

The Bodhi Mirror



Introducing Dharma Master Cheng Yen

On the eastern coast of Taiwan along the road from Hualien City to the famous Taroko marble gorge passes, there is a simple Buddhist temple built in an unimposing style. This Ching Ssu (Quiet Thoughts) Temple is the birthplace of the Tz'u-Chi (Merciful Salvation) Buddhist Contribution Society. From here, efforts have been directed to build a great hospital.

The story of the Tz'u-Chi Buddhist General Hospital began over twenty years ago with a bhikshuni's commiseration for suffering mankind. The fund began with donations of NT\$0.50 (about \$0.0125US) which local housewives set aside each day from their grocery shopping. Nuns worked hard producing baby shoes and other simple products, and donated the proceeds to the poor and needy. By 1979, many people had joined in the work, and it was decided that more thorough care could be provided by a hospital built for the sake of charity. Thousands from all walks of life have given their help; penny and dollar at a time. From meager beginnings, a modern hospital dedicated to mercy was established.

Before becoming a nun, Master Cheng Yen was noted in her hometown, Fengyuan in Taichung, for her filiality. Her mother's grave illness and her father's sudden death inspired her to seek the roots of human truth. It was at this time that she became determined to enter Buddhism. When she became a nun, she moved to the Hualien-Taitung area to practice Buddhism in quiet seclusion. Hualien and Taitung are on the remote eastern coast of Taiwan, where medical standards lag far behind the rest of the province. This is why Master Cheng Yen, in order to provide more extensive aid to the east coast's poor, decided to establish the Tz'u-Chi General Hospital here.

This is a self-supporting charitable organization. The nuns at Ching Ssu Temple do not use the money contributed by society to the Tz'u-Chi fund. Every cent contributed is used according to the donor's wishes; money goes into either the Poverty Salvation Fund, or the Tz'u-Chi Hospital Construction Fund. The role of the Tz'u-Chi Contribution Society is simply that of caretakers, to utilize contributions efficiently. Here, small grains of sand are gathered together to make a mighty tower. This is the realization of hundreds of thousands of persons' good will.

Membership

Tz'u-Chi Buddhist Society now has over several tens of thousands of members in eleven branches throughout the Republic of China, the United States, and other places. Membership continues to grow.

The Society has a Chairman and seven Directors. Each branch has an administrative officer in charge of branch operations. Merciful Salvation Committee Members and Donation Committee Members are all unpaid volunteers who devote their time, money, and efforts to procure donations for the Tz'u-Chi Society and to help the needy.

They solicit donations, visit and investigate the poor and needy, console those with difficulties, and handle routine Poverty Relief work. Worthy of mention is that even when their work carries them into remote mountains or to distant oceanside villages, these committee members pay all of their expenses out of their own pockets.

How the Society Works

The Society is dedicated to helping the sick and the poor. Committee members actively seek out persons to help. Unaffiliated persons and other social work organizations notify the Society of cases, and sometimes the person concerned personally asks the society for help.

When the Society learns that someone is having a hard time coping with an accident, a fire, or some other disaster, members immediately notify the person to go to the nearest branch of the Society so a solution may be reached.

Cases which are not emergencies are first classified and distributed to the appropriate branches. Cases which are important or difficult to judge are referred to the monthly Provincial Tz'u-Chi Contribution Society Plenary Meeting chaired by Master Cheng Yen to be discussed and acted upon.

Help is then given according to the particular needs of each case. The lone and the helpless are given a monthly stipend or rice allowance. Accident victims or the seriously ill who cannot afford doctors are given assistance in paying their doctor bills. Tuition subsidies and scholarships are provided so poor children may enjoy a good education.

Long-term recipients are visited every three months. If the recipient's condition has not improved, the committee members offer spiritual consolation and encouragement; if necessary, more money can be given.

Free Treatment

The Society provides free medical service for the impoverished. Free treatment with both traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine is offered at regular times at set places throughout the province. Society members also arrange for affiliated medical organizations to enter into remote areas to provide free treatment. By the end of 1985, the Society had provided free medical treatment for 135,547 needy persons.

Building the Hospital

A public request for hospital design plans was formally announced on November 15, 1981. The first stages of the hospital were completed by 1986.

Tz'u-Chi Buddhist General Hospital is near the New Hualien Train Station, beside Minglien Elementary School.



Tz'u-Chi Buddhist General Hospital

Majestic mountains rise behind the hospital. The thirty meter wide Central #1 Highway runs in front of the hospital. Tz'u-Chi Hospital enjoys a superb view, excellent surroundings, and convenient transportation.

The hospital occupies 27,000 p'ing (89,256m², 972,000 sq. ft.). The first stage of Hospital construction includes one floor underground, and five above ground. The basement, 1600 p'ing, is utilized to store X-ray film, medicine, and case histories. There is an activity center, a restaurant, shops, laundry room, mortuary, and air-conditioning plant. Here also is a room where friends and relatives of the dying may recite the Buddha's name so the dying person will be met and taken to the Pure Land after death.

Tz'u-Chi Buddhist General Hospital is designed to meet the standards of the best large-scale hospitals in Taipei. The first stage of construction provides 250 beds; after the first stage is completed, the hospital will be expanded to house another 350 beds. And all of this began with contributions of 50¢NT a day.

Doctors of the TCBGH

In 1985, Tz'u-Chi Hospital was granted approval to become an affiliated hospital of the National Taiwan University Medical School, and granted authority to train medical personnel. The NTU Medical School, one of the most highly respected medical training centers in Asia, gives support and supplies doctors to the Buddhist hospital.

A Nurses' Training Center is under construction at Hualien and upon completion, three years from now, will provide the major workforce for the hospital.

Tz'u-Chi Buddhist General Hospital formally began its mission of compassion in August, 1986. Those who cannot pay a guarantee deposit will not be left outside the door. Those who cannot afford doctors can find appropriate care.

The Hospital has already greatly enhanced the standard of medical care in the remote Hualien-Taitung area. The residents of the east coast will enjoy all the medical benefits modern science can provide.

Through years of helping the poor, Master Cheng Yen thoroughly understands that "sickness causes suffering and poverty." All her years of work and sacrifice, the countless hours devoted by so many of her fellows now come to fruition as the Tz'u-Chi Hospital begins operations.

The hospital was not built to earn money, but to give an equal opportunity to all people to receive medical help. Dharma Master Cheng Yen said, "This is a hospital that really belongs to everyone."