

Filial Piety

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Erasing Bad Memories to Become a Good Daughter

I try not to remember much about my childhood. It was so painful that I decided to block that part of my brain, but sometimes I can't help but remember what it was like to live in scarcity, or even worse, to live with my father. There are occasions that I find myself thinking of how lucky I am for coming to the United States and having the chance to start a new life. However, even after all these years, my duties as a daughter prevented me from moving on and for some reason I could not ignore that my father is still alive. Now that he is really old and very sick, it kills me inside to have this feeling of anger and vengeance. This is the story why.

I used to live with my 6 brothers and father. My mother would play an important role later on in my life. Some may find this unfair: harboring vengeance for my father who cared for us as children. However, my mother had her reasons in order to survive and be with us later on. Deep down, I secretly preferred being with my mother.

When my mom left I was very young. At first, I didn't understand why she left until I was 7 or 9 years old. At the time, I was always playing with my brothers or going to school which prevented me from witnessing what was going on at home. However, time flies and by the time I was 11 I was able to fully understand what was going on: the look on my mother's face revealed to me that she was being mistreated by my father. I realized my mother was not happy.

At that time, I was still innocent and didn't know what to do. As a child, my job was to go school, play, and wash the dishes when it was my turn. My older brothers kept my mother's unhappiness a secret from my little brother, sister, and I because they didn't want us to find out what was happening. I remember times I would notice my father being really rude to my mom, but I thought it was normal because I was raised to believe this was all normal: that a man was considered head of the family and he was the one that dictated the rules and women followed. I began to get exposed to more of their fighting and arguments, but I had believed every family had their share of arguing. However, soon I realized their problems would not stop at arguing. I remember listening to my Mom saying she was going to leave my father, but never mentioned that she was going to leave us. I remember my father furious and locking my brothers and I in one room while my Mom was getting beaten in another. We lived in a small home; everything could be heard from the walls. I heard my mother telling my father to stop. I heard my mother yelling with a pain that made me feel like I was the one getting beat. After that my mom would come out of the room and tell me she fell off and hit herself and that everything was fine, but I kept hearing the same story until I was 12 or 13 years old. I realized that my mother would leave the house to survive and be happy even if it meant leaving me and my brothers behind. Many things happened and after she left, I wasn't the same happy child anymore. My father did not treat us badly, but the fact that he was the one that made my mom leave made him a stranger to us. Luckily, a few years after my mother left she got a job and a place for us to live with her. One day, she came and we all escaped with her. After that, I never heard anything about my father. We were not rich, but my mother raised us to the best of her ability and despite not having money, I was the happiest I could ever be because I would not see my mother's tears and bruises anymore.

A few years ago I heard my father had become very sick with Parkinson's disease. His memory was so bad he would sometimes not remember his own name. Other times, he would get up and cry like a baby. His vision also began to deteriorate and he would call me a few times a week to say that he feels lonely and that no one loves him. I can't give a reason why I helped him. I don't know if it was love, or perhaps pity that moves me to help him? Or my duty to serve my family in need? To this day, I still do know the answer. I know that thanks to him I exist, but existing is not living and he did not give me the kind of life I wanted to have. I hated my father for some time, but now seeing him alone and crying all the time because nobody wants to help him breaks my heart. I finally decided I needed to go see him. Last year, I took a family leave from work and went to the Dominican Republic to see him. I found a place for seniors to stay and I convinced some of my relatives to check on him whenever they could. I even became good friends with the nurse so we could chat through text messages and she could keep me posted about his health and condition. I try my best to provide him with basic necessities such as clothing, food, or medicine. However, a part of me wondered should I have let him die. Sometimes I wonder if I should have made him pay for what he did to us, but there was another feeling that always won over that anger and hate: my duty as a daughter to take care of her father. There are times I struggle to let go of those hurtful memories, but he is my father and my love for him allowed me to establish a new relationship with him. My father has 21 children and some of them don't even want to talk to him, but I don't judge them because my father was not an easy person. But the fact I forgave him it gave me the peace I needed, for now, I will pray that one day we all come to our senses and realize that love and family are more important than anything in this world. I forgive my father and I wish I could convince my brothers to forgive him too. All I can do is erase those hurtful memories and become a better daughter.

Then, something beautiful happened: I became a mother. My son has given me a chance to look at myself and ask “do I want to become like my father? Have my son hate me for the rest of my life? Or do I want him to be better man than him and I a better mother?” Being a parent has allowed me to conquer my anger and seeing my son every day needing and loving me has provided the courage I needed to share this story knowing that one day I may be in the same situation as my father: needing someone to take care of me. I’m not sharing my story to inspire pity, but to show that despite one’s past circumstances one won’t ever be happy until one can forgive those people that hurt us. I’ve always read the Bible and often browse for positive messages whenever I felt lost; I dedicate this to those that are going through similar situations. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Forgiveness Bible Verses Colossians 3:13).

References

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