

A Story of the Buddha: Filially Supporting His Parents

The Buddha pays extreme attention to filial piety. The following is one of the stories about how the Buddha filially supported his parents during his path of Bodhisattva practice.

A long time ago, there was a poor family in a country called Varanasi. The family had only one son. He got married and had many children. At the time of famine, the only son buried his parents alive since the family was poor. He used the food that would have fed his parents to feed his children.

The neighbors questioned him, "Where are your parents?" since they had not seen his parents for quite some time

"My father and mother are already old and would eventually die so I buried them alive and used the food that would have fed my parents to feed my children so that they can survive."

After hearing what he said, the neighbors thought that it was reasonable and they also buried their parents alive. As the news of this passed quickly from mouth to mouth, it eventually spread all over the country and the king made this practice a national law that all citizens had to follow.

At that time, there was an elder who also had a son. The elder's son heard about the law of burying the parents alive and felt that the law was wrong.

"I should find a skillful and expedient method to revoke this evil law," he thought.

He asked his father, "Dad! Could you take a long journey to study the texts of sutras and treatises in foreign lands?"

The father promised and left home to travel far away from home. After the father had learned the texts of sutras and treatises, he returned home. As the father gradually aged, the son dug a basement and made it into a bedroom for his dad to live. Every day, he offered his father high-quality food.

"Who else can work with me to annul such an evil law?" he thought.

A divine being in Heaven heard that and appeared in front of the elder's son and said, "I can work together with you to get rid of the evil law."

Hence, the divine being wrote a note with four questions for the king who had enacted the law: "If anyone is able to answer the four questions on this note, I will support the king; otherwise, I will cut the head of the king into seven pieces after seven days. The four questions are:

1. What is the number one form of wealth?
2. What is the highest happiness?
3. What tastes the best?
4. What has the most longevity?"

After the divine being finished writing the note, he posted it on the entrance of the palace. After reading the note, the king was extremely frightened. He urged his chancellors to post a public announcement that whoever can answer those four questions will be rewarded with whatever he or she wanted.

After reading the announcement, the son of the elder took it down and wrote with the following answers:

"Faith is the number one form of wealth; the true teachings are the highest happiness; honest speech has the best taste; and wisdom has the most longevity!"

He then posted the announcement back on the palace entrance. The divine being was delighted with the answers, and so was the king.

The king asked the son of the elder, "Who taught you that?"

"My father did," replied the son of the elder.

"Is your father still alive?"

The elder's son begged the king to be merciful so he could speak freely without fearing punishment for violating the law. "Your Majesty, indeed, my father is old and I have violated the law by secretly hiding him in a basement. Your Majesty, I hope you can listen to my explanation. The grace and kindness of parents are so vast and great that they can be compared to the vastness of heaven and earth. Mothers bear the suffering of carrying their children for nine months in the womb; they take care of their children after birth by breast feeding and raising them selflessly and teaching them the worldly wisdom. A child grows up to be an adult owing to the loving care and kindness of the parents. The parents provide everything for their children to live on. Even when a person uses a shoulder pole with two wickerwork baskets to carry his parents, with the father on the left and the mother on the right, and walks for a hundred years giving them all kinds of offerings, he is still not able to repay the kindness of his parents." After hearing the explanation, the king asked: "What do you wish?" The son of the elder replied, "Your Majesty, I just wish you can revoke the evil law of burying parents alive."

The king immediately approved his request and publicly announced: "Those who are not filial to their parents will be severely punished."

The son of the elder at that time was Buddha Sakyamuni in the Cause Ground. He helped his country remove the evil national law and accomplished a filial duty. This is one of the causes and conditions that enabled him to achieve Buddhahood.