

# PARENTS

By Ven. Narada Maha Thera

*“There are four fields of merits”, says the Buddha. They are the*

- 1 *Buddha*
- 2 *Arahants*
- 3 *Mother and*
- 4 *Father.*

The Buddhas are the flowers of humanity. Rarely do they arise in this world. It is only during such Buddha-cycles that saintly disciples flourish. But a kind mother and a loving father are common spectacles in every home. Veritably they are fertile and easily accessible fields of merit for the dutiful and grateful children. What little is sown with care on those rich fields bears fruits in abundance. Blessed, indeed, are those fortunate sons and daughters who are graced with the presence of their beloved parents on whom they could bestow their unflinching love and over-flowing gratitude.

According to the Buddha, the children are so deeply indebted to their parents that they cannot sufficiently show their gratitude to them should they carry their mother on the right shoulder and their father on the left, ministering to all their needs even for a period of hundred years. Children can neither repay their debt even if they had the power to place them on a heap of jewels, waist-high, and bestow on them the sole sovereignty of the whole universe.

The Hindu Scriptures also pay a glowing tribute to the parents by stating that one religious teacher is worth ten secular teachers, one father is worth hundred religious teachers, but one mother is worth thousand fathers.

Why parents are so highly praised by Teachers of old is obvious to all. The reasons are not far to seek. Kind-hearted fathers give their best to their children. They forget themselves and see to their comfort and happiness. They liberally spend their hard-earned wealth on their education. Their sole delight is to see their children prosper and live in peace and happiness. Dear mothers at times risk their precious lives in their prime womanhood without even seeing the face of their innocent child. They feed them with their own blood. They spend restless nights for their sake. Indescribable are the sufferings they undergo in nursing them. Children’s pain is their pain. Children’s happiness is their happiness. Children are a part and parcel of themselves. They are their

valuable treasures. They are their main sources of delight and happiness. Without them they are desolate, unhappy, and miserable.

Now, is there any way to repay their great debt to their dearly beloved parents? Yes, there is. It is, by dissuading them from evil, inducing them to do good and be good, and by living as ideal children. They should be provided not only with fleeting material pleasures but also with substantial spiritual treasures.

Therefore, O good children, ever be obedient to your parents who are your best possessions in the world. Reverence them daily as King Agbo did of old. Respect their wishes and never hurt their feelings. Be a blessing to them and never a curse. Maintain their honour by your refined manners and noble demeanour. Show by your character that you are the worthy children of your worthy parents, especially in their absence. Do nothing to bring discredit to their hallowed name even after their death.

### **The Affectionate Father**

Children do not often realise the amount of affection and care showered on them by their kind and self-sacrificing parents. As a rule parental love is far greater than filial love. Well, one cannot expect immature, inexperienced children to be as dutiful and loving as their grown-up parents. Until they themselves become parents they do not fully realise what parental love is. Here is an appealing illustrative story.

Prince Ajatasattu, instigated by Devadatta Thera, attempted to kill his father King Bimbisara and usurp the throne. The unfortunate Prince was caught red-handed. The compassionate father instead of punishing him for his brutal act rewarded him with the coveted Crown.

The ungrateful son showed his gratitude by casting his father to prison in order to starve him to death. His mother alone had free access to the king daily. The loyal Queen carried food concealed in her waist-pouch. To this the Prince objected. Then she carried food concealed in her hair-knot. The Prince resented this too. Later she bathed herself in scented water and besmeared her body with a mixture of honey, butter, ghee and molasses. The king licked her body and sustained himself. The over-vigilant prince detected this and ordered his mother not to visit the father.

Kind Bimbisara was without any sustenance, but he walked up and down enjoying spiritual happiness as he was a Sotapanna Saint. Ultimately the wicked son decided to put an end to the life of his unfortunate father.

Ruthlessly he ordered his barber to cut open his soles and put salt and oil thereupon and heat them on the fire of charcoal.

The king who saw the barber approaching thought that the son realising his folly was sending the barber to shave his grown up beard and hair and release him from prison. Contrary to his expectations he had to meet an untimely and ghastly death. The barber mercilessly executed the inhuman orders of the barbarous prince. The good kind died. On that very day a son was born unto Ajatasattu. Letters conveying the news of birth and death reached the palace at the same time. The letter conveying the happy news was first read. O indescribable was the love he cherished towards his first-born son. His body was electrified, and the love penetrated up to the very marrow of his bones.

Instantly he cried – run and release my beloved father quickly!

His father had closed his eyes for ever.

The other letter was then placed in his hand. Immediately he rushed to his beloved mother and questioned – “Mother dear, did my father love me when I was a child?”

“What say you, son! When you were conceived in my womb I developed a craving to sip some blood from the right hand of your father. This I dare not say. Consequently I grew pale and thin. I was finally persuaded to disclose my inhuman desire. Joyfully your father fulfilled my wish, and I drink that abhorrent potion. The soothsayers predicted that you would be an enemy to your father. Accordingly you were named – Ajatasattu, unborn enemy – I attempted to effect a miscarriage, but your father prevented it. After you were born I wanted to kill you. Again your father interfered. On one occasion, child, you were suffering from a boil on your finger, and nobody was able to lull you into sleep. But your father who was administering justice in his royal court, took you into his lap, and caressing you sucked the boil. Lo, inside the mouth it burst open. O, my dear son, that pus and blood! Yes, your father swallowed it out of love for you.”

Ajatasattu shed hot tears.

Children dear, you can well imagine his feelings.

Parents can, as a rule, comprehend the inner working of a child under almost all circumstances, because they also passed through that juvenile stage. This is the reason why they are so sympathetic and generous towards their erring children. They are always ready to bear and forbear their wrongs. Knowing or

unknowingly children may hurt their feelings. Through some misunderstanding they may be ungrateful to them. Due to childish impatience they may disappoint them. They may indiscreetly follow a course diametrically opposite to that pre-arranged by parents for their own well-being and happiness. Despite all their short-comings, omissions, commissions and errors the sympathetic parents will readily forgive and welcome them. In times of adversity, even without their appealing for help, they will voluntarily come to their succour. If their favours are resented, they will assist them indirectly.

Such is the benevolent attitude of kind and enlightened parents.

But, can children understand the feelings and responsibilities of their parents towards them?

They cannot because they have not yet attained that stage of parenthood.

It is only a father or a mother that can really understand what genuine parental love is.

Ajatasattu's case is a striking example.

As children let them do their duty well.

### **Mother is the Way to Heaven**

*In the Sonadanda Jataka the Bodhisatta sings the virtues of a mother in the following strain:*

“Kind, pitiful, our refuge she that fed us at her breast,

A mother is the way to heaven, and thee she loveth best.

She nursed and fostered us with care; graced with good gifts is she,

A mother is the way to heaven, and best she loveth thee.

Craving a child in prayer she kneels each holy shrine before.

The changing season closely scans and studies astral lore.

Pregnant in course of time she feels her tender longings grow,

And soon the unconscious babe begins a loving friend to know.

Her treasure for a year or less she guards with utmost care,  
Then brings it forth and from that day a mother's name will bear.  
With milky breast and lullaby she soothes the fretting child,  
Wrapped in his comforter's arms his woes are soon beguiled.  
Watching o'er him, poor innocent, lest wind or heat annoy.  
His fostering nurse she may be called, to cherish thus her boy.  
What gear his sire and mother have she hoards for him 'May be',  
She thinks, 'Someday, my dearest child, it all may come to thee.'  
'Do this or that, my darling boy,' the worried mother cries  
And when he is grown to man's estate, she still laments and sighs,  
He goes in reckless mood to see a neighbour's wife at night.  
She fumes and frets, 'Why will he not return while it is light?'  
If one thus reared with anxious pains his mother should neglect,  
Playing her false, what doom, I pray, but hell can he expect?  
Those that love wealth o'er much, 'tis said, their wealth will soon have lost.  
One that neglects a mother soon will rue it to this cost.  
Those that love wealth o'er much, 'tis said, their wealth will soon have lost.  
One that neglects a father soon will rue it to his cost.  
Gifts, loving speech, kind offices together with the grace.  
Of calm indifference of mind shown in due time and place –  
These virtues to the world are, as lynch-pin to chariot wheel,

These lacking, still a mother's name to children would appeal.  
A mother like the sire should with reverent honour be crowned,  
Sages approve the man in whom those virtues may be found.  
Thus parents worthy of all praise, a high position own,  
By ancient sages Brahma called. So great was their renown.  
Kind parents from their children should receive all reverence due,  
He that is wise will honour them with service good and true.  
He should provide them food and drink, bedding and raiment meet,  
Should bathe them and anoint with oil and duly wash their feet.  
So filial services like these sages his praises sound  
Here in this world, and after death in heaven his joys bound.”

(JATAKA TRANSLATION VOL. V. PP. 173,174).

“Who is the best friend at home?” questioned a certain deity to the Buddha.

“Mother is the best friend at home”, replied the Buddha.