

Let's Protect the Earth Together

Written by Master Cheng Yen
Friday, 25 April 2008 00:00



[[Master's Teachings](#)] The insatiable greed of humanity is seriously damaging our precious Mother Earth. Without thinking of our offspring's future, we gorge on the world's natural resources. The well-being of the world should be everyone's responsibility. So how can we make this happen? We can start by disciplining ourselves, by reining in our unnecessary desires, and by encouraging everyone to protect the earth as much as we can from further damage. We should not forgo even the smallest opportunity to do a good deed, because when all of those small acts accumulate, a sense of kindness will ripple outwards throughout the world.

Every day people are creating an alarming amount of plastic garbage, severely damaging the world we live in. Fortunately plastic can now be recycled. For the past seven years, Li Sheng-you (李聖佑), who lives in Luzhou in northern Taiwan, has been picking up plastic rubbish on the streets. He fears that the rubbish, which people carelessly throw away, could choke up the drainage system and harm the environment. Li does the job so meticulously that he even recycles smaller shrink-wrap packaging. He doesn't mind the hard work at all.

When he first began collecting, recycling businesses were unwilling to buy the plastic materials he brought them. He visited one company after another until finally he found one willing to take what he had collected. This outcome made him very happy.

Li collects as much as four tons of recyclable plastic every month. He cleans the items, presses the air out, and folds them neatly into small parcels. Although his fingers ache and have even become misshapen, he still relishes the benefits his work has for the environment. Plastic can take up to a thousand years to decompose, so Li garners great satisfaction in cutting down on its production, thus limiting the long-term damage it can do to the earth.

I am so grateful to all of the recycling volunteers who work so hard. Their efforts to collect items, no matter how small or dirty they may be, make such a difference. As long as things can be recycled, these volunteers continue to collect them willingly and patiently. Recycling has become an integral part of their life. Such dedication is an inspiration to us all.

Mankind's careless conduct is resulting in devastating climate change. Only when people truly commit themselves to individual acts of environmental protection can this precious world of ours be saved.

Because of drastic global climate change, many places have already been severely affected by droughts, flooding, and hurricanes. This has led to poor crop growth and harvests, and farmers have been helpless to alter the global impact. All over the world grain prices are skyrocketing, as is the price of petroleum. As a result, the costs of even the most basic necessities are driven up.

Alongside steep population increases, food production levels are on the decline. It is inevitable

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that more and more people in impoverished regions will have less and less food. It breaks my heart to picture this dreadful situation. It is possible that food shortages might hinder Tzu Chi's international relief programs and make our work much harder and costlier to do.

Is climate change solely to blame for these drastic levels of environmental damage? No, I think not. Actually, if we look carefully we can see the blame is far closer to home. Reckless human conduct is causing this climate change in the first place, which in turn causes the earth to suffer so much. Because people want their lives to be ever more convenient and comfortable, they build unnecessary tunnels and roads through mountains, and erect countless constructions where trees once thrived. It is us--the human inhabitants--who are destroying the earth's fragile ecological system. Excessive consumerism, the easy way in which we discard old, but still usable, products, as well as the rampant use of disposable plastic utensils, have created terrifying amounts of garbage and pollution.

To help reduce the negative impact humans are having on the environment, Tzu Chi volunteers try to rein in their desires and lead a simpler life. They encourage others to do the same. Is it really possible for us to heal the world? Can we ever stop the poor from getting poorer? Yes--so long as we can tame our minds, subdue our desires, and adopt a more frugal approach to life. We should cherish and take care of what we already possess and not always be looking to buy more and more. We should spend more time walking and less time driving, so as to cut back on the high levels of carbon emissions. Climbing stairs instead of always taking elevators benefits both our environment and our health.

Scientific research shows that global warming is worsening. Its dreadful impact stems from reckless human behavior. For the earth to regain its health, people must begin to lead an environmentally sound life.

For 18 years, Tzu Chi has been engaged in environmental protection. Just examine our contribution to the recycling program alone. Last year we recycled enough paper to save approximately two million 20-year-old trees from being cut down.

Trees are the earth's lungs. They breathe out fresh oxygen and inhale polluted air. They prevent soil erosion, which leads to mud- and landslides. Without forests to regulate air and conserve water and soil, global temperatures increase and the earth gets sick. We have inflicted too many wounds on the beautiful forests and mountains. In squandering precious resources for future generations, we are creating immense negative karma. Ultimately, it is our own offspring we are victimizing.

Resource conservation benefits the world; recycling enriches society.

The earth provides us with everything we need to survive, so shouldn't we be grateful and try to protect our world? When we can stop wasting resources and engage in recycling, we will benefit and enrich society. When each and every one of us can live an environmentally friendly life, our planet will gradually regain its health. That is why so many Tzu Chi volunteers are committed to

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recycling.

Tzu Chi volunteers are concerned not only about garbage on land, but even garbage in the oceans. Volunteers in Yilan, northeastern Taiwan, for example, are asking fishermen to bring back the garbage they create while at sea instead of dumping it into the ocean.



Every time fishermen go out to sea, they take with them canned food and beverages. After they consume their food, they just dump the empty cans and bottles into the ocean. What is even worse is that they toss used batteries directly into the water. Batteries contain heavy metals such as lead. Just one tiny battery can create an immense amount of pollution. When toxic waste is ingested by fish, which in turn is consumed by human beings, many illnesses can follow.

Tzu Chi volunteers therefore offered to collect the fishermen's garbage when they returned from their fishing voyages. In just six months, volunteers in Yilan have collected over 200 kilograms [440 pounds] of batteries alone!

Our Tzu Chi volunteers in the United States are engaging in environmental protection as well. Every weekend, volunteer Li Zhu (李朱) goes to the Tzu Chi Free Clinic in Los Angeles to promote environmental awareness among the low-income families, illegal immigrants, and the homeless who go to the clinic for medical treatment. Li, who is quite petite, always carries a big yardstick on which she has hung eight different kinds of recyclable objects to use as visual aids. As she talks about the importance of recycling, volunteers translate what she says into English and Spanish so that patients of different nationalities can understand what she is saying. Everyone listens to her attentively.

After she gave her first talk, some patients were so inspired that they brought stacks of neatly folded newspaper to the clinic the following week. Li was very touched. She pledged to continue her efforts to raise the awareness of the patients, believing that even if only one person is inspired to take action, this person can in turn inspire others as well. Indeed, now many patients regularly bring in old newspapers and recyclables, turning the free clinic into a little recycling station.

Because Tzu Chi volunteers love both the planet and their fellow human beings, they can always come up with ways to inspire others to care for the earth and other people.

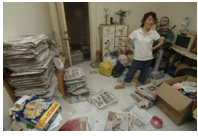
Cleanse the land and the mind

Environmental protection ultimately starts from within, through the thorough cleansing of the pollutants in your own mind--your worries and desires. By removing these, you can continue heading through life in the right direction. In this way, you will naturally cherish your life, your environment, and other people, and you will consider the effects of your actions more carefully

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and be more conscious about not creating so much garbage.



In Malaysia, there is a recycling volunteer named Heen Chooi Ping (何秋平). When she was young, her husband divorced her. Her confidence and self-respect in tatters, she gambled as a way to temporarily alleviate her suffering. As a single mother, Heen supported her two daughters by working as a caregiver for women who had just given birth. Five years ago she tuned in to Tzu Chi Da Ai TV by chance and first learned about the Buddhist teachings. It was a profound and life-altering experience for Heen as she came to realize that her hardships were due to the Law of Cause and Effect. She began to engage in recycling work. Although nowadays she wears hearing aids, Heen still watches Da Ai TV and reads Tzu Chi magazines to learn more about the Tzu Chi spirit. Besides recycling, she also urges others to donate to Tzu Chi. In March 2008, she became a trainee Tzu Chi commissioner.

Chin Chu Lin (陳秋林), another recycling volunteer in Malaysia, visited all of the 600 residents who lived in the three apartment blocks in her neighborhood. She walked from door to door and asked them to allow her to collect their recyclables. No matter what floor the residents lived on or how heavy the bags of recyclable garbage she collected, she never took the elevators. She insisted on climbing the stairs. Because of her dedication, over 60 households have promised to save their recyclables for her.

Tzu Chi volunteers not only discipline themselves to live an environmentally sustainable life, they also encourage others to care for and heal the earth. They try to purify not only the external landscape, but also the inner fields in every person's mind. Environmental protection starts with the heart and mind. If you have a joyful heart and an enthusiastic mind, you will seize every chance to inspire others to do good.

In the Buddha's time, monks went from door to door to beg for alms and to cultivate good relationships with people. In Taiwan, Tzu Chi volunteers also go from store to store on the streets and invite store owners to put up posters printed with Still Thoughts aphorisms. The volunteers hope to bring some spiritual nourishment to the general public and help nurture the kindness in everyone's heart.

Let us hope that seeds of kindness will thrive and grow into lush forests, so that we can leave a clean and hospitable world for future generations. When we can caress the wounded land with our limitless love, it will begin to get well.

When people are discontent, they always crave more external things, and thus they live a spiritually deprived life. On the other hand, when people are content with what they have and know to appreciate their blessings, they give others their love and so become the richest people in the world.

We are the richest people in the world if we live with contentment and love and cherish what we already have. We are the poorest if we are discontent, when we have one thing but crave nine

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more. When materially rich people can roll up their sleeves to serve society and help others, their lives surely become invaluable and meaningful. True wealth, both material and spiritual, will then be theirs.

In Zhonghe, Taipei County, there is a recycling volunteer, [Xu Qin-lin](#) (許勤林). Over 70, he is the managing director of a large financial holding company. Despite his tightly packed schedule, seven years ago he took the time to enroll in the Tzu Chi

[Tzu Cheng Faith Corps](#)

training class. During that training period, he never missed a single class or a volunteering opportunity.

Today Xu devotes at least ten days a month to volunteer activities. Of all the volunteer work he performs, his favorite is recycling. He thinks it is the duty of everyone to protect the world because only then can this planet survive. He doesn't mind getting his hands dirty and doing heavy lifting jobs. Through recycling he has learned the invaluable lesson of humility.

The Tzu Chi Foundation was originally called the Tzu Chi Merit Society. How do we define merit? Actually it begins with humility. When a person is humble inside and polite outside, it is the best example of true merit. Xu does not feel that he is any different from others just because of his wealth and status. By dedicating himself to volunteering, he has inspired his family, neighbors, and co-workers to volunteer along with him. People respect him not because of his wealth, but because of his loving actions.

Being truly rich or poor depends on our inner thoughts. When a person is materially poor and his mind is only occupied with thoughts of worry and greed, he is spiritually deficient. A truly wise person will give a part of his wealth, even if he is very poor, to help others. By giving to others, you can lead a more rewarding and happy life. A foolish person spends their entire precious existence always trying to accumulate more and worrying about how much they are gaining or losing. In Tzu Chi, there are people like Xu who are affluent both materially and spiritually. Likewise, there are many more volunteers who are not well-to-do, but who are still willing to donate their time and energy by working hard to help others. No matter how much or how little, each sincere donation has enormous power and strength. Even a little candle can illuminate a room that has been dark for thousands of years. What matters is not how much you can give, but that you nurture the love in your heart and do good deeds whenever possible. When you open your heart and give love, you are on the way to a truly wealthy life.

It is such a blessing that when you are hungry you have food and water available and that your body functions normally so you can eat, drink, be nourished and survive. This is a situation that should not be taken for granted. Indeed, it is something to feel truly grateful for. But most of the time we take our health, food, and water for granted. There are many people in this world who are desperate for a drop of clean water to quench their thirst. Knowing how lucky we are, we should do more and help more people in order to cultivate our blessings.

Life becomes truly valuable when you serve others with gratitude and love. In your everyday life, you should choose to do only the right and good. A good habit, a word of comfort, or even a friendly smile can all create good karma and send out waves of goodness. Do not let the

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smallest chance to serve others pass you by, because even grains of sand can be gathered together to form a castle. Do not commit even the smallest of bad deeds. When pooled together, insignificant drops of water can form a flood strong enough to capsize a ship. Thank you all!

By Dharma Master Cheng Yen
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