

The Buddha Speaks the Sutra About the Deep Kindness of Parents and the Difficulty in Repaying it

(FILIAL PIETY SUTRA)

At one time, the Buddha dwelt at Shravasti, in the Jeta Grove, in the Garden of the Benefactor of Orphans and the Solitary, together with a gathering of great Bhikshus, twelve hundred fifty in all, and with all of the Bodhisattvas, thirty-eight thousand in all.

One day, the World's Honoured One led the great assembly on a walk towards the south. Suddenly, they stumbled upon a pile of bones beside the road.

The World Honoured One turned to face them, placed his limbs on the ground, and bowed respectfully.

Ananda and all the other disciples could not understand why.

Ananda put his palms together and asked the World Honoured One, "The Tathagata is the Great Teacher of the Triple Realm and the compassionate father of all four kinds of births. He has the respect and reverence of the entire assembly."

"Why does he bow to a pile of dried bones now?"

The Buddha told Ananda, "Although all of you are my foremost disciples and have been members of the Sangha for a long time, you still have not achieved far-reaching understanding."

"This pile of bones could have belonged to my ancestors from former lives. They could have been my parents in many past lives. How can one not revere one's parents?"

"That is the reason why I bow to them."

The Buddha continued speaking to Ananda. "These bones we are looking at can be divided into two groups. One group consists of the bones of men, which are heavy and white in colour. The other group consists of the bones of women, which are light and black in colour."

Ananda said to the Buddha, "World Honoured One, when men are alive in the world, they adorn their bodies with robes, belts, shoes, hats and other fine attire, so that they clearly assume a male appearance."

"When women are alive, they put on cosmetics, perfumes, powders, and other elegant fragrances to adorn their bodies, do that they clearly assume a female appearance."

"Yet, once men and women die, all that is left are their bones. How does one tell them apart? Please teach us how to distinguish them."

The Buddha answered, "If when alive, men visit temples frequently, listen to explanations of Sutras and Vinaya texts, pay respect to the Triple Gem, and recite the Buddha's names, then it is due to this wholesome merit that their bones are heavy and white in colour after death."

"Most women in the world have little wisdom and are saturated with emotion. They give birth to and raise children, feeling that this is their duty."

"Each newborn baby relies on its mother's milk for life and nourishment. Milk is actually derived from the mother's blood, and each baby can drink up to one thousand and two hundred gallons of milk."

"Because of this drain on the mother's body whereby the child takes milk for its nourishment, the mother becomes worn and haggard, and so her bones turn black in colour and are light in weight."

"When Ananda heard these words, he felt a sharp pain in his heart as if he had been stabbed and wept silently. He asked the World Honoured One, "How can one repay one's mother's kindness and virtue?"

The Buddha told Ananda, "Listen well, for I will explain it to you in detail. The fetus grows in its mother's womb for ten months. What difficulties she goes through while it dwells there!"

"In the very first month of pregnancy, the life of a fetus is as precarious as a dewdrop on grass: It might not last from morning to evening, but might drip off or evaporate by midday!"

"During the second month, the embryo congeals like curds."

"In the third month it is like coagulated blood. It is until the fourth month of pregnancy that the fetus begins to assume a slightly human form."

"During the fifth month, the baby's five limbs - two legs, two arms, and a head start to take shape."

"In the sixth month of pregnancy, the child begins to develop the essences of the six sense faculties: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind."

"During the seventh month, the three hundred sixty bones and joints are formed....."

"And the eighty-four thousand hair pores are complete. The intellect is also ready."

"Following that, the nine apertures of the body are also opened."

"By the ninth month, the baby's hands and legs often move around, causing the mother to lose appetite and ease."

"The coagulation of the mother's blood from her internal organs forms a single substance, which becomes the baby's food during the entire pregnancy."

"By the tenth month, the development of the fetus is completed and it is ready to be born."

"After ten months of great difficulty for the mother, her blood will flow like a river for the smooth delivery of the child."

"If the child is extremely filial, it will emerge with palms joined together in respect and the birth will be peaceful and auspicious. Emerging with hands and legs together, and head first, the mother will remain uninjured by the birth and suffer little pain."

"However, if the baby is extremely rebellious in nature, it will injure its mother's womb, causing her great suffering."

"The birth will feel like the slicing of a thousand knives or like ten thousand sharp swords stabbing her heart."

"As a son or daughter, one must not forget the suffering that our parents have gone through in bringing us life and taking care of us. Otherwise, we are worse off than beasts."

To be more clear, there are ten types of kindness bestowed by the mother on the child:

"The first is the kindness of providing protection and care while the child is in the womb. The second is the kindness of bearing the pain during birth."

"The third is the kindness of forgetting all the pain once the child has been born."

"The fourth is the kindness of eating the worst herself and saving the best for the child."

"The fifth is the kindness of moving the child to a dry place while she lies in the wet herself."

"The sixth is the kindness of suckling the child, nourishing and bringing up the child, at the expense of the mother's health."

"The seventh is the kindness of being willing to wash away the unclean for the child."

"The eighth is the kindness of always thinking of the child wherever he is away."

"The ninth is the kindness of great care and devotion, with willingness to suffer in the place of the child."

"The tenth is the kindness of ultimate compassion and sympathy."

"The first kindness: The kindness of providing protection and care while the child is in the womb. The human birth is not easy to attain in the many countless lives of rebirth."

"It is easy that the child ends up in its mother's womb, with karmic connection with its parents."

"As the months pass, the five vital organs gradually develop. Within seven weeks, the six sense organs start to grow."

"The mother's burden becomes greater as the child grows."

"The movement of the fetus are like frightening earthquakes and hurricanes in the mother."

"With her mind only on her child, the mother is too tired to make up. Her fine clothes are left untouched while her mirror gathers dust."

"The second kindness: The pregnancy lasts for ten months, and culminates in difficult labour at the approach of the birth."

"Meanwhile every morning, the mother feels ill, and she is constantly drowsy and sluggish."

"Her fear and anxiety are beyond description. Grief and tears fill her heart."

"She painfully tells her family that she is only afraid that death will befall her baby."

"The third kindness: The day of the birth, the mother's five organs all open wide, leaving her totally exhausted both physically and mentally."

"She faints several times and bleeds profusely, like a slaughtered lamb."

"Yet, after the ordeal, upon regaining consciousness, her first concern is the well-being of the child."

"Upon knowing the child's well-being, she is overcome by redoubling joy"

"But after the initial joy, the physical pain returns and the agony wrenches her very insides."

"The fourth kindness: The kindness of parents is the most profound, deeper than the sea. Their care and devotion never cease."

"Never resting or complaining, parental love is indeed deep and indescribable."

"As long as their children get their fill, parents will rather go cold and hungry. As long as they are happy, parents are satisfied."

"The fifth kindness: The kindness of moving the child to a dry place and lying in the wet herself."

"Only wanting the child to feel full, the mother doesn't speak of her own hunger."

"The mother is willing to be wet, so that the child can be dry."

"With her two breasts she satisfies the child's hunger and thirst, bringing it health."

"Covering the baby with her sleeve, she protects it from the wind and cold."

"So long as the child is comfortable and happy, the kind mother seeks no solace for herself."

"The sixth kindness: The mother is like the great earth, supporting and nourishing the child's life."

"The stern father is like the encompassing heaven that covers from above, while the mother supports from below."

"The kindness of all parents is the same, which despises no offspring even when it is born ugly. It knows no hatred or anger."

"And they are not displeased, even if the child is born crippled."

"The parents care for and protect their children together until the end of their days, simply because they are their offspring. Such is the greatest of parental love."

"The seventh kindness: Originally, she had a pretty face and a beautiful body."

"Her spirit was strong and vibrant. Her eyebrows were like fresh green willows."

"And her complexion would have put a red rose to shame."

"But her kindness is so deep she will forgo her beauty."

"Although constant washing away the filth of her children and taking care of them injures her constitution."

"The kind mother acts solely for the sake of her sons and daughters without conditions, and willingly allows her beauty to fade."

"The eighth kindness: The death of loved ones is difficult to endure."

"But separation is painful as well, like when the child travels afar."

"The mother worries at home. From dawn till dusk, her heart is always with her child, praying for an early return."

"Some children leave for years without a message while their aged parents wait day and night, shedding a thousand tears."

"Like an old monkey weeping silently in love for her child. Bit by bit her heart is broken."

"The ninth kindness: How heavy is parental kindness and their emotional concern! Their kindness is deep and difficult to repay just a fraction."

"Willingly, they wish to undergo suffering on their children's behalf."

"If the child toils, the parents feel uncomfortable."

"If they hear that he has travelled afar, they worry that at night he might have to lie in the cold."

"Even a moment's pain suffered by the children, will cause the parents sustained distress."

"The tenth kindness: The kindness of parents is profound and important. Their tender concern never ceases."

"From the moment they wake up each day, their thoughts are with their children."

"Even if a mother has lived for a hundred years, she will still worry about her eighty year old child!"

"Do you wish to know when such kindness and love ends? It doesn't even begin to dissipate until her life is over."

The Buddha told Ananda, "When I contemplate living beings, I see that...."

"Although some are born blessed as human beings, nonetheless, some are ignorant and dull in their thoughts and actions."

"They don't realise their parents' immense kindness and virtue. They are disrespectful towards their parents and turn their backs on them. They are neither filial nor compliant."

"During the ten months while the mother is carrying the child, she feels uncomfortable every time she rises, as if she were lifting a heavy burden. She cannot eat or sleep well."

"Like suffering from a chronic disease, she is unable to drink and eat when ill or nearing birth."

"When ten months have passed and the time comes for the birth, she undergoes all sorts of pain and suffering so that the child can be born."

"Only when the child is born can the mother be at ease, as she becomes inseparable from the child."

"There is no toil or difficulty that she is reluctant to undertake for the sake of her child."

"She gives the dry place to her child and sleeps in the damp herself without complain."

"For three years, she nourishes the baby with milk, which is transformed from the blood of her own body."

"Parents spend much time to instruct and guide their children in the ways of propriety and morality as the youngsters mature into adults."

"They arrange marriages for them and provide them with property and wealth."

"They take this responsibility and trouble with tremendous zeal and toil."

"Parents never speak about their care and kindness or look towards repayment."

"When a son or daughter falls ill, parents can be so worried and afraid that sometimes they fall ill themselves."

"They stay by the child's side, providing constant care, and only when the child gets well are the parents happy again."

"They care for and raise their children in hope that their offspring will become mature adults. However, some children do not learn to be filial."

"They might even ignore their parents' needs and even scold them, seeing them as enemies."

"When they ought to be polite, they have no manners. They glare at those whom they should venerate, and insult their uncles and aunts."

"Rarely will they act according to the guidance of their parents. They are rebellious when interacting with their brothers."

"They come and go from their homes without ever reporting to their parents. Their speech and actions are arrogant and they act on impulse without consulting others."

"Such children ignore the admonishments and punishments given by their parents and pay no regard to their seniors' warnings."

"As such children grow up, they become more and more obstinate and uncontrollable. They are entirely ungrateful, rebellious and vengeful."

"They befriend evil people and, under their influence, soon adopt the same kinds of bad habits. They come to take what is false to be true, bringing harm to themselves."

"Such children may be enticed by others to leave their families and run away to live in other towns."

"They may become businessmen or civil servants who languish in comfort and luxury. Time passes by swiftly and soon they are old."

"They may marry in haste and that new bond provides yet another obstruction which prevents them from returning home for long periods of time."

"Or if these children are careless, they may find themselves plotted against or accused of doing evil."

"They may be unfairly locked up in prison. Or they may meet with illness and become enmeshed in disasters and hardships....."

"Subject to poverty, starvation, illness and emaciation. Yet no one will care for them."

"Scorned and disliked by others, they will be abandoned on the streets. No one even bothers to try to save them."

"Their corpses swell up, rot, decay, and are exposed to the sun and blown away by the wind. These children will never again have a happy reunion with their relatives and parents."

"Nor will they ever know how their ageing parents mourn for and worry about them."

"The parents may grow blind from crying too much or become sick from extreme grief and despair."

"Constantly dwelling on the memory of their children, with no mind to work any more....."

"They may pass away in sickness, but even when they become ghosts, their souls still cling to this attachment and are unable to let it go. Such is the greatness of parental love."

"Among those unfilial children are some who do not aspire to learning, but instead become interested in weird and bizarre doctrines with evil friends."

"Such children may be villainous, coarse, and stubborn, engaging in practices that are utterly devoid of benefit."

"They may become involved in fights and thefts, and set themselves against the others by drinking and gambling."

"If such children do live at home, they leave early in the morning and do not return until late at night."

"Never do they ask about the welfare of their parents or make sure they don't suffer discomforts. Their parents are left feeling empty and sad."

"They do not enquire about their parents' well being despite their old age and failing health, causing them burden instead."

"In fact, such unfilial children never ask whether their parents have slept comfortably or rested peacefully, even though all the family they might have left are them."

"Such children are simply not concerned about their parents' well being, causing them to be deeply hurt."

"As children, we should be filial to our parents. But unfilial children disregard this, bringing shame and embarrassment to their parents before others."

"Yet, such offspring may lavish wealth and food on their own wives and children, disregarding the toil and weariness involved in doing so."

"The parents are left alone in empty houses. Unfilial sons are often so intimidated by their wives that they fulfill all of their wishes."

"But when appealed to by their parents and elders, they ignore them and are unfazed by their pleas."

"Sometimes, daughters were quite filial to their parents before marriage, but after they get married, they may become progressively rebellious."

"The situation may become so extreme that if their parents show even the slightest signs of displeasure, the daughters become hateful and vengeful toward them."

"They may have strong emotion toward their husbands and children, but yet they hold their parents at a distance."

"They may follow their husbands and move to other places, leaving their parents behind uncared."

"When the parents hear no word from their daughters, they feel anxious. They become so fraught with sorrow that it is as if they were suspended upside down."

"Their every thought is about seeing their children, just like a thirsty person longing for something to drink. Their kind thoughts for their offspring never cease."

"Parents' kindness is boundless and limitless. If one has been unfilial, how difficult it is to repay that kindness!"

"Upon hearing the Buddha speak about the depth of one's parents' kindness, many fell to the ground in prostration."

"Some fell unconscious, while others stamped their feet in grief. Some even bled due to great sorrow."

"With loud voices they lamented, 'Such suffering! What suffering! How painful! How painful is the way unfilial children break their parents' hearts!'"

"We are all offenders. We are wandering criminals who have never repented."

"Having lived days of drunkenness, we have never considered the depth of our misgivings."

"Now we have understood our misgivings and our insides are torn to bits. Hearing the Buddha's teaching is like awakening from a big dream. Please tell us how we can repay the deep kindness of our parents!"

"We hope that the World Honoured One will pity and teach us how to return kindness of our parents."

"The Tathagata spoke to the assembly. 'All of you should know this. I will now explain to you this matter.'"

"If there were a person who carried his father on his left shoulder and his mother on his right shoulder, until his bones were crashed to powder by their weight...."

"....And if that person were to circumambulate Mount Sumeru for a hundred thousand kalpas until the blood that flowed out covered his ankles, that person still would not have repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who, during a famine, sliced the flesh off his own body...."

"....To feed his parents and did this repeatedly as he passed through hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who, for the sake of his parents, took a sharp knife and cut out his heart...."

"....And continues to do that for hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who beared hundreds of thousands of sharp knives upon his body and did this for hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who, for the sake of his parents, offered his body to the Buddhas in the form of light and did this for hundreds of thousands of kalpas, that person still would not have repaid the kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who beat his bones down to the marrow, that person still would not have repaid the deep kindness of his parents."

"If there were a person who, for the sake of his parents, swallowed red-hot iron pellets...."

"....And continues to do this for hundred of thousand of kalpas, that person would not have repaid a fraction of the kindness of his parents."

"Upon hearing so, everyone in the Great Assembly wept grievously and felt an acute pain in their hearts."

They felt repentful and asked the Buddha, "World Honoured One, how can we repay the kindness of our parents?"

The Buddha replied, "My fellow Disciples, if you wish to repay your parents' kindness...."

"Write out this Sutra on their behalf. Repent of transgressions and offenses on their behalf. For the sake of your parents, make offerings to the Triple Gem."

"For the sake of your parents, stick to the habit of pure eating. For the sake of your parents, practice giving and cultivate blessings. If you are able to do these things, you are being a filial child."

The Buddha told Ananda, "If a person is not filial, after his death, he will fall into the great Avici Hell."

"This great hell is eight thousand yojanas in circumference and surrounded by iron walls. Above, it is covered over by nets, and the ground is made of iron."

"A mass of fire burns fiercely, while thunder roars and bright bolts of lightning set things afire. Molten brass and iron are poured over the offenders' bodies."

"Brass dogs and iron snakes constantly spew out fire and smoke which burns the offenders and broils their flesh."

"Oh, such suffering! There are poles, hooks, spears, lances, iron halberds, iron chains, iron hammers and iron awls everywhere."

"The offender is chopped, hacked, and stabbed. Such cruel punishments go on for countless kalpas without respite."

"They then enter the remaining hells, where their heads are capped with fiery basins, while iron wheels roll over their bodies...."

"The iron wheels pass both horizontally and vertically until their guts burst open and their bones and flesh are squashed to a pulp."

"Such suffering are the result of committing the five rebellious acts and of being unfilial when one was alive."

After hearing the Buddha speak about the virtue of parents' kindness, everyone wept sorrowfully and addressed the Tathagata, "How can we repay the kindness of our parents?"

The Buddha said, "Disciples of the Buddha, if you wish to repay their kindness, then, for the sake of your parents, print this Sutra and distribute it widely to benefit others. If one can print one copy, then one will get to see one Buddha."

"If one can print one hundred copies, then one will get to see one hundred Buddhas. If one can print one thousand, ten thousand copies, then one will get to see one thousand, ten thousand Buddhas."

"Those who do so will be always be protected by the Buddhas and their parents will be reborn in heavens to enjoy much happiness....."

After hearing the Buddha's teaching, Ananda and the rest of the asuras, garudas, people, non-people, as well as the gods, dragons, and all the lesser kings - felt extremely upset and ashamed.....

They wept grievously and every one of them made a vow saying, "All of us, from now until the end of time....."

"Would rather that our bodies be pulverised for a hundred thousand kalpas....."

"We would rather that our tongues be plucked out, than to ever go against the Tathagata's sagely teachings!"

"We would rather have a hundred thousand bladed wheels roll freely over our bodies, than to ever go against the Tathagata's sagely teachings!"

"We would rather that our bodies be ensnared in an iron net for a hundred thousand kalpas, than to ever go against the Tathagata's sagely teachings."

"We would rather that for a hundred thousand kalpas our bodies be chopped, be chiselled into million pieces and our skin, flesh be completely disintegrated....."

"Than ever go against the Tathagata's sagely teachings."

Ananda rose from his seat and asked the Buddha, "World Honoured One, what name shall this Sutra have when we uphold it?"

The Buddha told Ananda, "This Sutra is called : **THE SUTRA ABOUT THE DEEP KINDNESS OF PARENTS AND THE DIFFICULTY OF REPAYING IT.** May all uphold it faithfully!"

At that moment, the Great Assembly, the gods, humans, asuras, and all others, rejoiced greatly at heart.

They believed the Buddha's teachings, received it, and promised to act accordingly. After which, they bowed to the Buddha respectfully before withdrawing.