

• Introduction •

Witness Great Love, Believe in Compassion

It is hard to imagine what the world would be like without love.

A philosopher said that love is the power that brings all things together, and hate has the effect of making the world crumble.

The history of mankind over thousands of years is a record of love, hate, passion and conflict. In times of increased love and mutual concern, blessings always outnumber disasters and people live in prosperity and light. On the contrary, when the power of hate grows and contentiousness intensifies, the world is plagued with war and disasters and people suffer in pain and darkness on the verge of death and hunger.

We do not purport to elaborate on the nature of our time, but remembering the famous words from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," we will say that whether the times are best or worst depends on whether we choose to love or hate.

Mankind ushered in the twenty-first century with great expectations and joy. Looking back on the last century, it was no doubt a time of rapid scientific progress, but it was also a period of frequent natural and man-made disasters. The pain, death, hunger and despair suffered by human beings in the twentieth century alone are perhaps more than in all the

previous nineteen centuries combined. Although the material aspect of civilization has advanced, its spiritual aspect has remained quite stagnant. The prevalence of the theory of natural selection and sociopolitical philosophies that encourage power struggles have caused human beings to distrust the concepts that great love is eternal and that caring for others makes one immortal.

By their actions Tzu Chi people carry out their belief in compassion, and with unselfish giving they testify to the power of great love. Master Cheng Yen's commitment to Buddhism and to all living beings has been realized through actions that aim to "relieve suffering and give joy." Starting from 1991, Tzu Chi became actively involved in international humanitarian relief work. We have learned much in the nine years since, and we have grown from newcomers groping our way into experienced workers. We do not presume that we have any achievements worth mention in the field, but this much we can say: we have done our best.

We have seen much during our humanitarian relief missions: nature's powerful counter-attack, mankind's horrible killing. The ethnic cleansing in Rwanda sent shudders up our spines. The civil wars and strife in Ethiopia, Cambodia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Senegal, Afghanistan, East Timor and

Vice President Wang Tuan-cheng on a relief mission in Qinghai Province, China.



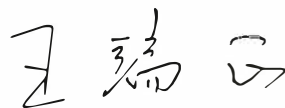
Kosovo made our hearts sink. Equally saddening were the consecutive years of floods in Bangladesh, the great snowstorm in Outer Mongolia, the famine in North Korea, and the hurricanes and floods in the Central American countries of the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Haiti and Mexico. The massive earthquake in Turkey, the tsunamis in Papua New Guinea, and the poverty and starvation in African countries brought out our deepest sympathies.

Where frightened refugees fled from raging war, we were there. Where natural disaster relentlessly struck, where poverty grew on barren land, where lives hung on the faintest breath, where there was dire need of help,

we were there. As witnesses of so much pain and suffering, our belief in compassion and great love is all the stronger.

In the nine years of our involvement in humanitarian aid, we have come in touch with people in over forty countries. They may remember us, or they may not. Still we thank them for letting us help and give them our blessings for a better future.

The great Chinese poet Tao Yuan-ming wrote, “Once born into this world we are all brothers; we need not share the same parents.” This is the spirit of Tzu Chi. We are not so optimistic as to hope to relieve the suffering of all the people in the world, but we promise our utmost efforts to steadfastly carry out humanitarian aid. This book on Tzu Chi’s international humanitarian relief work is only a brief prologue to many more to come. “Attain nirvana only after all living beings have been enlightened and saved from the misery of the world.” In this spirit, Tzu Chi will never cease its efforts to help people so long as there is still suffering in the world. Thus, records of humane help and great love will be written and passed on from one generation to the next.



Wang Tuan-cheng

Vice President, Tzu Chi Foundation

April 2000