunteers had to stoop as they entered. Inside, there were two beds; one of them, covered in straw, served multiple purposes—a sleeping space, a dining table, and seating for guests. Eleven-year-old Srijana Kahar's school bag hung on the wall. A volunteer presented her with a card bearing an aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen: "The most beautiful face is a smiling face." In response, the young girl's face beamed with a radiant smile.

The cooking area was located in one corner of the house, where two plastic buckets were catching rainwater dripping from the roof. Srijana's grandmother, 70, pointed to the leaky spot, lamenting, "Every time it rains, we can't cook." The volunteers made a mental note to repair the roof for the family.

After providing the household with a month's worth of food provisions, the volunteers prepared to move on to the next household. But before they left, the grandmother quickly retrieved a container of rice, requesting that they share it with other people in need. Despite their challenging circumstances, the family's compassionate practice of setting aside a portion of rice every day for charitable purposes persisted, profoundly moving the volunteers.

Young girl, big responsibilities

Tzu Chi's connection with Srijana and her family began in December of last year, when the foundation launched distributions of winter clothing and school supplies at 28 schools in Lumbini. Volunteers discovered Srijana at Siddhartha Primary School, shivering in the cold, her school

Elementary school student Srijana Kahar holds a card printed with this aphorism by Master Cheng Yen: "The most beautiful face is a smiling face." She demonstrates this statement through her actions.

uniform damp. They promptly held her close to share their warmth. After a subsequent visit to her home, they made the decision to include her family on Tzu Chi's long-term aid recipient list.

While speaking with the Tzu Chi volunteers visiting them, Srijana's grandmother conveyed deep concern for her granddaughter. She revealed that Srijana's parents had separated when she was young, and both had started new families. With Srijana's father now living elsewhere, the grandmother was deeply troubled by the uncertainty of who would care for Srijana should she and her husband, Diyar, become unable to work or pass away.

The family's livelihood depends on the elderly couple tending to a plot of land, which yields approximately 200 kilograms (440 pounds) of wheat per year. During the winter, they also grow mustard greens. Srijana is a great help at home. She never indulges in outdoor play after school. As soon as she gets home, she starts taking care of household chores. She cleans the house, gathers fodder to feed the sheep, and harvests vegetables for dinner. When her grandparents return from the fields with their empty lunch containers, she takes it upon herself to clean them using rice husks. The entire family then sits down to dine together.

Since Srijana was doing all the household chores, she could only study at night. Their home lacked electricity, and volunteers once observed during one of their visits that she was diligently doing her homework under the feeble glow of a flashlight. It was a poignant scene. To improve the lighting conditions, volunteers visited the family in early March of this year and installed solar panels. When they flipped the switch after the installation, instantly illuminating the room, the entire family burst into cheers. With light now available at home, the volunteers encouraged Srijana to complete her homework every day, ensuring that she could stay on track with her coursework.

"I like going to school, and I never miss a day," Srijana shared with Tzu Chi volunteers. "My dream is to become a teacher in the future."

Helping oneself and others

In mid-July, six volunteers arrived at Srijana's home with materials to fix the leaky roof. They replaced some of the roof tiles and iron sheets with galvanized zinc plates, added an extra layer of wood for insulation at the bottom, and thoughtfully raised the height of the eaves. Srijana's grandfather, Diyar, lent a helping hand. The repairs were completed in just one day with everyone's combined efforts. The couple was



overjoyed, exclaiming, “Thanks to Tzu Chi for the assistance!”

Recognizing Diyar’s skillful hands during the repairs, volunteers decided to extend an invitation. Given that July and August marked the low season for farming, they asked him to join Tzu Chi’s repair team through a cash-for-work arrangement. He readily agreed and started working the next day. He reported to the Tzu Chi Lumbini office, where he helped prepare materials for building a new home for Radheyshyam.

One side of Radheyshyam’s home had crumbled due to rainwater erosion, rendering it unsafe and unsuitable for habitation. Volunteers decided to build a simple dwelling for him and his family. Diyar contributed by drilling holes, painting, and cutting construction materials. He appreciated the opportunity to assist, remarking, “Volunteers helped me repair my house, so when they needed my help, I willingly joined. It’s fantastic to work here.”

As of August this year, volunteers have repaired or built homes for 17 households in



Srijana's home had a leaky roof. Volunteers stepped in to address this issue.

RAJ KUMAR

Lumbini. Several men from families receiving long-term aid from Tzu Chi have enthusiastically joined these efforts, working in exchange for pay. Through this, they have not only contributed to the reconstruction of their own and others' homes, but also earned income to support their households. Volunteer Zhang Bo Lin (張柏林) from

Malaysia praised the men, saying, "They show up for work almost every day. Their dedication is truly admirable."

The week after repairing the roof of Srijana's home, volunteers returned to assess the quality of the work. The house no longer leaked, allowing the family to comfortably cook, even on rainy days. Srijana's grandmother chatted casually with the volunteers, mentioning her husband's delight at being part of the repair team. The volunteers offered their feedback, remarking: "Grandpa Diyar is highly committed to his work with Tzu Chi, and he performs really well!"

A handful of rice

Tzu Chi's monthly distributions provide much-needed relief to recipient families by alleviating their financial burdens. However, volunteers have observed during their home visits that these families often harbor a stronger desire for employment opportunities rather than receiving mere aid. As a result, some of them have enthusiastically participated in Tzu Chi's recent workshops, such as soap-making classes, where they acquire skills in soap production and packaging. Such training has the potential to enhance their income. Others, who were once beneficiaries of Tzu Chi's repair projects, have joined the repair team, taking pride in both assisting others and earning an income.

Tzu Chi volunteers from Singapore and Malaysia have been stationed in Lumbini for over a year now. They understand that only continuous and sincere care can transcend language, culture, and ethnicity, nurturing bonds of trust and love. An example of their impact can be seen in Srijana's warm smile. She greets their arrival every month with a heartfelt smile and presents them with a plastic container filled with rice that she has set aside. The practice of saving a handful of rice to assist those in need has become a part of her daily routine.

Srijana is grateful for the care and companionship provided by Tzu Chi volunteers. Not only has her home environment improved, but her grandfather has also discovered an additional source of income. This positive transformation and newfound stability have allowed her to devote more time to her studies, resulting in improved grades and bringing her one step closer to her dream of becoming a teacher. Volunteers remain committed to their work in Nepal, assiduously planting and nurturing seeds of love and kindness in the land where the Buddha was born. ❀

From Struggles to Strength

Reflections of a Dialysis Patient in Malaysia

Narrated by Hann Ping A/L Ba

Compiled by Tan Chia Hoong

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Yew Chin Bey

People who donate to the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center in Kedah, Malaysia, are willing to support us in extending our lives, even though we have never met. In gratitude for such kindness, I should naturally cherish my life.

My name is Hann Ping. I was an ordinary boy in my childhood and teenage years—optimistic, cheerful, and talkative. I never held any grand aspirations. All I ever hoped for was to grow up, secure a stable job, provide for my parents, and, if possible, start a family of my own.

However, as the older generation often says, “Heaven has its own plans.” Things don’t always unfold as we envision. Many aspects of life, including our health, lie beyond our control.

As I neared my 30th year, my previously healthy body started experiencing unexpected issues. It felt like an abrupt, uncontrollable turn in the road, with no brakes to stop the downward spiral. My left leg, eyes, and kidneys were all severely affected.

Diabetes triggered a bacterial infection in my lower left leg, leading to multiple surgeries. Finally, the doctor recommended the damaged limb be amputated and replaced with a prosthesis. I chose to follow this recommendation, believing I could still lead an independent life after the amputation.

But my problem wasn’t limited to my leg. Over the subsequent months, my vision gradually faded until I found myself in total darkness. Just as I had with my amputation, I accepted my blindness with equanimity, trusting in a higher power’s arrangement. I told myself I just needed some time to acclimate to my new pitch-black reality, and then I’d be fine.

Later on, my urine output dwindled, my body swelled, and my appetite waned. After several medical consultations, the doctor declared that dialysis was essential to save my life. My mother had endured the rigors of dialysis during her later years, and it was a taxing experience. Contemplating a similar journey filled me with dread.

Dialysis differs significantly from fitting a prosthesis or adapting to blindness. It’s not as simple as merely getting accustomed to it. Undergoing dialysis meant committing four hours to the machine three times a week. It seemed unlikely that I’d be able to maintain a stable job under these circumstances. Another daunting question loomed: how would I manage the substantial medical expenses that were bound to come? I could only imagine inevitably becoming reliant on my two sisters, forfeiting my independence. That was the last thing I wanted.

Before the boat sank

I came from a family that was far from well-off. I dropped out of school at ten and took on odd jobs to help support our household. I left my hometown as a teenager, in search of a means to make a living. Wandering without a fixed residence, I was like a boat adrift, yearning for stability in the voyage of my life. I clung to the belief that I would one day find a safe harbor. Even in the face of occasional storms over the years, I gritted my teeth and persevered.

But facing dialysis was like battling unbeatable



Hann Ping and nurses at the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center in Kedah, Malaysia, express gratitude to each other during the center's annual gathering in 2020.

waves. I felt completely powerless. I simply wished to sink to the bottom of the sea. My foremost concern was not to become a burden to my family.

I couldn't bear to face all this, so I chose instead to slowly fade away. I deliberately ate high-sodium foods and increased my daily water intake to induce swelling in my body. There was even a time when I developed fluid in my lungs. These self-imposed choices landed me in the hospital time and again.

This cycle persisted until my sisters discovered the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center in Kedah. The center offered free dialysis services. Since my family couldn't afford regular dialysis, this was supposed to be great news for us. But it did little to lift my spirits. I wondered when I would be able to fulfill my wish of departing from this world once I commenced treatment there. However, I am the youngest in my family, with my two sisters being over a decade older than me. My mother entrusted them with taking good care of me before she passed away. To ease my sisters' worries, I reluctantly consented to become a patient at the dialysis center.

To my surprise, once I started treatment there, I found myself genuinely grateful to the center. Back at home, my sisters had provided me with meticulous care, but their concerns about my emotional well-being, given my visual impairment and other physical conditions, had led them to steer clear of certain subjects in my presence. I understand their intent to protect my feelings,

but this approach only deepened my sense of inadequacy. But the dialysis center is different. The nurses at the center engage in friendly conversations with me about all kinds of topics, including food, current events, and travel. I also have heartfelt conversations with fellow patients and share light-hearted moments with them. I appreciate the way I am treated there, and that's why it is only at the dialysis center that I really feel like a normal person.

I undergo three dialysis sessions each week at the center. Every time I step inside, the nurses there greet me warmly and inquire about my well-being. We don't even show such warmth and concern to our own family members at home. How can I not be touched by their warm treatment?

After I began treatment at the center, my outlook underwent a transformation, and I no longer yearned for death. Instead, my thoughts now often turn to the generous donors who support this dialysis center. They are complete strangers to us, yet they extend a helping hand like a ray of sunshine during our darkest moments. I resolved to cherish my life, not wanting to disappoint those kind-hearted donors. I also decided that if the dialysis center ever needed my assistance, I would eagerly help.



Life's ups and downs

My eyes may be impaired, but my mouth and voice are perfectly fine. There are still ways for me to make a meaningful impact on others, such as offering emotional support. Whenever a fellow kidney patient feels down or has just started dialysis, the nurses deliberately seat me beside them during the four-hour treatment session. In those four hours, I seek out opportunities to chat with them, share my experiences, and help them view their situation from a different perspective, so they don't get too discouraged. When I succeed in opening their hearts and making them smile instead of frown, I feel so happy and fulfilled. I feel I've performed a good deed. Not even money can buy that kind of happiness.

Sometimes, I am invited to participate in Tzu Chi events to inspire fellow kidney patients or people with disabilities. I am grateful for such opportunities to help. I want donors to see that every cent they contribute has the power to transform lives, including mine. Furthermore, it's a way to emphasize the message that if I can lead a meaningful life in the face of my many challenges, others can lead equally meaningful lives in the face of theirs.

Losing my left leg wasn't too bad because I have a prosthetic that allows me to walk. The loss of my eyesight, while undeniably inconvenient, had its silver lining—it made my world significantly more beautiful. Without the ability to perceive physical appearances, I naturally harbor no biases or preconceived notions. For instance, when encountering a stranger, I'm oblivious to

Hann Ping (second from right) extends his appreciation at a thanksgiving event to people who have donated to the Tzu Chi Dialysis Center in Kedah, emphasizing that their generosity allows kidney patients like him to see hope.

YING JIAN HUA

their external features. My sole focus is on their words. Through our conversation, I come to discern their personality and character, their joys and sorrows. Their physical appearance never influences my judgment, making it easier for me to discern their inner beauty and goodness.

In the past, I neglected my diet and hygiene, leading to recurrent hospitalizations. But that chapter of my life is behind me. I am now a conscientious kidney patient. I carefully manage my water intake and watch my diet. Despite my best efforts, my health remains somewhat unpredictable. But, as they say, life is filled with more ups and downs than smooth sailing. Finding contentment in the midst of our trials is the key.

Occasionally, I have thoughts of despair. After all, I'm not used to relying on my family. If, one day, my health takes a serious turn, I hope my family will allow me to go in peace and then scatter my ashes at sea so my soul can explore this beautiful world. This, you could say, is my final wish.

For now, my health is holding up reasonably well. I am deeply grateful for the care and support I receive from everyone. I will continue to give my best, treasuring each day until that inevitable last day arrives. ❀



Meeting Tzu Chi

By Zhao Jia-jui

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photo by Li Bai-shi

Demanding school work took a toll on my physical well-being during my high school years, leaving me exhausted. It was during this time that a classmate offered me some methamphetamine to help me combat my fatigue. I accepted, but unfortunately that decision led me down a dark path of drug addiction, which eventually resulted in my expulsion from school.

Despite my older brother's efforts to help me by taking me to rehabilitation, I was unable to break free from the grip of addiction. Desperate for cash to sustain my habit, I resorted to embezzling money from my father and brother. Though I was but 21 that year, I had transitioned from a drug user to a thief. My father pleaded for me to quit taking drugs and my mother cried over me, but their pleas fell on deaf ears.

After my mother passed away, I was sentenced to prison. I was almost too ashamed to receive visitors during the first year. However, my father eventually came to see me, bringing a copy of *Tzu Chi Monthly*. From that moment onward, a deep connection began to form between Tzu Chi and me.

The lingering effects of my drug use resulted in auditory and visual hallucinations. My erratic conduct following my release from prison prompted the neighborhood chief to report me to the police, which led to my admission to the hospital. During that time, I shared a room with a wonderful Tzu Chi volunteer who invited me every day to recite and memorize aphorisms by Dharma Master

Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi. Though I couldn't remember a single line at the time, I held a profound admiration for the Tzu Chi sister.

After leaving the hospital, I moved into a recovery home located in Changhua, a city in central Taiwan. I took the initiative to contact the Tzu Chi sister I had met during my stay in the hospital and became a donating member of Tzu Chi. It was in Changhua where I experienced many firsts: my first visit to a Tzu Chi Jing Si Hall, participation in a Buddha Day ceremony, volunteering at a Tzu Chi recycling station, and attending a Tzu Chi year-end blessing ceremony.

I have since been diagnosed with schizophrenia and currently reside in a nursing facility. Whenever I can, I serve at a recycling station, reclaiming reusable resources. When I want inner peace, I go to the Jing Si Hall. Master Cheng Yen's teachings and the compassion she shows for all living beings have left an indelible mark on my heart. In the past, I sought for love and care among the crowds, oblivious to the fact that the Tzu Chi family had always been there. Now, I understand.

Through my volunteer work with Tzu Chi, I have successfully overcome the smoking and alcohol addiction that plagued me for years. My health has improved as a result. I am immensely grateful for the guidance and support from my Tzu Chi Dharma family. I will diligently walk the Bodhisattva Path, in pursuit of the love and happiness that eluded me in the past. ❁

Their Tzu Chi Journey

By Lamiya Lin

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Chen Chiou Hwa

One of them is the son of a Palestinian refugee, while the other is the pillar of a single-parent Syrian refugee family. Despite the impact of war on their lives, they've found peace through Tzu Chi.



Their journey to Taiwan in June commenced in Amman, Jordan, and spanned a total of 48 hours, including layovers in Bahrain, Singapore, and Thailand. But Khader Khalifeh, a 60-year-old Jordanian, and Mohamed Khir Alriz, a 58-year-old Syrian, were undaunted by the long journey. Their ultimate destination was Hualien, where the Jing Si Abode—the spiritual home of all Tzu Chi volunteers—is located. At the Jing Si Hall in Hualien, they received their volunteer certifications from Dharma Master Cheng Yen.

The two men also participated in a Tzu Chi camp for overseas volunteers during their visit to the island. Their plan was to leave for Jordan after the camp was over, but Mohamed still hadn't received permission to re-enter Jordan when the camp concluded. Despite the uncertainty, the two of them decided to adhere to their original itinerary, and set off for Taoyuan Airport after the camp to begin their journey back to Jordan. Khader tried to reassure Mohamed by telling him, "Don't worry. The Jordanian Ministry of the Interior has responded, and your visa will be approved." Nevertheless, a sense of unease continued to hover over them.

War and poverty

Khader is a retired teacher who taught at a public school in Amman. At the age of 16, he started learning Taekwondo under the guidance of Chen Chiou Hwa (陳秋華), a martial arts instructor for the security detail of Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan. Khader excelled in the sport. Eventually, he became a coach for the Jordanian Taekwondo national team, a role he held for 21 years.

Khader's father was originally from Palestine, but was compelled to uproot his family and escape from Jerusalem to Jordan due to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The eldest of ten children in his family, Khader shouldered the responsibility of caring for his siblings from a young age. Reflecting on his humble beginnings, he said, "As a child, I sold newspapers in the city center to make a living. During summer and winter breaks, I worked as a

laborer on construction sites with my uncle, carrying bricks and mixing cement to earn some pocket money. In my teenage years, I sold popsicles near the elementary school close to my home." Growing up in such challenging circumstances, he developed a profound understanding of the resilience required to survive in adverse conditions.

Khader's educational journey was equally challenging. He couldn't obtain his bachelor's degree until he was admitted to a university that provided government-subsidized transportation expenses. After he graduated from the university, he started teaching at a public vocational school while also coaching at Chen Chiou Hwa's Taekwondo studio. It was during this time that his life began to improve. Chen Chiou Hwa, 14 years Khader's senior, was not only a mentor and friend, but also like a father and an older brother.

Chen was a Tzu Chi volunteer originally from Taiwan, so in addition to coaching at his Taekwondo studio, Khader joined him in carrying out charity work for the foundation. Their efforts included purchasing new clothes for underprivileged children as Ramadan approached, offering financial support to students who couldn't afford university tuition, and providing emergency aid to families of students facing crises. During his involvement in Tzu Chi activities, Khader witnessed extreme poverty in underserved regions. "It fostered in me a sense of gratitude for my own circumstances and a stronger desire to help those in need," he reflected. As he engaged in Tzu Chi's philanthropic endeavors, Master Cheng Yen's compassion and Chen's selfless dedication gradually seeped into his heart.

Time flew quickly. In the blink of an eye, two decades passed.

When lockdown measures were imposed in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions prevented Chen from being physically present for relief distributions. Consequently, he entrusted Khader and Abu Tamar, another volunteer, with the responsibility of obtaining travel permits through a police acquaintance and carrying out aid distributions to over 1,600 households across 15 locations.

During this time, public transportation was halted and roads were restricted due to the pandemic. But that didn't stop Chen. He once walked for three hours under the scorching sun, disregarding his leg pain, to reach a bank and withdraw money for the relief efforts. This selfless act, undertaken solely for the well-being of others, deeply moved Khader and sparked his desire to

Risking the possibility of not being able to return to Jordan, Mohamed Khir Alriz (right) arrived in Hualien, Taiwan, in June to participate in a Tzu Chi camp for overseas volunteers and receive his volunteer certification from Dharma Master Cheng Yen. Khader Khalifeh (left), who has been supporting Tzu Chi for over two decades, received his volunteer certification at the same time.



learn more about Tzu Chi. He pondered, “What could drive a 70-year-old man to endure leg pain and invest so much care and effort for the benefit of needy people and Syrian refugees in Jordan?”

Tzu Xin House

In July 2021, Taekwondo classes were introduced at Tzu Xin House, a shelter supported by Tzu Chi for Syrian single mothers and their children. This gave Khader more opportunities to participate in Tzu Chi activities. Tzu Chi volunteers shared five aphorisms by Master Cheng Yen during each distribution event at Tzu Xin House. The inspirational sayings not only resonated with the children there but also helped local volunteers understand better how Tzu Chi is an inclusive family transcending race and religion. In October of the same year, Khader began his training to become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer. He was accompanied in his training by Mohamed, the head of Tzu Xin House.

Mohamed’s father, Mohammad Bashir Roz, was born in a destitute district in Damascus, Syria. In his youth, he mended shoes to make ends meet. He persevered in his studies despite his poverty, ultimately earning three bachelor’s degrees in Arabic literature, Islamic law, and law. He later became a renowned scholar at the University of Damascus. When he passed away in 2011, half of

Tzu Chi has long been caring for Bedouin people in the Jordanian border city of Mafraq. This picture shows Mohamed Khir Alriz (back row, sixth from left) and Khader Khalifeh (back row, second from right) participating in a distribution of school supplies for underserved children there.

Damascus’s residents took to the streets to bid him farewell.

“My father’s story inspired me to study hard and work diligently,” Mohamed said.

In 1990, due to political instability in Syria, Mohamed took his father’s advice and left his home country. He spent the next 17 years working as an Arabic language teacher in Dubai. In 2007, he returned to Syria and founded a publishing house. Unfortunately, the Syrian civil war erupted just four years later, forcing him back to Dubai. After grappling with months of unemployment there, he returned to Syria in 2012 before eventually crossing into Jordan with his entire family. They initially settled in the Zaatari Camp and later relocated to Amman.

Mohamed’s brother-in-law was a successful businessman. In 2012, the brother-in-law and three of his friends pooled together resources and leased a building in Amman’s Ein Basha region to provide shelter to Syrian refugee widows and

orphans. They named it Beit Safout, and it marked the inception of Tzu Xin House. Mohamed took on the responsibility of managing it.

Initially, everyone thought the war would end soon, but it dragged on, year after year. In 2016, Mohamed's brother-in-law and his friends could no longer afford the rent for Beit Safout. Mohamed turned to Tzu Chi for assistance, asking if they could support the refugee families at the shelter. The foundation decided to help.

Tzu Chi volunteers, including Chen Chiou Hwa, delivered food packages to Beit Safout in December 2016. Mohamed fondly recalled, "The first time I came into contact with Tzu Chi, I immediately sensed that it was a distinctive charitable organization. It was evident that they genuinely cared. They treated other people's children as their own." With Tzu Chi's support, Beit Safout gradually stabilized. The foundation helped with rent payments and provided essential supplies. They also offered free medical clinics at the shelter and sponsored educational fees. In 2017, Beit Safout was renamed Tzu Xin House, meaning "compassionate hearts."

According to their records, Tzu Xin House accommodated 33 refugee families at the end of July 2023. By that time, Tzu Chi had extended further support to the single mothers living there by offering vocational training in sewing, beauty and hairdressing, home care, and cooking, aiming to fortify them with skills for self-sufficiency.

Thanking Master Cheng Yen in person

It has been over seven years since Mohamed began volunteering for Tzu Chi. He holds great admiration for Master Cheng Yen's guidance, stating that what she teaches embodies the pure essence of religion. He further elaborates that the Master encourages everyone to love all lives, curb their desires, and help purify every heart and mind. He believes that this is the path to creating a better world. "The Master is our mentor, leading all Tzu Chi brothers and sisters to help those in need, no matter where they are. I'm deeply grateful for her guidance," he emphasized.

In February of this year, major earthquakes struck Türkiye and Syria. On February 28, four military trucks loaded with Tzu Chi relief supplies entered Syria from Jordan. In March, another 18 trucks delivered clothing, blankets, shoes, gloves, and hats to the disaster-stricken area.

"Look! That's Syria!" Mohamed exclaimed with excitement, pointing to the land on the other side of the Jabir border crossing in northern

Jordan. He called out to Tzu Chi employee Lamiya Lin (林綠卿), who was with him, and asked her to take a photo of him with Syria in the background. Tears welled up in his eyes as he gestured toward his home country.

"Since the outbreak of the war," he said, "all Syrians have come to truly understand how precious a sense of security is. We all yearn so much for an end to the conflict and a return to peace." Witnessing foreign aid crossing the border into his home country after the quakes, he was overcome with emotion. "My three sisters are still in Syria; they live in a relatively safe area without conflict, so I don't worry about their safety. However, it has been 12 years since we last saw each other. I really miss them." Mohamed added, expressing the sentiments of millions of Syrians living in exile: "I lost everything in Syria. There's no compelling reason to return. Besides, if I did, I wouldn't be able to come back to Jordan."

Jordanian policy states that when Syrians holding refugee permits depart Jordan, they must surrender their refugee permits and sign a declaration indicating that they will not return to Jordan as refugees. Knowing this, Mohamed anxiously awaited the visa that would grant him re-entry to Jordan before his planned journey to Taiwan in June. Despite his apprehensions about re-entry, he resolved that he would proceed with his trip to Taiwan even if the visa did not arrive by the deadline. His determination to visit the island was resolute—he wanted to visit the Jing Si Abode and personally convey his heartfelt gratitude to Master Cheng Yen for her unwavering support of Syrian refugees over the years.

One family

Because he was still waiting for his visa, Mohamed chose not to depart for Taiwan with the other volunteers. Khader couldn't bear the thought of him later embarking on the long journey alone, so he voluntarily postponed his own departure to Taiwan in order to accompany him.

Mohamed was deeply moved during the five-day camp in Taiwan. "I feel the harmony in Tzu Chi. Regardless of where we come from, we are one family here, united by a common goal to purify people's hearts and minds. The courses offered at the camp are so valuable; I wish I didn't have to leave, but could keep listening." He also praised Tzu Chi's organizational and coordination abilities, remarking, "In today's world, there are very few organizations like Tzu Chi. I feel peace here, in this paradise-like Tzu Chi world."



After the conclusion of the camp, Mohamed and Khader began their journey back to Jordan. During their layover at Bangkok Airport in Thailand, a troubling incident deeply worried Mohamed. “I saw a Syrian man being escorted away by airport security, set to be deported back to his country of origin.”

Chen Chiou Hwa, who had also visited Taiwan and was still there, was equally filled with worry. He contacted Princess Sumaya bint Hassan of Jordan, Prince El Hassan bin Talal’s daughter, seeking assistance to ensure Mohamed’s safe return to Jordan. The Prince’s office dispatched two personnel to pick up Mohamed and Khader at the airport upon their return to Jordan. Eventually, the two successfully passed through security and immigration inspections, exiting on June 28 at noon.

As soon as they emerged from the airport, they informed everyone of their safe return. Their fellow volunteers in Taiwan and Jordan, who had anxiously awaited their news, finally breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Mohamed wrote a message to Master Cheng Yen after their safe return: “We often say that those who do not appreciate others do not truly understand how to appreciate the Lord. First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to you,

Khader Khalifah (fourth from left) and Mohamed Khir Alriz (third from left) accompanied children from the Tzu Xin House Taekwondo class to a government girls’ shelter in Irbid, northern Jordan, for an exchange event.

LAMIYA LIN

Master. Your compassionate care for us deeply touched my heart. I wholeheartedly believe that you deserve the love, respect, and gratitude of people around the world.”

The trip to Taiwan also left a deep impression on Khader. He mentioned something the Master said to the attendees of the five-day camp: “If you love me, then please be sure to extend that love to the people I love—the suffering beings of the world.” This message became etched in his mind and helped him understand the reason behind Chen Chiou Hwa’s tireless work for the needy—he was doing what the Master wants them to do: to love and assist the suffering people of the world.

Having weathered life’s hardships, Khader and Mohamed have transitioned from being recipients of help to lending a hand to others. An inspiration to those who continue to grapple with adversity, they have emerged as among the gentlest and yet strongest pillars within the Tzu Chi team in Jordan. ❁❁

Explore the All-New Website

of *Tzu Chi Bimonthly*



The redesigned official *Tzu Chi Bimonthly* website offers an enhanced user experience and improved visual presentation. It provides comfortable reading across mobile phones, tablets, and computers, ensuring that you can stay informed of Tzu Chi's latest updates no matter where you are.

Grandma Gold Enjoys Her Old Age

By Hong Jing-jing

Edited and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos by Yan Lin-zhao

Ceasing to learn and grow speeds aging, while self-enrichment fuels confidence, joy, and energy, adding meaning to life every day.

—Huang Mei-yu



Earlier this year, Tzu Chi organized a fundraising bazaar at the Changhua Art Museum in central Taiwan to support earthquake relief efforts in Türkiye and Syria. The *taiko* drum team I belong to was invited to perform at the beginning of the event. Our dynamic performance elicited thunderous applause from the audience. Many fellow Tzu Chi volunteers gave me a thumbs-up, praising my performance with comments such as, “Grandma Gold, your drumming had a flawless rhythm. You were the center of attention!” and “We all admire and aspire to be like you!”

As the saying goes: “Three minutes on stage, ten years of hard work off stage.” While our performance didn’t represent a decade of practice, it demanded a tremendous amount of dedication from every team member. We learned our drumming in a *taiko* class. It was quite a journey, from being complete novices to performing on stage, particularly for me, 82 already. I really gave it my all!

I never miss a session of the class and always arrive early. It usually takes me several sessions to master a new drumming piece. Recognizing my age-related limitations, I wake up at 4 a.m. before each performance for intensive practice. My strength lies in putting in more effort than others, but I tend to be too hard on myself. Our teacher often reminds me to “relax and enjoy the learning process.” I keep those words in mind as I actively participate in every team activity.

Encountering Tzu Chi

When I was in my 40s, my husband’s publishing business collapsed, followed by his untimely passing due to a stroke. He left behind a huge debt that I took upon myself. I knew I had to stay strong for my children, so I toiled day and night, willingly bearing all the burdens. The difficult days, fortunately, eventually ended in sweetness. My children grew into kind-hearted adults. Their children, my grandchildren, have brought a lot of comfort to me as well.

Despite finding solace in the warmth of my family, I faced another rough patch in my 60s. The manager of the multi-level marketing company I was part of vanished with the company’s funds, leading to its sudden closure. Our group of senior distributors was left with nothing and burdened with debt. This sudden blow deeply disheartened me. To shift my focus, my eldest daughter signed me up for a multi-media platform, allowing me access to a wider range of TV channels and National Open University courses. That was when I first started watching Tzu Chi’s Da Ai TV.

Da Ai TV offered uplifting and inspirational programs, giving me considerable nourishment and encouragement. Its prime-time dramas, based on real-life stories, especially touched a deep chord in me. I admired how the dramas steered hearts toward kindness and positivity.

I was struggling like an injured eagle during that time, weary in body and mind. Tzu Chi became the lifeline I clung to for a fresh start. My daughter had previously suggested that I become a Tzu Chi donating member, making monthly donations to the foundation, but I had politely declined. But now my perspective shifted, and I decided to take that step. When I told my daughter my decision over the phone, she was overjoyed, exclaiming, “Mom, that’s wonderful! I’ve been making donations on your behalf for many years!” I was speechless, moved by her kindness and love. Tears streamed down my cheeks.

At her encouragement, I even began training to become a certified Tzu Chi volunteer.

A dedicated volunteer

I remember reading an article in which someone asked Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the founder of Tzu Chi, “How have you come this far on the Tzu Chi Path?” After a brief moment of contemplation, she responded, “Forbearance and humility have carried me this far.” Immediately, I was struck by a wave of emotion. I deeply admired her for establishing Tzu Chi, and I understood the challenges she must have encountered and overcome to provide relief to so many needy people around the world. In that moment, I made a solemn pledge, vowing to closely follow her and support all her endeavors.

I didn’t join Tzu Chi until I was in my 60s. Knowing there was a lot to learn about the foundation, I made an effort to attend as many classes offered by Tzu Chi as possible and learn diligently. I developed a habit of taking meticulous notes in every class.

Noticing my diligent note-taking in class, a senior volunteer approached me, saying, “I have been observing you for some time, and I noticed your consistent note-taking in class. Would you be interested in becoming a documenting volunteer, writing articles for Tzu Chi?” I was elated and immediately said yes.

But when I began writing, I noticed that my pieces lacked a certain depth. I soon realized that I needed to read more of Master Cheng Yen’s books and engage in more Tzu Chi work to write more in-depth and impactful articles.



When I first started, I didn't know how to use a computer for writing documents. Thanks to the patient guidance of other volunteers, I gradually gained the necessary skills. They readily provided assistance over the phone, even late in the night when I was rushing to complete an article. There were even occasions when Brother Shi Long-wen (施龍文) hurried to my place in the middle of the night to fix my computer, ensuring I could meet my deadline.

I went everywhere with other volunteers to cover Tzu Chi events and stories. As time went on, my writing skills improved. I also became faster, allowing me to submit drafts in the early morning after working tirelessly through the night. My efficiency even earned me the title of "Swift Pen."

However, I wasn't without my share of missteps in the beginning. One time, while reporting on a concert, I penned over 5,000 words, meticulously capturing every detail. My write-up was subsequently used as a cautionary example, emphasizing to newcomers the significance of

Huang Mei-yu (黃美玉) practices drumming in a taiko class. She used to dye her hair a golden hue, earning the affectionate nickname "Grandma Gold." Today, her silver-white hair makes her vitality stand out even more.

focusing on key elements when documenting an event. I guess this was my 15 minutes of fame.

I have been invited several times to share my approach to crafting articles since I became a more mature writer. I always encourage my audience to participate in all kinds of Tzu Chi work to produce touching Tzu Chi-related articles. Doing so allows them to truly grasp the spirit of gratitude, respect, and love in Tzu Chi, leading to pieces that are genuinely inspiring.

Allow me to share an anecdote here. When I was about 70, a crew from Da Ai TV visited me for an interview and discovered that I typed with one finger to write my articles. The director expressed his admiration for me when he saw how I painstakingly but patiently tapped out each word with



one finger. He said the dedication of Tzu Chi volunteers was just amazing.

Teaching drawing

I'm an amateur painter and teach drawing twice a month at the senior day-care center at Tzu Chi's Changhua Jing Si Hall in central Taiwan. Though each session lasts only an hour, I enthusiastically make the journey there.

I find the elderly participants of the class very endearing. They always eagerly ask for my help with outlining, saying, "Teacher, I want to draw fruits!" "Teacher, I want to draw a house!" or "Teacher, help me create a dog!" They remind me of a group of innocent, playful children.

One of the participants referred to me as a bodhisattva, as I never fail to fulfill their requests for help. I don't focus on my students' artistic abilities. My main purpose isn't to teach them how to draw but to provide warm and cheerful companionship. Given our advanced age, what truly matters is the joy we find in the act of drawing. Anything they create is worthy of praise!

Huang teaches drawing at a senior day-care center twice a month.

My daughter Bing-xian once baked dozens of cupcakes and accompanied me to the senior day-care center to provide assistance. She was moved to tears seeing the elderly students' affection for me. She said to me, "I knew you dedicated much of your time to Tzu Chi work, but I never fully understood the impact of your efforts until now. What a beautiful scene this is—so many elderly individuals, with limited mobility, completely engrossed in the creation of their vibrant artwork, lost in the fun of drawing." She also shared that visiting the center helped her realize how many volunteers were silently serving the world.

I have wholeheartedly participated in various types of Tzu Chi work for more than 15 years now. It has become evident in the process that my most suitable role is to provide companionship to the elderly through art. Taiwan's population is rapidly aging and there is a great need for

initiatives or tasks dedicated to the elderly. I found myself in the right place at the right time and am more than happy to contribute to the best of my ability.

Each individual has a unique purpose; when serving in the right role, everyone can create boundless value. We might have a past we'd rather not revisit, a past chock-full of hardships. But no matter our past, Tzu Chi serves as a great platform to realize our dreams. Irrespective of our backgrounds, we can all find our place in Tzu Chi and achieve a great sense of accomplishment.

A storyteller

Recently, I received a letter:

Dear Grandma Gold:

I was a first grader ten years ago. At the time, I eagerly looked forward to your storytelling every Wednesday in our class, just like I would anticipate Santa Claus. The stories you told, illustrating the wisdom of Master Cheng Yen's Jing Si aphorisms, were meaningful and lively, bringing us joy every Wednesday morning and making an unforgettable impression.

I am now about to finish my final year in high school. Whenever I feel down, I recall the aphorisms you shared with us, such as "Don't underestimate yourself, as we all have unlimited potential" and "Think good thoughts, speak kind words, and do good deeds." Those aphorisms and your stories have consistently served as a wellspring of encouragement for me.

I miss you dearly and am profoundly grateful for the precious time you dedicated to us. My heartfelt wish is for your continued well-being and enduring happiness.

*With warm regards,
Jia-yun*

This letter brought back fond memories from a decade ago. Back then, I regularly visited three schools every week to share stories. I can still vividly remember the children eagerly awaiting my arrival, often gathering at the windows to check if I had arrived. The entire class would burst into cheers as soon as they caught sight of me, affectionately calling out, "Grandma Gold!" It's deeply moving to realize that some of these children, now teenagers, still remember me. Knowing that my storytelling left a lasting impact on them warms my heart to no end.

When I was in fourth grade, I often visited a classmate's home to listen to her uncle tell stories. I didn't have any storybooks as a child, so those storytelling sessions quickly became the highlights of my days. On one occasion, our Chinese language teacher assigned us the topic "My Aspiration" for an essay. I wrote about my dream of becoming a storyteller, convinced that sharing stories could bring joy to others. To my amazement, the teacher submitted my essay to a renowned children's newspaper, and it was accepted for publication. I was overcome with joy when I received payment for my article. Tears of happiness coursed down my face. This experience cemented my love for imagination, storytelling, and writing.

True to my aspirations, during my middle years, I began sharing stories with homemakers in local communities. Now, with the growing prevalence of senior day-care centers in Taiwan, I frequently engage the older generation with my storytelling. With age, my life experiences have deepened, lending a more profound resonance to the stories I share.

I hold onto the hope that even at the age of 90, when I might not be as articulate as now, there will still be willing listeners for my tales.

Zest for learning

People often say, "You're never too old to learn." I have embraced this philosophy wholeheartedly. Even at the age of 82, I still possess a youthful spirit, driven by an insatiable curiosity and a passion for learning.

When I was four, my father went to work in Japan, leaving my mother and me to live with our extended family. Life was challenging, and financial constraints limited my educational opportunities. Unfortunately, I had to drop out of high school, much to my heartache. Though I had the desire to continue my studies later in life, the responsibilities of supporting my family during my midlife made it impractical. It wasn't until my 60s, when I enrolled in National Open University, that I finally had the chance to resume my education.

Receiving my diploma from the president of National Open University and obtaining certification as a Tzu Chi volunteer marked two of the most significant milestones in my life. They served as ample compensation for the unrealized dreams I had carried since my youth.

I am now a happy, contented senior. My physical agility may have diminished, but my mind remains sharp. I often encourage people to invest in their minds, emphasizing the enduring value of



mental enrichment over material possessions, like extravagant food or clothing, which offer fleeting satisfaction but lack profound fulfillment.

I lead a frugal lifestyle, finding contentment in tidy attire and simple vegetarian meals. I focus my energies on nurturing my inner self. I believe that an enriched inner self radiates an intangible glow, attracting like-minded individuals who share my enthusiasm for learning. Such people will have much to teach me and help me further enrich my life.

Learning knows no bounds. True learning transcends the mere accumulation of knowledge, extending to the cultivation of one's character. I consider the latter to be of even greater significance than the former. I often reflect on myself, striving for personal growth. Tzu Chi's Four-Magic Soup—contentment, gratitude, understanding, and tolerance—has provided invaluable guidance on this journey.

More than ten years ago, Huang regularly visited three schools to share stories and Jing Si aphorisms. Her storytelling was greatly popular with students.

COURTESY OF HUANG MEI-YU

I have deposited 50 years of my age into the “age treasury”—a concept introduced by Master Cheng Yen, into which older people can deposit 50 years of their age, leaving them that many years younger at heart. The aim is to encourage seniors to continue giving of themselves as long as they are still able, helping them live a fulfilling and purposeful old age. I have discovered a true sense of belonging in Tzu Chi, feeling immensely blessed and secure in the embrace of Master Cheng Yen's Great Love, an unselfish love that embraces all humanity. I am determined to make the best use of the time I have left, striving to make meaningful, impactful contributions. ❀

A Place Like Home

Chang'an Recycling Station

Text and photos by Huang Xiao-zhe

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Saturdays are busy days at the Chang'an Recycling Station in Taiping District, Taichung, central Taiwan. It's the day when nearly all the volunteers come together to help, typically completing the majority of recycling sorting before noon. Afterwards, most of the volunteers call it a day and head home.

I arrived at the station on one such Saturday afternoon to find its metal entrance gate partially open. Upon entering, I found Yang Hui-mei (楊惠美), a regular at the station, skillfully dismantling cardboard boxes. On the other side, two additional volunteers were sorting through piles of recyclables. After inquiring, I learned that these two are nearby residents who generously volunteer their time whenever they can.

Soon after, a woman arrived, pushing a baby carriage loaded with recyclables. She warmly greeted everyone. Her name is Shen Mu-lan (沈木蘭), and she is another familiar face at the station. A heartwarming touch to this scene was the presence of a little dog named Beauty nestled in the carriage. Beauty often accompanies her owner on recycling collection trips, making her a miniature guardian of the Earth.

I took a photograph of the group that afternoon with the intention of using it as the starting point for this story. These volunteers dedicate their Saturdays not to rest or leisure but to the pursuit of environmental conservation, selflessly contributing to the well-being of our planet. Their eco-friendly endeavors, coupled with the delightful presence of the little dog—who appeared to relish the experience just as much as the humans around her—painted a truly heartwarming picture.



Recycling volunteers Yang Hui-mei (first from left) and Shen Mu-lan (third from left), along with two nearby residents, dedicated their time to volunteering at the Chang'an Recycling Station on a Saturday afternoon.



A Welcoming Haven

The Chang'an Recycling Station is located near a residential area, serving as both a convenient resource recycling center for local residents and a welcoming haven for the elderly. One Sunday morning, I saw Zhang Xi-qing (張喜慶), 83, disassembling discarded electronic devices at the facility. He lives right next to the station and took up recycling over a decade ago, when he retired. The station has since become his second home. Whenever he has the time, he walks over to offer his assistance. Whether it involves tending to the surrounding plant hedges, assisting with facility construction, or designing rainwater recycling systems for cleaning recyclables or restroom use, he always does his best to help.

Less than a five-minute walk away from the station lives Liu Bi-luan (劉碧鸞), who has reached the ripe age of one hundred. The centenarian enjoys nothing more than coming to the recycling station every day. To ensure her safety during her short journey, volunteer Lin Li-xu (林麗旭) walks to her home every day to escort her to the station and accompanies her back home afterwards. This considerate gesture warms the elderly woman's heart and eases her family's concerns about her safety during the brief trip. Examples like this illustrate how the Chang'an Recycling Station has seamlessly woven itself into the fabric of the community, continuously nurturing goodwill.



Finding Meaning and Companionship

The majority of volunteers at the recycling station on weekday mornings are senior citizens. Among them, a few have developed the habit of sorting recyclables in an area near the roadside. The natural light there is at its best, providing the clearest view of recyclable materials. Some individuals in the group focus on categorizing plastic bags based on their material types, while others remove non-recyclable labels and stickers. There are also those who handle the recycling of transparent plastic bags and foam mesh wrappers commonly used for fruit packaging. Lively conversations fill the air as they go about their tasks.

One day when I visited, the elderly volunteers there began to rise from their seats as noon approached, preparing to tidy up and head home. Suddenly, Huang A-qi (黃阿齊, seen wearing a dark apron in the photo) and Chen Mei-zai (陳梅仔) turned back-to-back and engaged in a playful twisting exercise to limber up their bones and muscles. Xu Jin-lan (許金蘭), standing nearby, couldn't help but burst into laughter. These older people gather here to volunteer, developing warm friendships and forging emotional bonds. It is no surprise that they return day after day!

Witnessing this cheerful scene evokes something I once heard Dharma Master Cheng Yen say in a talk. She encouraged older people not to feel that they require care just because they are getting on in years, but instead urged them to offer their service proactively, as long as they are still able. For instance, they can care for the Earth by volunteering at a recycling station, sorting recyclable resources to transform them into useful materials. Engaging in such meaningful work brings them joy, allows them to make friends, and keeps them socially active. This in turns helps them feel fulfilled and purposeful in their golden years. What sound advice that is!









Warming Hearts and Stomachs

While volunteers diligently sort recyclables, another group takes care of kitchen duties in a corrugated metal building at the recycling station. These volunteers typically arrive early in the morning to prepare ingredients and cook, ensuring that the volunteers who come to the station have a delicious lunch to enjoy. On this particular day, the menu included freshly cooked Chinese Angelica rice, two stir-fried vegetable dishes, stewed tofu, fried mushroom stems, and pickled radishes, complemented by fresh fruit. The meal offered a delightful balance of colors, flavors, and nutrition.

When the piping hot meals were ready, the culinary volunteers formed an orderly line to carefully pack each dish into lunch boxes. Soon, it was nearly noon, and a bell rang outside, accompanied by a voice exclaiming, "Everyone, it's time to rest!" It was volunteer Liao Xiu-qin (廖秀琴) who energetically tugged on a rope to sound the bell before shouting loudly, concerned that everyone might be too engrossed in their work to hear.

As the recycling volunteers gradually wrapped up their tasks and prepared to leave, the culinary volunteers warmly reminded everyone not to forget to take their packed lunches home. This considerate gesture added an extra layer of warmth to each person's meal, allowing them to savor the taste of happiness even before taking their first bite.



Volunteers in the PET bottle sorting area. From left: Xu Li Xiu (徐李秀), Chen Yue-zhen (陳玥禎), Wu Zhen-ye (吳貞葉), and Liu Bi-luan.



Volunteers in the plastic bag sorting area. From left: Liao Xiu-qin, Huang A-qi, Liao Xiu-ying (廖秀英), Lin Shu-jiao (林淑嬌), and Cai Bao-zhao (蔡寶照).

A Goodbye Hug

As I was nearing the completion of my documentary work at the Chang'an Recycling Station, I looked back on the time I had spent with the volunteers there. Among them, Lin Li-xu had made an indelible impression on my mind. Regardless of when or where I was at the station, her presence was unmistakable. She could be found organizing recyclables in one of the sorting areas one moment, and then the next be working at the back of the station, using fruit peels to create eco-enzymes for cleaning purposes. At yet another moment, she had effortlessly transitioned into the kitchen, where she skillfully chopped vegetables and prepared ingredients for lunch. She would also occasionally treat everyone to delectable food she had prepared herself. I came to learn that her enthusiasm extended to special occasions like Chinese New Year and other major festivals, where she would lovingly prepare traditional treats such as radish cakes and rice cakes and share them with everyone. Her selfless dedication resembled that of a mother, attentively caring for each volunteer's physical and emotional well-being.

During one memorable instance, Lin Li-xu spontaneously gave Huang A-qi a tight hug as the latter was preparing to leave for home. I aimed my camera at them, immortalizing their smiles through my lens. Just then, I thought of Lin Li-xu's words: "Live each day as if it were the last day of your life, and you won't have worries." This spirit seemed to permeate those at the Chang'an Recycling Station, infusing this home-like place with a perpetual sense of positivity and warmth. ❀



Lin Li-xu (right) embraces Huang A-qi before the latter heads home, their smiles forever immortalized within the camera frame.

More Than Words

Continued Support for Ukrainian Refugees

By **Monica Chang, Susan Chen, Chen Hui-ru, Anastasiia, and Zhu Xiu-lian**

Translated by Wu Hsiao-ting

Photos courtesy of Monica Chang

As the war in Ukraine drags on, Tzu Chi continues aid for displaced Ukrainians in Poland, providing language and vocational training courses as well as other services to facilitate their integration into a foreign land.



The Russia-Ukraine war has persisted for 20 months. While younger Ukrainian men remain in their homeland to defend their nation, many elderly people, women, and children have fled to foreign lands, facing challenges in sustaining themselves and uncertain family reunions.

Hanna Prasolova, an English teacher from Ukraine, obtained a language certification during her time as a refugee in Poland. She said that as a foreign language teacher, she understood the importance of knowing the local language in a foreign country. "It's the first step towards an easier life in a foreign land," she remarked. "There is, however, a significant distinction between being able to speak the language and possessing a certificate that proves your proficiency, especially in terms of job applications. Attaching a European Union-recognized certificate to your resume is the most direct and compelling evidence for your language proficiency."

As part of their humanitarian efforts for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, the Tzu Chi Foundation offers language courses to aid them with their integration into local society. For instance, in Lublin, eastern Poland, Tzu Chi, in collaboration with Caritas Lublin, has supported 79 individuals so far this year in completing their language courses. They received their graduation certificates at the end of July.

The value of this graduation certificate should not be underestimated, as noted by Tzu Chi volunteer Chen Shu-nu (陳淑女), who lives in Germany: "This certificate aligns with the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, put together by the Council of Europe. These guidelines encompass proficiency levels from A1, A2, B1, B2 to C1 and C2, each with scores ranging from one to five." The levels mentioned by Chen describe one's language ability, with Level A1 representing beginning levels of proficiency, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language.

Chen continued, "Holding such a certificate, participants of our language courses allow people across Europe to assess their proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing." The certificate not only aids in job hunting but also enables

individuals under the age of 26 with a B2 language proficiency, regardless of their nationality, to study for free in Poland from primary school to university.

While Ukrainian and Polish share some similarities, mastering the grammar can be challenging. The language courses supported by Tzu Chi mentioned earlier took place at the Catholic University of Lublin. Aleksandra Czaplewska, one of the teachers, said that completing the course was quite demanding. Students often needed to balance work, education, and family responsibilities.

Instructors not only taught Polish but also shared all kinds of practical information and introduced students to potential employment opportunities. Even though older students may not work anymore, understanding Polish made shopping and engaging in conversations easier, reducing their sense of isolation. Becoming familiar with the local language undoubtedly brought a sense of relief.

Magdalena Gardzisz Gisza, another teacher, expressed pride in her B1-level students. "They made such rapid improvement," she said. "Some have even secured jobs or gained admission to universities, demonstrating the effectiveness of Tzu Chi in assisting individuals in achieving professional and academic success."

To leave or stay

Poland, sharing a border with Ukraine, accommodated the largest number of refugees during the early stages of the war. Government entities and domestic and international charitable organizations were initially focused on providing for refugees' basic needs. Take, for example, Opole, a major city in the southwestern province of the same name. An affiliated agency of the social services department in the city provided round-the-clock assistance, including organizing the care of Ukrainian refugees by residents of Opole originally from Ukraine. The department subsequently assisted with employment opportunities.

Given the need for mothers to work and the absence of caregivers for their children during summer vacation, the social services department introduced day-care services from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. each weekday. This arrangement allows children from both Poland and Ukraine to engage together in drawing, playing, and reading activities, promoting integration.

The Red Cross branch in Opole Province distributed essential supplies to refugees almost

On July 29, 79 Ukrainians received EU-recognized certificates at a Caritas hall in Lublin after successfully completing their Polish language courses, courtesy of the efforts of Tzu Chi and Caritas. SERGII

daily after the war broke out to help them get through the emergency period. Now, due to a decline in public donations, distributions have decreased to 12 times per month, specifically targeting the elderly, mothers with three or more children, and individuals with disabilities.

Opole's Tzu Chi volunteers, Chen Hui-ru (陳惠如) and Radosław Atlas, a couple, organized 18 distributions for Ukrainian refugees at a local stadium in June and July last year, providing gift or cash cards and blankets. In December last year, they initiated a collaborative program with the University of Opole, offering Polish language classes and vocational training to refugees to improve their employment opportunities.

The language classes, scheduled from mid-December 2022 to March 31, 2023, were initially planned for 300 people but received an overwhelming response from over 400 applicants. Eventually, 350 students were enrolled, with eight teachers from Opole University providing the instruction. An intensive class was arranged based

on the urgent needs of some refugees. Notably, the classes were not conducted on the university campus but in dispersed teaching locations, primarily in coordination with high schools, primary schools, or cultural centers located in areas where the refugees resided. The intensive class was held in a hotel accommodating a larger concentration of refugees.

Despite the high initial enrollment, not every student managed to complete the courses. Refugees often found themselves torn between staying in Poland or returning home. For those planning to settle long-term, learning Polish was imperative, yet the possibility of returning home in the near future added to their dilemma. The program's volunteers fully comprehended this predicament and

Tzu Chi volunteers lead elderly Ukrainian refugees in signing the lyrics of the Tzu Chi song “One Family” during a routine food distribution in Lublin, creating an atmosphere of care and support.

SERGII



provided their best assistance to the refugees, regardless of their eventual decisions.

Practicing medicine in Poland

At the end of 2022, the Polish government made an important announcement, allowing Ukrainian doctors with existing qualifications in their home country to practice medicine in Poland for a maximum of five years. This policy not only helps alleviate the scarcity of medical professionals in Poland but also presents Ukrainian doctors with the opportunity to establish themselves locally, leading to a more stable livelihood.

As soon as this policy was announced, Łukasz Baranowski and his wife, Monica Chang (張淑兒), Tzu Chi volunteers in Poznań, west-central Poland, recognized the need for Ukrainian medical practitioners to learn medical Polish. This policy required Ukrainian medical personnel to possess a certain level of proficiency in Polish, especially in medical contexts, to effectively communicate with patients.

In response, the couple sought collaboration with Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, ranked the third best Polish university, to launch a medical Polish language course for Ukrainian doctors.

This language course wasn't the first offered by Tzu Chi in Poznań. Starting in August 2022, the foundation had been providing free Polish language classes to Ukrainian refugees in the city. But the newly introduced course focused on medical Polish language, required students to maintain an attendance rate of over 80 percent, gain an in-depth understanding of Poland's medical system and laws, and pass a rigorous examination to qualify for a certificate jointly issued by Adam Mickiewicz University and Tzu Chi.

A total of 50 students participated in the course, graduating in August this year. Twenty-three of them have successfully passed the medical Polish language tests conducted either by the government or hospitals. This accomplishment enabled these doctors to utilize their expertise in

Tzu Chi's Aid for Ukrainian Refugees in Poland

Emergency Relief Efforts:

- After the war broke out in February 2022, Tzu Chi extended aid to Ukrainian refugees who sought shelter in different countries, collaborating with 11 non-governmental organizations, including the International Red Cross, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Salesians of Don Bosco, Caritas, Camillian Disaster Service International, the Polish Women Can Foundation, World Hope International, and IsraAID, to offer a range of support.
- Poland hosted the largest number of refugees during the early stages of the war. Tzu Chi distributed gift or cash cards to displaced Ukrainians in the country for up to four months during the emergency phase.

Medium- to Long-Term Support:

- Tzu Chi's aid in Poland is offered in Warsaw, as well as in Lublin, Szczecin, Poznań, and Opole, with the backing of Tzu Chi volunteers in Europe.
- Services provided encompass the distribution of essential supplies, living subsidies, Polish language classes, adult vocational training courses, and free dental treatment.





Poland, earning a lawful income and aiding their families in achieving financial independence in the country.

One of the beneficiaries, Alona Tokarieva, had 18 years of experience as a chest physician in Kharkiv, Ukraine. She expressed her gratitude to Tzu Chi for providing the course, enabling her to work as a physician in a clinic in Poland. Similarly, Natalya Kozoriz from Chernivtsi, a city in western Ukraine, had served in pediatrics for 35 years. After arriving in Poznań, she assumed the role of an assistant nurse in a children's hospital. Upon

The dental department of the Poznań University of Medical Sciences, in collaboration with Tzu Chi, provides free dental treatments every month for financially challenged Ukrainian families in Poland.



Tzu Chi volunteers in Poznań launched a medical Polish language course, which, in less than 12 hours of its announcement, drew more than 50 Ukrainian doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals to enroll for participation.

completing the medical Polish language course, she submitted an application for a nursing license to the health department, aspiring to continue her professional journey formally in Poland.

Yuliya Kravyvna holds a master's degree in pharmacy and had a decade of experience as a pharmacy manager in Kharkiv. She secured a position as an assistant to a pharmacist following her completion of the medical Polish language course. Notably, two of the beneficiary doctors have also become volunteers, dedicating three

days each week to providing free medical services to their Ukrainian compatriots. In September alone, they conducted medical consultations for 42 patients at the Tzu Chi office in Poznań.

Free dental services

The Tzu Chi Poznań team offers a diverse range of aid to refugees, serving over 1,300 people every month (with repeated services counted as separate recipients). Their support includes adult vocational training courses, such as medical Polish, hairdressing, makeup, and entrepreneurship. They also provide an array of classes for children and adolescents, spanning computer programming, English, gymnastics, drawing, and international chess.

In Poland, the scope of available free dental services is severely limited. Even employed families with mandatory health insurance are entitled to only basic check-up services, with wait times for appointments ranging from two to six months. If one opts for treatment at a private clinic, a single consultation alone may cost over 35 U.S. dollars. Procedures like a tooth extraction or a root canal would result in additional expenses, posing an even greater financial challenge for jobless Ukrainian families.

Dental problems cannot be ignored. Łukasz Baranowski and Monica Chang received support from Professor Karolina Anna Gerreth at the affiliated hospital of the Poznań University of Medical Sciences and started providing free dental services for disadvantaged Ukrainian families every month.

Thirty-eight-year-old Kateryna Velychko fled with her two underage children, Roman and Viktoriia, from Zaporizhzhia, a southeastern Ukrainian city housing the largest nuclear power plant in Europe. The three of them reached Poznań on March 9 last year. Kateryna's 70-year-old father, Volodymyr Honcharenko, also underwent a challenging journey before reuniting with them.

Kateryna, a beneficiary of cash cards distributed by Tzu Chi for Ukrainian refugees, had been a full-time homemaker in Ukraine and had struggled to find employment after arriving in Poland. Not having a job, combined with a monthly rent of 2,300 Polish zlotys (US\$545), forced her to endure frequent toothaches without seeking treatment. It was only with the help of Tzu Chi that she finally received the much-needed dental treatment in June this year, finding relief from her pain.



Anna Kholiavka arrived in Poland in March this year with her three-month-old daughter and underage son. Financial constraints hindered her from prioritizing her own health, as almost all money available to her was dedicated to childcare and rent. “I have no relatives here,” she said. “My husband is serving in the frontline armed forces. I pray for his safety every day, longing for the day our family can reunite.” She faced dental issues after giving birth, and her son, Hlib, suffered from tooth decay too. Both received free treatment from Professor Gerreth.

Hlib also joined the international chess course offered by Tzu Chi. His participation in the weekly classes continuously enhanced his chess skills, earning him admiration from his peers. Volunteers extended their best wishes for his success in future competitions.

Don't cry for me

Lublin, located in eastern Poland near the Ukrainian border, offers a relatively low cost of

In August, Tzu Chi volunteers visited Vladimir Grankin (third from right), a Ukrainian senior who had been saving up for the cost of prosthetic installation by selling his artworks. The volunteers supported him by purchasing his paintings.

living. It serves as a temporary stop for many refugees from Ukraine before they continue on their journey. Those who choose to stay are often individuals with constrained financial means, unable to afford the higher costs of living in other areas. Another reason they choose the city is its proximity to their homeland. This closeness implies that, in times of dire need, they can more easily manage the journey back to Ukraine.

For more than a year now, the Lublin Tzu Chi team, consisting of Ukrainians, Polish locals, and Taiwanese students, has placed special emphasis on tending to the needs of elderly refugees and those facing physical and mental challenges in the city. The Polish government's monthly allowance,



equivalent to 95 U.S. dollars for each Ukrainian senior, is insufficient to help the elderly cope with the mounting living costs. Recognizing this, Tzu Chi has been distributing various food items, such as vegetables, grains, and legumes, to those aged 65 and above since September last year, ensuring they have access to nutritious food for maintaining their health. These distributions, conducted every ten to 14 days, benefit 200 to 250 people each time.

Volunteers thoughtfully prepare an array of food items for each distribution. For instance, during a distribution event in late August, they offered eggs, bread, cooking oil, buckwheat, tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchinis, as well as bananas and pears, allowing the elderly to effortlessly prepare salads and main dishes. They also distributed root vegetables, perfect for soups.

Anastasiia, who originally came to Poland for her studies and now manages a nail salon in Lublin, started volunteering with Caritas after witnessing the plight of her compatriots. She also

The Tzu Chi team in Poznań provides vocational training and other courses for Ukrainian refugees. Hlib Kholiavka (pictured on the left) attends the weekly chess class and is an admired player among his peers.

took on the role of a contact person for Tzu Chi. "The consistent support provided by Tzu Chi for the elderly through these food distributions truly warms one's heart," she said. When each distribution concluded, the elderly would leave, some struggling with their heavy bags. Their solitary figures never failed to stir the volunteers' emotions. Unexpectedly, it was the elderly who offered solace to the volunteers, saying, "Don't feel sorry for us; we're grateful to have food for the next ten days. We can rest easy knowing we won't go hungry and can sleep peacefully at night." Thankful for more than a year of Tzu Chi's companionship, they bid their farewells with a heartfelt "Thank you very much. We'll see you in ten days." ♣

Aiding Victims of Hawaii Wildfires

Compiled and translated by Wu Hsiao-ting
Information provided by Tzu Chi USA volunteers



In August 2023, devastating wildfires ravaged the island of Maui in the U.S. state of Hawaii. Fueled by powerful winds from Hurricane Dora, the fires engulfed the historic town of Lahaina, home to 12,000 people. The disaster marked America's deadliest wildfire in over a century, claiming the lives of 99 residents and leaving over 80 percent of the town's buildings damaged or destroyed.

Many residents had barely escaped the inferno with their lives, let alone with anything they would need afterwards, so Tzu Chi USA quickly launched a fundraising campaign to provide support. The first aid distribution for survivors took place in Lahaina on August 27, during which cash cards were provided. The financial aid offered much-needed support to survivors, left with almost nothing, enabling them to procure necessary items for their immediate needs.

Matthew Isenberg, a beneficiary of the distribution, recounted the tragic event: "It was unreal. Literally, in one night, you had no job, no home, and your friends were displaced. It was just horrific." Expressing his gratitude for Tzu Chi, he added, "We really appreciate it [your help] because we can use whatever we can get. I have been wearing somebody else's clothes for almost three weeks. I'm going to get some clothes for myself."

Volunteers also offered survivors leis, a garland made of flowers worn around the neck, and Tzu Chi's signature blankets, made from recycled plastic bottles. Peachie Garcia, holding a blanket from Tzu Chi, remarked, "It's kind of amazing because last night I was kind of cold and I said, 'I wish I had an extra blanket,' and here it is."

Two doctors from the Tzu Chi International Medical Association offered on-site consultations. Lai Chang-di (賴昌棣), Tzu Chi Hawaii's deputy CEO and a practicing physician, explained that the free medical service was provided considering the potential respiratory impact of the smoke on residents. "We administered asthma medication to those exhibiting symptoms," he stated. "We also observed elevated blood pressure levels in many patients, likely also due to the wildfires."

Tzu Chi held six distributions in the aftermath of the disaster. The assistance reached 1,689 households. Against the backdrop of desolation, the tragedy spurred an outpouring of support, illuminating a path forward from the ashes of despair. ❊



PHOTO BY JAMIE PUERTA



PHOTO BY FAN TING

The JING SIA Illustrated APHORISMS

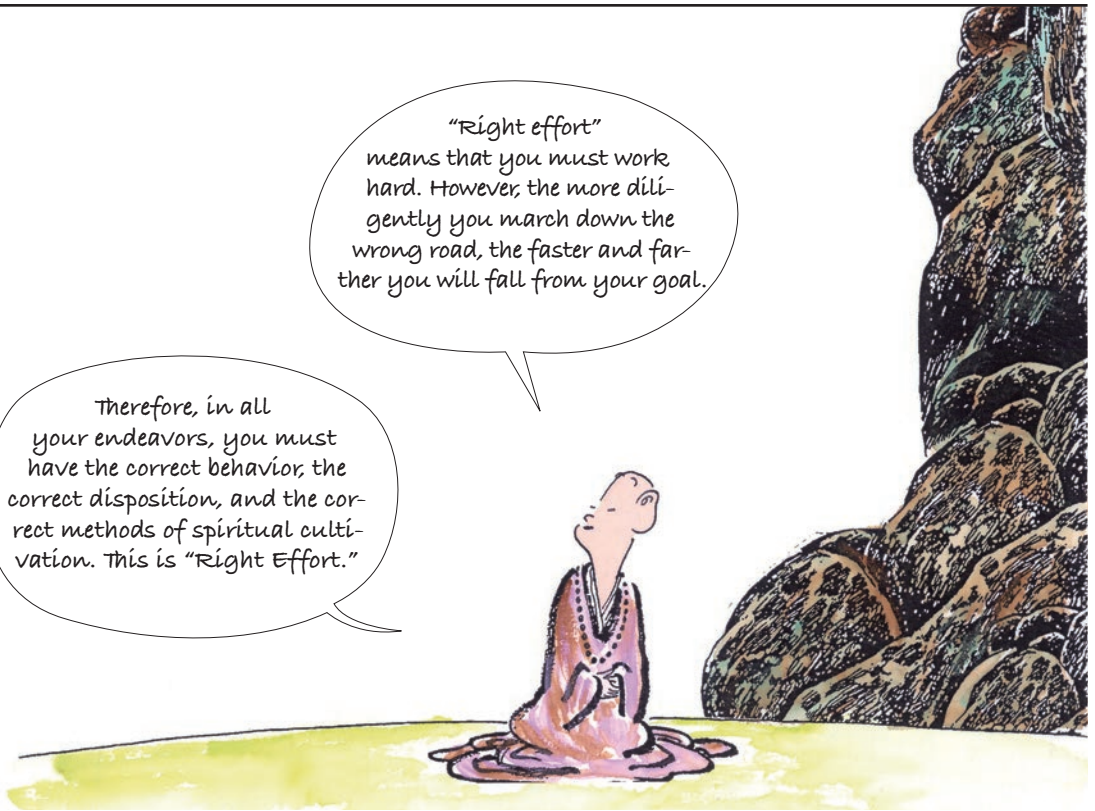
The Buddha says:

Be determined to fulfill yourself
and work hard to strengthen your character.
Prevent the evil that has not yet begun,
stop the evil that has already begun,
do the good that has not yet begun,
and encourage the good that has already begun.
My fellow monks! This is "Right Effort."



Therefore, in all
your endeavors, you must
have the correct behavior, the
correct disposition, and the cor-
rect methods of spiritual culti-
vation. This is "Right Effort."

"Right effort"
means that you must work
hard. However, the more dili-
gently you march down the
wrong road, the faster and far-
ther you will fall from your goal.



Master Cheng Yen, why do you insist on not getting involved in politics?

As a religious leader, I must clearly distinguish between religion and politics. As a neutral party, I can work better to help the world and all people. Not getting involved does not mean that I don't care. For example, I respect every citizen's right to vote or to be elected. I do not try to influence their choices. The purpose of an election is to choose good, capable public officials. I am glad to see such people run for office and propose constructive suggestions for improving our society. I also firmly support the right of all people to judge wisely and elect those who they feel are best fitted to serve our community.

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

Directory of Tzu Chi Offices Worldwide

TAIWAN

Hualien: Headquarters
Tel: 886-3-8266779
Fax: 886-3-8267776

Taipei: Tzu Chi Humanitarian Center
Tel: 886-2-28989000
Fax: 886-2-28989994

ARGENTINA

Tel: 54-11-48625770
Fax: 54-11-43140252

AUSTRALIA

Brisbane
Tel: 61-7-32727938
Fax: 61-7-32727283

Gold Coast
Tel: 61-7-55717706
Fax: 61-7-55717703

Melbourne
Tel: 61-3-98971668
Fax: 61-3-98974288

Perth
Tel/Fax: 61-8-92278228

Sydney
Tel: 61-2-98747666
Fax: 61-2-98747611

BRAZIL

Tel: 55-11-55394091
Fax: 55-11-55391683

BRUNEI

Tel/Fax: 673-3336779

CANADA

Edmonton
Tel: 1-780-4639788
Fax: 1-780-4621799

Montreal
Tel: 1-514-8442074
Fax: 1-514-2889152

Toronto
Tel: 1-416-8868886
1-905-9471182
Fax: 1-416-9002048

Vancouver
Tel: 1-604-2667699
Fax: 1-604-2667659

DOMINICAN REP.

Tel: 1-809-5300972

EL SALVADOR

Tel/Fax: 1-503-7293905

FRANCE

Tel: 33-1-45860312
Fax: 33-1-45862540

GERMANY

Tel: 49-40-388439
Cell: 0049-152-2951-9571

GREAT BRITAIN

Tel: 44-20-88699864
Fax: 44-20-89334262

GUATEMALA

Tel: 502-22327648
Fax: 502-23675872

HONG KONG

Tel: 852-28937166
Fax: 852-28937478

INDONESIA

Tel: 62-21-50559999
Fax: 62-21-50556699

JAPAN

Tel: 81-3-32035651
Fax: 81-3-32035674

JORDAN

Tel/Fax: 962-6-5817305

LESOTHO

Tel: 266-28312566

MALAYSIA

Ipoh
Tel: 60-5-5471013

Kedah
Tel: 60-4-7311013
Fax: 60-4-7321013

Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 60-3-62563800
Fax: 60-3-62563801

Melaka
Tel: 60-6-2810818
Fax: 60-6-2812796

Penang
Tel: 60-4-2281013
Fax: 60-4-2261013

MEXICO

Tel: 1-760-7688998
Fax: 1-760-7686631

MOZAMBIQUE

Cell: 258-849530241

MYANMAR

Tel: 95-9-260032810

NETHERLANDS

Tel: 31-629-577511

NEW ZEALAND

Tel: 64-9-2716976

PARAGUAY

Tel: 595-21-333818
Fax: 595-21-310588

PHILIPPINES

Tel/Fax: 63-2-7320001

SINGAPORE

Tel: 65-65829958

SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town
Tel: 27-21-9130934
Fax: 27-21-9137057

Durban
Tel: 27-31-5615348
Fax: 27-31-5644438

Gauteng
Tel: 27-11-4503365/4502256

Ladysmith
Tel: 27-36-6341333
Fax: 27-36-6341261

Port Elizabeth
Tel/Fax: 27-41-3607033

SWEDEN

Tel/Fax: 46-31-227883

THAILAND

Tel: 66-2-3281161-3
Fax: 66-2-3281160

TÜRKIYE

Tel: 90-212-4225802
Fax: 90-212-4225803

UNITED STATES

San Dimas
Tel: 1-909-4477799
Fax: 1-909-4477948

Atlanta
Tel: 1-770-4581000

Austin
Tel: 1-512-4910358
Fax: 1-512-9261373

Boston
Tel: 1-617-7620569
Fax: 1-617-4314484

Cerritos
Tel: 1-562-9266609
Fax: 1-562-9261603

Chicago
Tel: 1-630-9636601
Fax: 1-630-9609360

Cleveland
Tel/Fax: 1-440-6469292

Columbus
Tel: 1-614-4579215
Fax: 1-614-4579217

Dallas
Tel: 1-972-6808869

Detroit
Tel/Fax: 1-586-7953491

Fresno
Tel/Fax: 1-559-2984894

Hawaii
Tel: 1-808-7378885
Fax: 1-808-7378889

Houston

Tel: 1-713-2709988
Fax: 1-713-9819008

Indianapolis
Tel: 1-317-5800979

Kansas
Tel: 1-913-3976517

Las Vegas
Tel/Fax: 1-702-8805552

Long Island
Tel: 1-516-8736888
Fax: 1-516-7460626

Los Angeles Northwest
Tel: 1-818-7277689
Fax: 1-818-7279272

Los Angeles West
Tel: 1-310-4735188
Fax: 1-310-4779518

Madison
Tel: 1-608-2687692

Miami
Tel: 1-954-5381172
Fax: 1-317-6459907

New Jersey
Tel: 1-973-8578666
Fax: 1-973-8579555

New York
Tel: 1-718-8880866
Fax: 1-718-4602068

Oakland
Tel: 1-510-8790971

Orlando
Tel: 1-407-2921146
Fax: 1-407-4793662

Phoenix
Tel: 1-480-8386556
Fax: 1-480-7777665

Pittsburgh
Tel: 1-412-5318343
Fax: 1-412-5318341

San Diego
Tel: 1-858-5460578
Fax: 1-858-5460573

San Francisco
Tel: 1-415-6820566
Fax: 1-415-6820567

San Jose
Tel: 1-408-4576969
Fax: 1-408-9438420

Seattle
Tel: 1-425-8227678
Fax: 1-425-8226169

St. Louis
Tel/Fax: 1-314-9941999

Washington DC
Tel: 1-703-7078606
Fax: 1-703-7078607

VIETNAM

Tel: 84-28-38535001
Fax: 84-28-38535055



One who has a clear and firm direction in life has no need to compete with others.

—Dharma Master Cheng Yen

PHOTO BY HSIAO YIU-HWA