

GIVE US A HOUSE

CRY THE DEFEATED BUT COURAGEOUS

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TSUNAMI KILLER WAVES

Dec 26, 2004. The world was shook to its core by the enormity of the destruction in the wake of the tsunami disaster that struck across Asia. The death toll was a staggering 300,000+. This devastation has affected millions of lives and caused untold suffering and tragedies.

Three weeks after the tsunami, a small group consisting of Bhante, a German monk, a Chinese physician Guo Zhen Xin, Yan Choo, and Li Zhen, left for Sri Lanka. Bhante had travelled from Sri Lanka. His connections with a doctor in Sri Lanka who had been helping in the relief efforts gave us an opportunity to offer support and help. The journey began...

We touched down in Sri Lanka and were met by the doctor. It was 4 am. After a short rest, we set off with a small number of other volunteers in a rented van and headed toward the worst-hit coastal areas. Several stops were made to assess the tsunami aftermath.

THE MOST HORRIFIC SIGHT: THE DEATH TRAIN

We arrived at Telwatte Village. The scene of utter destruction was unimaginable. Part of the railway track was completely swept away, thus putting a halt to the train services. What used to be a home for these 450 local families had turned into a flat land of desolation. Most of these families had lost their livelihoods to this tragedy. It had cast a pall over this once-peaceful village. Where we stood, it was calm—suffocatingly calm. The natives were subdued. We saw a badly damaged train. Its presence seemed to serve as a poignant reminder of the horrific event. As we explored inside the train, a bad stench permeated the stale air. We saw moldy baggage and torn clothing, strewn and scattered among the debris. Remnants of broken glass lying jaggedly in the windows seemed to show a desperate struggle to escape the raging waters crashing into the train. It was a heart-wrenching sight. Eyewitness reports said that an estimated 1500 people on board the passenger train “Queen of the Ocean” were all killed. The jam-packed train, filled to its capacity, was leaving Colombo and had travelled ninety kilometers. It was chugging along some two hundred meters from the coast when the disaster struck. Panic drove many in the vicinity to clamber onto the train to escape the relentless tidal waves. But alas, this ill-fated train became a death trap for these hapless people.



NATURE'S WRATH CONFOUNDS MANKIND

As we travelled on, we met Lieu Quan, a Vietnamese monk who came of his own accord from the United States to help in the relief efforts. Through him, we met other international volunteers: medical personnel, engineers, teachers, et cetera. He had also set up a fund for the Perlaya Relief Camp; we made a monetary contribution to this worthy cause. A female doctor-volunteer then told us that some wretched villagers with foot injuries needed slippers, as they were barefooted when they came for treatment. We saw to this small request. The courageous spirit and sacrifice of these volunteers touched us deeply, because regardless of race, religion, or status, they cast aside preconceptions and prejudices, put it all down, and "only did it" with the sole purpose of helping to rebuild fractured lives. These selfless acts moved us beyond words.

One hundred kilometers up north, once-sturdy brick houses now lay in ruins. A big question arose. Where had the people gone? The search began the following day. We came upon derelict schools and temples that had been turned into temporary relief camps. Scores of women and children made homeless by this disaster were taking refuge in the shelters. The plight of these people had never seemed more real as we went about offering assistance and donations to every family, after ascertaining their needs. These gifts were received with gratitude. The villagers were not beggars, but they were turned into refugees overnight because of the brutal killing waves. It had been three weeks since the disaster and they had yet to rise above this tragedy *and* recover from the painful loss of their homes and families. It is our fervent hope that despite losing their loved ones, these stricken villagers will find the strength and will to carry on living for the sake of their remaining relatives. And, that they will regain their smiles once again.

The ensuing days were filled with a myriad of feelings. As I walked toward boulders marking the coast line, only breathing, I offered a wholehearted prayer that the lives of these survivors would settle into normalcy. As we left the heartbreaking land steeped in Buddhist traditions that is Sri Lanka—I vowed to return.

Nature's destruction had made us realize the transience of humankind. How can we not cherish our existence? In this all-encompassing world, human beings are indeed insignificant and vulnerable. Surrounded by innumerable deaths, we all the more felt life's impermanence. We are blessed. We are alive today. Each day draws closer to death, yet, death is merely a debt that everyone has to pay. Life, with its fragility, must be treasured. Human beings only live once. Life is fleeting—and death is only transitory.

We are fortunate to be alive. Grasp the present and live in the moment—give it all that you can. While we cannot determine our lifespan, we can direct our lives. There is no knowing what tomorrow brings, but we can seize today. In spite of life's ups and downs, strive for the best.

Discern life's true meaning and find your correct direction. Let us work together and help the survivors reconstruct their homes and soon find peace.

The merciless tsunami has left countless people without a home, but love and hope have prevailed. With great faith in the human spirit, we can help them rebuild their lives. Let's shine a ray of hope for every tear in the Indian Ocean. 🌍

Kwan Yin Chan Lin continues to raise funds for the relief efforts in Sri Lanka. Please make your checks payable to:

**Kwan Yin Chan Lin Meditation Centre
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**Please indicate on the back of checks
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