

' FILIAL PIETY'

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Nature is the greatest teacher. A entire tree including the fruits are manifestations of the things that were in the seed of that particular tree. It is not surprising to expect the fruits on a tree to contain seeds that it sprung from. Children are seeds of their parents. In most if not all cases children resemble their parents. The parents being the “seed,” the children being the fruits of their union, or adoption. Just as parents pass on physical qualities to their children; they should pass on moral, spiritual, social and ethical qualities to their “seed” – their children. This brings me to the topic that I want to express my thoughts on “Filial Piety”.

Every civilization is guided by certain principles which influence the lives of successive generations – filial piety is no exception. Filial piety incorporates “: Reverence for parents, considered in Chinese ethics the prime virtue and the basis of all right human relations.” Most of the formative years of a child are spent with its parents. It is in these crucial years that most of the principles that would become the foundation for them to stand on would be either learnt or not learnt. In some cultures children are seen as “ insurance policies” – policies that have a pay later plan; children would take care of the parents when they are old and unable to fend for themselves.

My mother was very stern but loving. She would not let anyone get away with any form of disrespect. Even though my time with her was very short – she died when I was still a child, it is not difficult to imagine what great family values groomed her. One of the greatest things that are still with me and what I still practice is praying. As a young child my mother encouraged me to pray. I saw her many times on her knees seeking the face of God. Her intense prayer life brought us through the tough times that we sometimes encountered. I realize that even though

my mother never really told me to respect her; by teaching me to respect God she was covertly telling me to respect her and my fellow man. My mother disciplined me when it was necessary to do so. She enforced upon me the principle of being honest and to always tell the truth. These principles remain with me today and they are my watchword and song. Respect for the elderly is ingrained in my behavior. Simple things like saying good morning, good afternoon and thanking someone in return for a kind deed; things which I practice today can all be attributed to my mother.

The few years that I spent with my mother; I am sure she was pleased with my overall behavior. The latter part of the definition of filial piety “the basis of all right human relations”; has been my guide to success from primary school all the way to university. For someone who had a very bad temper, applying these principles has made me a calmer, confident, respectful and well behaved individual. I volunteer at many soup kitchens and shelters – institutions which make available, services to people who are almost forgotten by society. It gives me a sense of satisfaction to feed an elderly person. Even though it is not my mother or father I am elated to do something that she taught me. I could see her looking down the bannisters of heaven and saying well done keep it up; my labors were not in vain.

My mother has left some ethical and moral footprints which I have walked in. The fruits of her training which were ingrained in me have been passed on to my children. “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.”- I have saturated my children with the virtues that emanate from these words. Now they are very respectful not only to me but to their fellow students, teachers and family members. Never once has there ever

been a cause for the teachers to complain about any negative behavior by my children. Their grades are excellent and it is very easy to communicate with them because they are so attentive and respectful.

Regardless of how much my mother tried to get me to practice filial piety; the first thing she had to do was to change my way of thinking. Words are thoughts expressed. In the same breath actions are thoughts or ideas expressed. The transformation from a very high tempered person to a very calm, respectful and ethical did not happen overnight. According to Rhonda Byrne in her book "The Secret" – "Thoughts are magnetic and thoughts have a frequency. As you think thoughts, they are sent out into the Universe and they magnetically attract all the things that are on the same frequency. Everything sent out returns to the source." My mother helped to change my way of thinking – from being a high tempered person seeking revenge on my enemies to being able to say "Father forgive them for they know not what they do;" the words that Jesus said as he was being crucified on a cross by the very people he had helped. My life has been transformed through prayer.

A practical example of forgiveness and respect for the basis of all right human relations – when I was attacked in a park by four men and two women. They were armed with a steel lock and a long blade with a handle. I was hit in the head with the steel lock and while I was on the ground they hit me on my back with the blade. Even though I was able to take away the blade with the handle and actually corner one of them; I showed mercy to him when he cried out in anticipation of me hitting him, I refrained from hitting him. Many times I am pestered mentally to return to the park to search for those men and get my revenge on them through violence.

The lessons that I learned from my mother have kept me from doing so. I have forgiven them and I know that it was only a test to see how well I still adhere to this principle. It is not hard to imagine that these guys were either not trained to respect their fellow human beings or even if they were trained they did not practice them or care to do so or did not think it important to do so. On the other hand the parents themselves might not have been taught by their parents or guardians to respect others; so it was virtually impossible for my attackers to have manifested any virtue reference respect for their fellow humans. It is not hard to understand why they had no reservations attacking me and also showed no remorse.

It brings to mind a story that I read in the argosy paper which vividly demonstrates the saying – whatever you sow you will reap. The scene is in a courtroom with the magistrate about to sentence a man who has been arrested repeatedly for stealing and armed robbery. It was known in the community that this individual stole everyday yet his mother never disciplined him or even attempted to guide him along the right path. Over the years he had grown very disrespectful to his parents especially his mother. It seemed that she condoned his evil behavior. He had appeared before the magistrate on numerous occasions and he was spared long prison sentences even though he never made any restitution. However, this time the magistrate was not going to be lenient and meted out the maximum sentence upon him – fifteen years in jail. When asked if he wanted to say anything to the court before being taken away; he requested to say something but not audible – only to his mother. The following scene shocked the entire court. After the magistrate gave him permission to speak to his mother, she walked over to her son who requested to speak quietly in her ears. Suddenly there was a sharp cry from the convict's mother and blood was seen pouring from the side of her face. Her son

had bitten off her ear in anger. His words to her were “If you had brought me up the right way and not compromised with my wrong doings we would not have been here. “ “ You did nothing to help me and now my life is wasted.”

I think everyone comes into this world for a purpose. My purpose cannot be achieved or fulfilled if I do not reach my full potential as a human being. I would be most effective in relating to my fellow humans when this is achieved. My mother has always emphasized having a sound education. To achieve this I was sent to some of the best primary and secondary schools. The schools that I went to were Roman Catholic- I knew nothing about the Roman Catholic doctrine but my guiding principles helped me enough, to respect their principles and not show any disrespect for their clergy. I was able to live, work and study among persons who express different views on the scriptures to mine. I do not see someone through my own eyes; I see them through the eyes of God who made all people in his own likeness and image. As I show respect for my fellow man I show respect for God; it is not hard for me to do this. I also transfer this attitude to organizations, other religions, cultures and races. I make provision for being different and acknowledge that it is politically correct to be different. In the same breath I must be accommodating. I have learned that variety is the spice of life and that my opinion is not the be all and end all on any topic. I must make space for other people’s ideas however different and absurd they may seem. I have learned that in nature there are many different flowers; there are different colors, shapes, sizes and fragrances – they all make up the great bouquet and no one is more important than the other. I believe that human beings are the “Flowers of humanity”- they are various shades, sizes, attitudes, but they all belong to the same bouquet. This bouquet is incomplete without the inclusion of every “human flower.” Only

respect for parents – filial piety will ensure that this happens. The behavior of children towards their fellow man is a function of how they treat their parents. The early years of socialization take place in the home. Most homes where spousal or child abuse is the norm; the products of those homes, abuse their children and their spouses. During the short period of time that my mother graced my life before she passed I did not witness any physical abuse; the abuse if there were any was more mental or emotional. My mother remained calm, collective and very secure during those times. The main quality among others that she infused in me – admonishing me to always have an active prayer life. These qualities I have passed on to my children and I will never abuse my wife. In some circles I have been called the “N” word but the guiding principles of peace and non -violence have made me able to ride the high tides of racism through the power in the words of Mahatma Ghandi who said : “peace and non-violence are my god”. These principles have kept from getting into things like selling drugs; I am in school hoping to graduate very soon. Soon the world will be able enjoy the fragrance of this “ flower of humanity.”- me.

It may seem strange that so far I have only written about my mother. This is so because my father is almost completely opposite to my mother in terms of values, respect for children and respect for himself. This statement endorses the statement that I made earlier – the type of home that the individual is socialized in determines what qualities either negative or positive will be manifested throughout his life. My father never spoke of his father. One lady actually told me that my father was an abandoned child. However his mother told me that he was her child. It is obvious that this affected my father throughout his life. He was always very reserved,

spoke very little of his mother even though he was very proud of his grandmother. The closeness between my mother and me caused many problems between my father and me. Sometimes he was very abusive. Here is the paradox – how do I show respect to one parent and not another? The extent of the price I paid for having to deal with an individual who was totally opposite to my mother became more evident after my mother died. Whatever resentment, anger and other ills that were resident in my father's mind; he used me as his target to shoot all his poison arrows of hate, anger, distaste, spite and isolation. He also encouraged all the other members of the family to separate themselves from me. His hatred became so intense that he asked me to leave the house. This was a house that my mother had acquired before she died; I walked past that house many times unable to enter it all because of a man who was not trained by his parents to respect and love his family and fellow man. Even though I was separated from him during this period of time; I helped him out with anything that he needed. My faith was put to the ultimate test when I heard that he was sick. I took time off from my studies and took care of him until he recovered. After his recovery he went back to his old ways of isolating me and expressing his hatred and distaste for me.

I must confess that this was the last straw for me with him. I was very displeased with him; I moved out of the area without telling him. I never remained in contact with him. About six years after our separation I heard that he was very sick and wanted to speak to me. He sounded very desperate and requested that I should come to see him without delay. This was not possible and a few months after this conversation he passed away. I do not blame my father for not having the quality of filial piety. It is obvious that the home that he grew up in was broken –



his mother was an alcoholic and his father was never on the scene. My father was deprived of what he was supposed to be – a normal loving human being who is capable of passing on good qualities to his children. My greatest test was now to show respect and love to my father while he in turn was not demonstrating any respect or love to most of his children. I think I am the embodiment of this quote by Major H. L. Barner- “ If you deprive a man of who he is, you can make him anything that you want him to be. But if you teach him his heritage and his culture, he will aspire to be greater than those before him.” My mother taught me my heritage and infused certain qualities in me – self-respect, faith , hope, charity, justice and prudence. These qualities empowered me to cope and conquer all the negatives of my father and all others who have opposed me over the years. Along the journey of life and at each stage I have taken solace in this reality; I am in this situation because it was pre –determined to be so and because I am empowered to adapt I will be victorious in every situation. I take courage in this quote by Marcus Antoninus –“ Adapt thyself to the things with which thy lot has been cast; and love the men with whom it is thy portion to live, and that with a sincere affection. . . . No longer be either dissatisfied with thy present lot or shrink from the future”. Over the years I have learned to adapt to the things that have been my lot and I have expressed love, tolerance and respect to the unlovable, the indifferent and the critical. I will not shrink from trying to cope and conquer anything that the future will bring. I will only do this through filial piety - :”reverence for parents; the prime virtue and the basis of all right human relations.”

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