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**THE BUDDHA DISCOURSES THE FATHER AND
MOTHER GREAT KINDNESS SUTRA**

Thus have I heard: -- One time the Buddha was at Rajagraha on the Gridhakuta Mountain accompanied by a throng of Bodhisattvas and Sravakas, when bhiksus, bhiksunis, upasakas, upasikas, dwellers from all the heavens, as well as Nagas, Demon Gods and such, wishful to hear the Dharma, came together there. With singleness of heart they stood around the treasure seat, without the blink of an eye gazing upon the august countenance. At this time then, the Buddha deigned to discourse on the dharma and said, "All you excellent young men and excellent young women, in a father there is loving kindness, in a mother there is compassionate kindness. What is meant is that people born into this world have their karmic accumulation as the inner cause, and father and mother as the immediate causative factor of relationships.

"If it weren't for the father they wouldn't have life, if it weren't for the mother they couldn't be brought up. Or we may put it that they obtain their vital spirit from the father's seed and their form is shaped by the mother's womb. Because such is the inter-meshwork of causes that produces them, there is nothing in the world that can compare with the concern that the compassionate mother has for the child. Her kindness extends

*Isaacson, Harold J., tr. + ed. The Thread of the
Pearl. NY: Theatre Arts Bks, 1974*
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to even before there is a form. From the time that she first receives it in her womb, for a period of ten months continuously going, stopping, sitting, lying down, whatever she does, she receives all sorts of discomforts. As there is no time when these discomforts cease, the food and drink she usually enjoys, or the obtaining of fine clothes, or such thoughts as she is prone to find attractive, concern for none of these springs up. Just with all her heart what she thinks about is, if she can safely give birth to the child. When the months are completed and the days sufficient, and she reaches the time of bearing it, the wind of karma blows, it begins to be urgent in her, all of her bone joints ache, a fatty sweat pours from her, and her anguish is hard to endure. The father too, his heart and person alarmed and worried, has anxious thoughts for the mother and child. All the various relatives and connections too are anxious and concerned. When finally it is born and fallen onto the grass, the delight of the father and mother has no bounds. It is just like an impoverished woman who has obtained a wishing jewel. When the child first raises its voice, for the mother too, it is as if she had just been born into the world.

"Thereafter it makes the mother's bosom its sleeping place, it makes the mother's lap its playing place. It feeds from the mother's breasts; the mother's tenderness is very life to it. When it is hungry and wants food, if it weren't for the mother it wouldn't eat. When it is thirsty and wants what to drink, if it

weren't for the mother it wouldn't drink. When it is cold and wants additional garments, if it weren't for the mother it wouldn't be clothed. When it is hot and wants to take off clothes, if it weren't for the mother it wouldn't get them off. Even when the mother herself is hungry, she takes what she has in her mouth and feeds her child with it; even when she feels the cold, she takes off what she is wearing and puts it on the child. If it weren't for the mother it couldn't be nourished; if it weren't for the mother it couldn't be brought up; if it chances to get out of its crib, then from its ten finger-tips the child eats what is unclean. When added up, people drink their mother's milk to the extent of 7,150 gallons.

"Father and mother's great kindness is like the sky which has no limit. If the mother has something to do at some nearby place, whether it be to draw water, or else to make a fire, or else to use the mortar, or else to grind something, any of the various things she is busy with, on returning to the house, before she has reached it she thinks, 'Now my child, has he been crying in our house, . . . he must be longing for me,' and her bosom flutters, her heart is excited, her two breasts flow and she is hardly able to restrain herself. Equally, when having gone out she returns home and the child in the distance sees his mother returning; if he is in his crib, then he moves his head and shows signs of interest. If he is outside the crib, then crawling, he comes out to her and whimpering, makes toward

his mother. The mother for the sake of her child hastens her footsteps, bends down, stretches out both her arms and brushes the dust from it. Putting her own mouth to the child's mouth she kisses it, and taking out her breasts she gives them to drink. At such times, the mother seeing the child feels glad, and the child seeing the mother is happy. The two feelings make one sphere. In all the realms of fondness, there is nothing that exceeds this.

"At the age of two he leaves his mother's arms and begins to walk. If it weren't for father he wouldn't know that fire burns one; if it weren't for mother he wouldn't know that knives cut fingers. At three he leaves the breasts and begins to eat food. If it weren't for his father he wouldn't know that poisonous things are harmful to life; if it weren't for his mother he wouldn't know that medicines are helpful in illness. When father and mother go out or go to visit people's houses, if they should get there something delicious or unusual to eat, for themselves they don't care about eating it. They put it in their pockets and bring it home, call the child to come and give it to him. If ten times they come back, right up to nine times he obtains something, and having obtained it, he is always rejoiced and laughs and eats it. If perchance one time he doesn't get anything, he makes himself cry, makes himself shriek, and he reproaches his father and blames his mother.

"But gradually he grows up and gets to have friends, and

the father gets him clothes and gets him sashes; the mother combs his hair and smooths his topknot. All of their own best clothes, they give to the child to wear, and they for their part wear the older clothes or torn garments. After that he seeks for a wife and marries a girl from somewhere, and turning from his father and mother, he holds them more at a distance, while the husband and wife get to be especially close to one another. In their private rooms, he takes pleasure in talking with his wife. As father and mother's years advance, their spirits grow old, and their strength declines, the only person they have to rely on is their son, the only person they have to turn to is his wife. But still in all, the husband and wife from morning until night, not even once come to inquire after them.

"Or in some cases the father dies before the mother, or the mother dies before the father; then all alone the one keeps to an empty room. It is just like some solitary guest who is putting up at a lodging house. There never is any kindly feeling, never any pleasure of agreeable conversation. Late in the night under the quilts they feel chilly, the five limbs cannot be at ease. How much the more if there be in the bedding many fleas and lice so that until dawn comes, not able to sleep, many times tossing and turning they murmur to themselves, 'Ah, what kind of bad karma did I have to have gotten such an unfilial child?'

"Then it may happen that when they call the son he will glare at them or scold them angrily, and so his wife too, and his

children, seeing such a thing, also will be berating the parent, putting him to shame, and bend their heads down to hide their laughter. The wife unfilial and the children undutiful, husband and wife combine to commit what is among the five unpardonable offenses. Or else it may be again that suddenly they want to tell the parents about something, and they summon them to give them orders. They may call ten times; nine times not complied with, in the end they get angry and scold them and say, 'You've gotten too old; instead of lingering in the world, why don't you hurry up and die.' Father or mother hearing this, grievous thoughts choke up their breasts, bitter tears spring from their eyelids. Their eyes grow dim, their hearts grow dizzy. In anguish they cry out, 'Ah, when you were young, if it weren't for me, you could not have been brought up, but still when it comes to now, this is the way it is. Ah, the fact that I bore you, much better had it never happened.' If there is a child who from father and mother causes such words as these to arise, that child then, along with those words falling, will enter into the hell, preta, or animal realm. All of the Tathagatas, the Vajra Devas, the five mighty Rishi, these even would not be able to save or protect such a one. The greatness of obligation to father and mother is like the heaven which has no limit.

"Excellent young men and excellent young women, if I were to explain this in detail, in father and mother there are ten kinds of kindness achievement. What are the ten kinds?"

1. Bearing in the womb, guarding and protecting kindness.
2. At the time of birth receiving anguish kindness.
3. At the child being born, forgetting all grief kindness.
4. Suckling at the breasts, bringing up and nourishing kindness.
5. Moving into the dry and taking the damp kindness.
6. Washing uncleanness kindness.
7. Swallowing up the bitter and spitting out the sweet kindness.
8. For the child's sake doing bad karmic actions kindness.
9. When it has gone afar, think and remember kindness.
10. To the very end concerned and wish to help kindness.

"The greatness of father and mother's kindness is like the heaven which has no limit. Such kindness efficacy as this, how can it be requited. The Buddha now will put this into gathas and recite it.

"The compassionate mother, when the child is in her womb, for the space of ten months shares her blood and flesh with it. Her body feels very ailing but the child's body through this gets to be completed. When the months are fulfilled and the time has come, urged on by the karma wind, through all her body are severe pains, the bone joints seem to separate; her spirit, heart and mind are agitated. All of a sudden her whole body is as if ruined. If it is safely born, then it is just as if she had been brought

back to life again. When she hears the child raise its first cry, it is as if she herself had been born.

When it was first born, the mother's face was like a flower, but as she nourishes the child for a number of years, her form gets emaciated. Even on nights of damp frost or dawns of icy snow, she removes the child to a dry place and she herself lies in the wet place. The child will defecate on her bosom or urinate on her clothes, but with her own hands she washes it clean and doesn't feel repugnance at the smelly filthiness of it.

When she takes food into her mouth she wants to give some of it to the child. The bitter things she herself eats, and the sweet things she spits out for him.

If for the child there is something which it is essential to provide, she herself will do deeds of bad karma, and though she fall into bad gatis, still is pleased to do it.

If the child goes to a distance, until he comes back and she sees his face, whether going out or coming in she thinks of him; whether sleeping or awake she worries about him.

As long as she lives she is thinking of how her life can be of use to the child, and after she has died, she prays that she may still be able to protect the child. Such kindness efficacy as this, how can it be requited.

And yet in growing up and becoming a man, to raise one's voice or feel annoyed, to go against the words of a father or

to be impatient at the words of a mother ; or when one has taken a wife, to be rebellious to father and mother, that is the way of a person with no gratitude, just as to hate or despise brothers or sisters is the way of a person who is envious. When one's wife's relatives come to visit, bringing them into the hall and making a feast for them, bringing them into family rooms and animatedly talking to them -----ah, ah, human beings do everything upside down. People who should be cherished, instead kept at a distance; people who should be kept at a distance, instead made much of.

The great kindness of father and mother is like the sky which has no limit."

At this time Ananda rose from his seat, bared his right shoulder, and bending his knee, put his palms together and said to the Buddha, "Bhagavan, so great as this being the kindness of father and mother, we who are children that have left the household, how ought we requite it? Please explain in detail about that."

The Buddha declared, "You of the Maha-Sangha, listen well. In the matter of filial concern, between those who remain in the household and those who leave the household, there is no difference. When one goes out, if one obtains sweet fruits of the new season, then one should bring these back and offer them to father and mother. Father and mother will be glad to accept

them, and even if they can't eat of them themselves, yet they will straightway send them round to the Three Treasures, and by this offering will tend to bring into being their Bodhi Citta.

"If father or mother should be ill, one should tenderly nurse them, not leaving their bedside. Nothing about it should be entrusted to others. At frequent times one should inquire how they feel and tenderly one should prepare gruel. The parent, when he sees the effort of the child, will very heartily eat the gruel, and the child, when he sees the parent eating, will humbly for his own part feel better. If for a while the parent sleeps, getting some rest, then listen to his breathing. When he wakes from sleep, inquire of a doctor and bring medicine. Day and night doing homage to the Three Treasures, pray that there might be a cure for the parent's illness. Ever fixed in mind the wish to requite kindness, even for a second, the child does not ignore it."

At that time Ananda further asked, "Bhagavan, the child who leaves the household, if he diligently does things in this way, has he requited the kindness of father and mother?"

The Buddha said, "No, not yet has he managed to requite the kindness of father and mother. Should the parents out of blind obstinacy have no regard for the Three Treasures, so that they inconsiderately do harm to things, or dishonestly steal things, or not acting properly, they indulge in licentiousness, or not being sincere they deceive people, or deficient in wisdom

they are addicted to drink, the child then should firmly admonish them and try to get them to realize what it is they do. But if they still remain unresponsive and cannot be made to realize, then he should bring examples for them, show similar instances, explain the principles by which cause and effect act, and teach them the painful consequences that will come of it. But if still, through stubbornness, he cannot get them to correct themselves, with weeping and tears and sighs he should instruct them, and himself cease to drink and eat. However blindly obstinate the parents may be, yet as they become fearful lest the child might die, drawn along by their feelings of love and fondness, they will make a great effort and turn towards the Road. If the parents' feelings thus alter and they respect the Buddha's five regulations of conduct, that is, they have consideration and don't kill, they have honesty and don't steal, they have propriety and don't indulge in licentiousness, they have sincerity and don't deceive people, they have wisdom and don't get drunk, then, in such a household it will come about that the parents act with fond concern, the children act with filial devotion, the husband acts with correctness, the wife acts with virtue, the relatives are in harmony and are amicable, the servants are loyal and obedient. The six kinds of domestic animals on down to the insects and fishes, all of them respond to the softening kindness. All the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, the sky nagas, demon gods, princes who have the way, loyal and excellent

ministers, from them on down to ordinary people in general, by all these they will be respected and esteemed. Violent and bad lords too, and flattering, cunning retainers, evil men and wicked women too, and the 1000 malignancies and myriad distortions too, against such excellence can do nothing.

"In brief then, for father and mother, that in the present life they may live calmly and quietly, and that in the next life they may be born in some excellent place where they can see a Buddha, hear the Dharma, and for long get free from the wheel of dukha, to do such as this is to begin to requite the kindness of father and mother."

The Buddha further to enforce his explanation declared: "You the Great Sangha, listen well. For the sake of father and mother exert all your heart's strength. Whatsoever you may have of delicious taste, beautiful sound, fine garments, carriages and carts, halls and rooms, with these serve them. But if father and mother, though through all their life they may have had more than ample of pleasures and enjoyments, still if they do not yet have faith in the Three Treasures, then you still are not acting with filial devotion. What should it be like? Having a considerate heart, to practise dana; having actions of propriety, to regulate one's person. With gentleness and easiness to endure shame, with vigorousness to pursue virtue, and immerse one's mind in the utter quietness. Although thusly one may with vigor exert one's spirit in studies, still perhaps for one

time one gives way to carousing and gluttony, feasting; --bad mistakes abruptly seek out an opening and malignant forces may then obtain an opportunity. Then without any regret on his part for what he has obtained, they captivate his feelings, cause anger to arise in him, make idleness to increase in him, and the citta to get confused, the wisdom to grow dark, until at last they cause his actions to become equivalent to those of beasts. Maha-Sangha, from of old down to the present time, such causes as these have hastened on the destruction of persons, the ruin of families, the endangerment of princes, and all this not without the bringing of shame to parents. As matters are so, children must deeply be mindful and think through things to a far point. And thus the degree of filial care and its promptness is a question that they must know about. These are the things which make the requital for the kindness of father and mother."

Then Ananda wiping his tears, rose up from where he sat, and kneeling on one knee, putting his palms together, said: "Bhagavan, what name should be given to this sutra, and in what way should it be regarded?"

The Buddha told Ananda, "Ananda, this sutra should be called Father and Mother's Great Kindness. If there are any sentient beings who once read or repeat this sutra, thereby they suffice to requite the obligation for the milk suckled. If with all their hearts they hold the mind-thought of this sutra, or if

they cause people to hold the mind-thought of it, then you must know that such a person well requites the kindness of father and mother, and in a whole lifetime, whatever there might be of the ten badnesses, the five great offenses, the heavy ill deeds belonging to the lower hell, all of these fade away and that one obtains to the supreme path.”

At this time Brahma Deva, Indra, dwellers in all the heavens, everyone gathered there, hearing this explanation of the Dharma, each one of them brought into being the Bodhi Citta. Touching their five limbs to the earth they shed tears like rain, and coming forward they touched their heads to the Buddha's feet, and then withdrawing, each one of them for himself joyfully put it into practise.

Senryu