

# Engage in Sutra and Repent Unwholesome Habits

By Ruey-Ho Kao, Superintendent, Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center

On the nights of March 8 and 9, all 162 colleagues from Yuli, Kuanshan and our Hualien Tzu Chi Hospital, transcribed the *Water Repentance Sutra* with onstage performances. Everyone was immersed in the long lasting Dharma joy.

I attended the sutra performance last August at the Taipei Arena as a member of the audience. I was deeply moved. This time around I felt even more meaningful as a performer with two months of practice. It is like the difference between watching a baseball game and playing in the game. Throughout practice sessions, dress rehearsals, singing with accompanied sign language, my mind was cleansed and purified with gradual understanding of the meaning of the sutra.

During the performances, images of my past continuously flashed through my mind. I reflected on myself, "Have I done any wrongdoing in the past that I need to repent? Are there aspects of my conduct, speech, and thought that I can improve?" In answering those questions, I found many areas where improvement was needed. For example, when I saw others making mistakes, I would directly confront them. However, the other parties might not appreciate the approach. I found three reasons for this through self-reflection. First, my



subjective judgment was not always correct. Secondly, the communication was insufficient. There were many instances where things were on the contrary to my assumption. Lastly, my demeanor was unforgiving so people naturally resisted. In the end, I was unable to achieve what I wanted. Through performing the sutra I realized my habit of bluntness is inapt. So I vowed to correct them and adjust for the better.

I still remember the Sunday of February 26. Volunteers of Hualien sutra performing team gathered to conduct a final performance review. Chief Director Tzu-Yueh kindly gave us an “A” in our rehearsal. I was sincerely impressed by stories shared by the bodhisattvas that were there, especially of an elderly member. I admire her determination in participating in the performance despite wearing a back support and leaning forward while she walked. To my surprise, she shared with us that she was illiterate. How can one perform the sutra without being able to read and therefore understand its meaning? I could not quite understand the meaning of the words in Water Repentance Sutra when I first read it, let alone someone who is illiterate? Upon second thought this elderly bodhisattva had already passed the obstacles of illiteracy and was directly experiencing the meaning with her heart. This reminds me of Huineng, the Sixth Zen Patriarch who was also illiterate but realized the true meaning of Bodhidharma. So I think regardless of age, gender, and education level. Buddha nature is inherent, and one can surpass any obstacle with a clear mind.

I was lucky that I had the opportunity to participate in the sutra adaptation performance. It was extraordinary, and I was so thrilled by sacredness of the event. Among the four consecutive performances, two were performed by volunteers from medicine mission and the eastern region. The other two were performed by students and teachers from the education mission. It was a great spiritual ceremony (like the Vulture Peak Pilgrimage) of Eastern Taiwan.

In addition to the performers, before and after the event, there were many volunteers who supported the function, such as cleaning. TIMA members and personnel from the Tzu Chi Hospital’s emergency room set up a medical station early in the morning to offer medical and first-aid assistance to anyone in need of such service.

I was nervous right before the official performance. When the time came, I could feel that every person’s heart was pumping exhilaratingly. There was a segment during the performance where I stood still as if I were in the audience

watching the bodhisattvas on stage. There was an aura of energy immersing the arena with the smell of incense permeating the air. I stood on stage along with the audience experiencing the astonishing power of the Dharma. There was no distinction between the performers and the audience. We were all one, immersed in the sutra. Everyone performed the sutra whole heartily. The singing and chanting echoed in the auditorium, and at the end everyone sang loudly. I was surrounded by Vice Superintendent, Wen-Lin Hsu and Director of Emergency Medicine Sheng-Chuan Hu. They both sang mightily loud that and overshadowed the music. In the end, everyone was in sync for a superb sutra performance.

With four public performances of *Water Repentance Sutra*, great repentance has a vibrating and cleansing effect on the audience. I sincerely pray that Buddha will hear our plea for world peace and harmony.

Following the end of the spiritual journey, I returned to my post infused with Dharma-cleansed soul and cleared of unwholesome habits. Many challenges await our hospital for her 26<sup>th</sup> year. In the next year, our hospital has to face two certification assessments; one is A-Level Certification for the Center of Cancer Medicine, and second is the certification for the Intensive Emergency Medicine. I anticipate all hospital colleagues will strive hard to achieve the goals of certification.



**Superintendent Ruey-Ho Kao (center in front row) and staff of Hualien Tzu Chi Medical Center in Water Repentance Sutra performance.**