

Venerable Sir, How Are You?

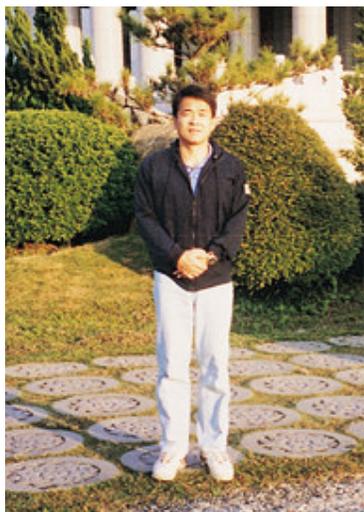
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Photographs courtesy of Sun Chin-hsing

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Six months after I donated my bone marrow, I received a letter from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, mainland China. The letter began, "Venerable Sir, how are you?..."

Ten years ago, my wife and I visited Hsiulang Elementary School in Yungho, a suburb of Taipei, and took part in a blood testing activity for bone marrow donation. Our motivation was simple: that good deed could help save people's lives.

Years later, we moved to Hsintien, just south of Taipei. At that time, a good classmate of mine was diagnosed with leukemia. When I visited him in the hospital, I saw how his visitors looked even more distressed than he did. My mischievous personality motivated me to ease up the solemn atmosphere by telling one joke after another.

My classmate laughed wholeheartedly. Yet his wife stayed in a corner of the room, hiding her tears. I was shocked to learn that he had not laughed in a year and eight months.

The neighboring bed was occupied by another classmate of mine. His father had died of leukemia. My father was afflicted with liver cancer. All the suffering, sickness, and death made me realize how insignificant and powerless we are as we face our destiny.

Now it's my turn

One night several years ago, a Tzu Chi volunteer called to tell my wife that she was a possible match for a patient in need of a bone marrow transplant.

It was the first time anything so significant had ever happened in my family. We hardly knew how to react. My wife was determined to donate her bone marrow, yet she was worried that the procedure might be dangerous. I comforted her by joking, "Don't worry, if anything happens to you, I'll go and marry another woman!" So I "honorably" accompanied my wife to the hospital for further tests.

On another night just as peaceful as the first, another Tzu Chi volunteer called to tell

us that the test results were negative. I felt somewhat relieved, but also a little disappointed.

In July 2001, yet another night, I received a call from a Tzu Chi volunteer: "Congratulations! You're a match for a bone marrow donation!"

"Really? I'll be there for the confirmation tests," I answered right away. Since my wife's last experience had turned out to be unsuccessful, I hoped that I would be able to do a good deed this time.

Two weeks after the confirmation tests, I received another call informing me that I had indeed qualified as a donor. When my father learned about it, he said to me, "Go donate your bone marrow. It's your honor!"

Mother was, however, a little hesitant, so I tried to reassure her. "If one day I were diagnosed with an incurable disease and you knew that someone could save me, would you go beg him to do so? I believe you would. I'm the only one who can save this person whose bone marrow matches mine. When Master Cheng Yen promotes bone marrow donation, she even says that she would never sacrifice one person's life to save another's. So, you see, bone marrow donation is perfectly safe."

Mother finally consented to let me donate my marrow.

No more risky acts

I work as an instructor at a university, and I am healthy and stout. In order to be fully prepared for the marrow donation, I took folic acid, iron supplements, and other pills for a week. However, I also suffered from diarrhea for a week. My friends teased me, "You look like you need a marrow transplant even more!"

I was born impatient and easily irritated. I always drive too fast on my motorcycle. One day, I started thinking seriously: "Someone is waiting for me to donate my bone marrow. Wouldn't that person be worried if he or she found out that I didn't take good care of myself? What if one day that person was to be told that I had died in a traffic accident?"

Aware that I was responsible for another life, I became very cautious. When I played tennis, I always warned my opponent not to hit me with the ball because my life was as precious as two lives combined together.

Finally, the moment came! I had imagined a generous kiss and a passionate hug from my wife... It didn't happen! I had imagined that my children would promise to take good care of their mother... But that didn't happen either!

As I lay on the operating table, I was informed of every procedure before they gave me the general anesthesia. I thought to myself, "A man as strong as I am won't be so easily knocked out by anesthetics." Yet it was less than three seconds before I was completely unconscious!

When I regained consciousness, I felt stiff at the waist. Was it over? I opened my eyes and saw Tzu Chi volunteers smiling warmly at me. I was so grateful to them for accompanying me throughout the entire operation, which was the most important event in my life so far.



The whole bone marrow matching and donating process, however routine and mundane it may seem, actually carries a significant message: that a precious life can be saved. Bone marrow donation has changed my life and has even made my character a little more noble!

I cried!

Six months after I donated my bone marrow, I received a letter from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, mainland China. It read: "Venerable Sir, how are you? I am the leukemia patient who received your bone marrow. I am very happy to tell you that I was discharged from the hospital today! I owe my sincerest gratitude to Master Cheng Yen for establishing the Tzu Chi Foundation, which provides care to all living beings. I am also grateful to you for being such an honorable, unselfish, and kind person."

I had never in my life been described with such complimentary terms as honorable, unselfish, and kind (even from my students). I was really flattered!

Actually, I'm the one who should be thankful. I would never have been able to donate my bone marrow and make my life so meaningful if it weren't for the efforts of the Tzu Chi volunteers who committed themselves so unselfishly in bone marrow donation activities.

After I donated my bone marrow, volunteers took me to the Abode of Still Thoughts to visit the Master. I, who have always had such a glib tongue, stammered before the Master. At that moment, I felt I was facing my truest self. I cried. I cried to my heart's content. I was so touched. I realized that even I could be such a good person.

I am such a common man, and yet I had such an uncommon experience. I want to thank the Master and all the Tzu Chi volunteers. They grow the seeds of love and cultivate goodness. My encounter with them has been the most revealing and meaningful in my otherwise calm and peaceful life. I feel that I gave the least but received the most!

Sometimes when I think about the young mother in Chengdu, China, whose blood type is the same as mine and whose personality might even become similar to mine, I smile in my dreams!