



Buddhism and Respect for Parents

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- [*Schopen, Gregory. "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' Viewed from the Other Side." *T'oung Pao LXX \(1984\).**](#)
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- [*Strong, John. "Filial Piety and Buddhism: the Indian Antecedents to a Chinese Problem." *Traditions in Contact and Change, 1983.* \[slow download, Acrobat file\]*](#)

Itivuttaka:

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: "Living with Brahma are those families where, in the home, mother & father are revered by the children. Living with the first devas are those families where, in the home, mother & father are revered by the children. Living with the first teachers are those families where, in the home, mother & father are revered by the children. Living with those worthy of gifts are those families where, in the home, mother & father are revered by the children. 'Brahma' is a designation for mother & father. 'The first devas' is a designation for mother & father. 'The

'first teachers' is a designation for mother & father. 'Those worthy of gifts' is a designation for mother & father. Why is that? Mother & father do much for their children. They care for them, nourish them, introduce them to this world."

Mother & father,
compassionate to their family,
are called

Brahma,
first teachers,
those worthy of gifts
from their children.

So the wise should pay them
homage,
honor
with food & drink
clothing & bedding
anointing & bathing
& washing their feet.

Performing these services to their parents, the wise
are praised right here
and after death
rejoice in heaven. (106)

Sutta-Nipata:

Though being well-to-do, not to support father and mother who are old and past their youth
-- this is a cause of
one's downfall. (I:6, Narada Thera, tr.)

...a wise man...should support his mother and father as his duty....(II:14, John D. Ireland,
tr.)

Sigalovada Sutta:

In five ways a child should minister to his parents as the easter quarter [i.e., the direction of the rising sun or birth]: 'Once supported by them, I will now be their support; I will perform duties incumbent on them; I will keep up the lineage and tradition of my family; I will make myself worthy of my heritage; I will give alms on their behalf when they are dead.' In five ways do the parents, thus ministered to as the eastern quearer by their child, act in sympathy with him: they restrain him from vice, they exhort him to virtue, they train him to a profession, they contract a suitable marriage for him, and in due time they hand over his inheritance. (D.III.189)*

The Path of Purification:

[Regarding lovingkindness toward parents,] here is what is said:

Bhikkhus, it is not easy to find a being who has not formerly been your mother...your father...your sister...your son...your daughter (S. ii, 189-90).

Consequently he should think about that person thus: This person, it seems as my mother in the past carried me in her womb for ten months and removed from me without disgust as if it were yellow sandalwood my urine, exrement, spittle, snot, etc., and played with me in her lap, and nourished me, carrying me about at her hip. And this person as my father went by great paths and paths set on piles, etc., to pursue the trade of merchant, and he risked his

life for me by going into battle in double array, by sailing on the great ocean in ships and doing other difficult things and he nourished me by bringing back wealth by one means or another thinking to feed his children. (IX, 36, Nyanamoli, tr.)

Mindfulness of Our Parents' Kindness from "An Exhortation to Resolve on Bodhi"

What is mindfulness of our parents' kindness? Alas for my parents! I was born through much toil. I was nurtured nine months in the womb and was suckled three years at the breast. My bottom was dried and my diapers were changed. I was fed delicacies while they toiled bitterly. Only then was I able to grow up. They hoped only that I might glorify and carry on the family name and continue the ritual offering to our ancestors. But now I have left the home, and am gratuitously called a disciple of Shakyamuni and have dared to assume the title of Shramana. I neither offer delicacies to my parents nor sweep the ancestral graves. While they live, I cannot take care of their physical needs; after they depart, I cannot guide their souls. In this world, I have thereby hurt them greatly, and as they leave this world, I am of no real help. To cause them such a double loss is a serious offence. How can I possibly avoid the consequences! I contemplate in this way: I must always cultivate the Buddhas' Way through hundreds of kalpas and in thousands of lives and save living beings everywhere throughout the ten directions and three periods of time. I will rescue my parents in not only this life but my parents of every life. I will take across not only one person's parents but everyone's parents.

Venerable Master Hsuan Hua's Commentary to "Universal Worth's Conduct and Vows":

For example, teaching living beings who do not understand filial piety to be filial is a method to cause them to plant good roots. There is a saying,

Of the ten thousand evil acts, lust is the worst;
Of the one hundred wholesome deeds, filial piety is foremost.

What makes people different from animals is that people understand how to be filial to their parents and respectful to their teacher and elders. People are different from animals, who do not understand filiality, yet even

The lamb kneels to nurse;
The crow returns to feed its parents.

The young lamb kneels when it takes milk from its mother, and when the young crow grows up, it returns to care for its parents. Filial piety, therefore, is basic to being human. Those who are not filial to their parents do not have good roots, but one who is filial certainly does have good roots. (*Flower Adornment Sutra*, Ch 40, pp. 115-116)

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