



WHAT IS FILIAL PIETY?

Do Not Hate or Be in Conflict with

〈There is a proverb that says〉

“When you want to perform filial piety for your parents, they are gone. It’s like wrapping a blanket around a headstone.”

〈I am sure many people〉

are nodding in agreement, as they keenly feel the regret of not having performed filial piety for their parents while they were still alive and well.

〈I think〉

It does not mean
That nothing can
or should be done.

〈Thinking about the meaning
being filial to our parents〉

also means looking at the origin of our own lives through the lives of our parents and ancestors and asking what we can do now as we look toward the future.

〈Character for “filial” 「孝」〉

is a combination of the characters for “old” [老] and “child” [子]

which seems to suggest the unity of older generations and younger generations who are being bound together as one through the seamless process of passing down important things.

So there is no doubt that filial piety has a deeper meaning and substance than merely being filial to your parents.

〈According to *The Analects*〉

Confucius was asked “What does it mean to be filial?” he gave an answer that is easy to understand: “Because parents are always worrying about their children’s wellbeing, it means looking after yourself so that you do not make your parents worry about you.”

〈But when we look into the etymology〉

of the character for “disease” [疾] (in Japanese, *shitsu*), in addition to “illness,” it has other meanings such as “to hate,” “to envy,” “to resent,” and “to torment.”

According to Masahiro Yasuoka’s research, it also seems that “‘disease’ is the same as ‘conflict.’”

〈Therefore,〉

Therefore, one of the ways we can perform filial piety in our daily lives is to be careful not to allow selfish desires or conflicts to create rifts in all our human relationships,

including, of course, between parents and children.

Filial Impiety Is Like Taking Life

〈Gyoki (668–749)〉

“When I hear the pheasants calling, / I think, ‘Could that be the voice / Of my father or my mother?’”

The poem fully expresses the feeling of longing for your deceased parents

〈While〉

We may at times become immersed in such sentimentality,

we are also apt to forget to be grateful to our parents for giving birth to us, lamenting our physical appearance or resenting that we cannot live our lives as we wish.

〈Soto sect priest Suigan Yogo (1912–96) says,〉

These are acts of filial impiety—of failing to be grateful for the life we have been given-- they are tantamount to violating the precept to not take life.

〈In other words〉

our lives are none other than buddha nature, and they are all equally and indiscriminately wonderful;

there is no meaningless life or meaningless existence in this world.

He says that “passing judgment” on yourself or your own life is akin to taking life without regard for the source and origin of life—in other words,

it is violating the precept to not take life, one of the five precepts that must be observed by lay Buddhists.

〈In that sense, for us,〉

filial piety means avoiding conflict with others and reining in, as much as possible,

the mind of anger or displeasure that lays bare the ego and

〈believing that we ourselves are one and〉

the same as buddha nature

while honestly accepting whatever happens as the workings of the Buddha (the Truth)

since the workings of nature are based on the principle of unceasing progress, advancement, and creativity,

we also have an important responsibility to develop our own selves and to “raise human beings” who will shoulder the next generation,

〈Your Takeaway〉

The key to this is being “loyal and considerate”—that is, nurturing a mind and attitude that encompass everything discussed so far. Forgiveness, acceptance, sincerity, and consideration for others—as we put these into practice every day, we are spreading and passing on the truly important spirit of *daiwa*, “great harmony.”