

Delaying My Studies for My People

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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On January 1, 2005, I (Uditha Asanka Waduge) visited a Tzu Chi medical station seeking treatment for a sore back. After working so hard in the aftermath of the tsunami, I was fatigued and required immediate treatment. At the station, I met a Taiwanese surgeon, Dr. Li Wei-che.

The doctor jokingly asked me, "You're so young, so how can you have back problems?" I explained that my younger brother, my friends, and I had been lifting people injured in the tsunami and bringing them to hospitals. We had also been busy providing lunches to victims over the past several days. All of this was more than enough to explain my serious back pain.

After talking with me, Dr. Li saw that I had the heart to help tsunami victims. Because I could speak English, he encouraged me to translate for the Taiwanese doctors at the medical station. Eager to help any way I could, I gladly returned to the medical station the very next day.

In the beginning, I didn't know exactly how to help out or how to show compassion to patients. But as I worked under the guidance of other volunteers, I gradually began to understand my duties. Although at first I had no idea how to treat a wound, I quickly picked up many first aid techniques by watching others. Now I know how to perform basic first aid and have learned the proper way to care for patients.

Despite working long hours at the clinic, I never felt tired. I think this was because there were so many people who loved me and so many people I loved in return. Because I was able to help others, I felt fulfilled. In fact, I was so preoccupied with helping others that my own back pain disappeared!

The tsunami and its aftermath came at a crucial time for me, because I was studying hard in preparation for additional schooling in Japan. I felt that it was more important to continue volunteering and helping others, so I asked my teacher to postpone my preparation classes for a few weeks.

My teacher was surprised at my request. "Why? Do you know that you only have one or two months to prepare?" I responded that I felt compelled to continue to help the victims of the tsunami, even though it meant putting my education on hold. After hearing the explanation, my teacher was very supportive. He wished me well, saying, "You can be a volunteer and study at the same time. Just go ahead and help the needy!"

From that time on, I slept only two or three hours a night. I awoke at four a.m. and studied to six. Then I would go to work at the medical station. By the time I fell back into bed at the end of the day, my feet were very sore and I was totally exhausted. I realized that I could not continue to prepare for study abroad and volunteer with Tzu Chi at the same time. It was just too much.

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