

Repaying Our Parents

December 2, 2014

There's a daily practice we have of dedicating the merit of our meditation, of our practice, to those who have passed away, to people who have been good to us. And it *should* be something we do every day.

Of course, our parents had some wonderful qualities, but they also had some very human foibles. In spite of their foibles, we have to appreciate them for the good they did, because that helps us to appreciate goodness within ourselves—and then to think about what we can do we can repay them. If they're alive, we try to repay them in our dealings with them. If they've passed away, we dedicate the merit of our practice to them.

That was one of the things that really struck me when I first went to see Ajaan Fuang: how much he stressed the importance of dedicating the merit of my meditation to my parents.

That's something we should think about every day.

Not all of our parents are Buddhists; not all of them are even favorably disposed towards Buddhism. But we shouldn't let that make a difference.

There's goodness in the world—Ajaan Lee talked about this quite a lot—there's goodness in the world that has nothing to do specifically with the Buddha. In many cases, he simply pointed out things that everybody had known before: that killing is bad, stealing is bad, illicit sex, false dealings, intoxication are bad. A lot of people had already seen that.

Many of us have learned these things from our parents. Even if we didn't, we can repay our parents by setting a good example for them in avoiding these unskillful forms of behavior.

Because we live in this world, we live through our dependency on other people.

I think I've told you the story about the young boy in Thailand whose parents had scraped together money to send him in to a private Christian school in Bangkok. The boy started picking up Christian ideas at school, and one night he came home, saying that he wanted to ask grace at the table. So the parents let him.

He started his grace by thanking God for putting food on the table.

The father immediately cuffed the boy up against the head and said, “What kind of ingrate are you? *I’m* the one who put the food on the table. If it were up to God, there’d be nothing on the table at all.”

We owe a lot to our parents. They let us be born. They provided us with food, clothing, shelter, medicine. They taught us how to walk and how to speak. They may not have been perfect human beings, but they did their best. Without them we wouldn’t be here.

So we dedicate our goodness to them, in hopes that something gets through, something gets back to them wherever they may be.

Remember that we’re part of a long line of human beings, each generation depending on previous generations, and each setting an example for the following ones. We repay our debt to the previous ones by setting a good example for those who come after.

It’s in this way that goodness gets passed down from generation to generation and stays alive in the world. Often, the generations before us have come back and they’re going to be reborn as generations after us, so we want to make sure that we haven’t dropped anything good in the meantime as we pass it along and hand it back to them.

If we can improve what gets passed along, so much the better.