

Copied 11/18/13

Parents' Day Service
Makawao Hongwanji, 9:00 am
May 14, 2000, Sunday

With a heart full of love
And gratitude, we repeat
The sacred Name and take
Refuge in Amida Buddha,
and His teachings. On this day
When we honor our parents, living
and dead, may my family and
Friends be surrounded by the
Life, Light and Love of the Other Power.

✓ (14)

a. Dr. Saburo Anno & donation
b. Wayward son changes
when he hears of parents'
unconditional love.

NamoamidaButsu

Good morning everyone:

Welcome to our Sunday Family Service. And a Happy Parents' Day and especially a happy mother's day to you. Again, we are blessed with a beautiful weather for this special day.

Yesterday I attended the Hongwanji Pre-school graduation exercise. They were so cute - children of the new millennium - The leaders of tomorrow.

Today is also Mother's March for gun control.

Well, today nationally is Mother's Day, a day set aside to commemorate an important person in our lives. As you may know, Mother's Day started back in 1872, but it did not become a national holiday until May 9, 1914 when President Woodrow Wilson signed a joint resolution of Congress.

Today, at Makawao Hongwanji, not only mother, but father, the lesser half, is also recognized. We honor our parents because they are givers of life and we would not be here without them. We honor them because they have sacrificed and suffered for us. We honor them because they love us more than anyone else. Parents' love is said to be closest to Amida Buddha's love. Of course, Amida Buddha's love is given to everyone equally and freely and it is unconditional. Parent's love may not go that far, but perhaps its in the ball park.

In Buddhist scriptures there is a story which says we can carry our parents on our shoulders for the rest of our lives & yet not be able to repay our indebtedness to our parents.

a.

One man would attest to that. His name is ^{a Saburo} Dr. Anno. When there was a building drive to build a new temple, Dr. Anno donated half the money needed to complete the temple. When people praised him and asked for an explanation, he said no praise was necessary because he made the donation not out of charity, but out of gratitude. He said a pregnant mother refused to have an abortion even though doctors had warned her that she may die if she had the baby. She said she wanted the baby to be born so

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that he could hear the teachings of Shinran Shonin. She said that she herself had already heard the teachings so she was willing to take the chance. She gave birth to the child and died at child birth. Dr. Anno was that baby. He wanted to dedicate the temple to his mother for allowing him to live.

When we realize how difficult it is to be born into human life, and in Buddhism that is emphasized a lot, it should be only natural that we should be grateful for this precious life we have. And it is to our parents that we owe our gratitude.

a.

That is why we observe parent's day on this national Mother's Day to remind us of our indebtedness. But we should not forget to tell our parents how we feel. One daughter wrote to Ann Landers to express her feelings.

Dear Mom: I wish I could spend Mother's Day with you, but I can't, so I am writing a letter instead and hope you read it in Ann Lander's column. I understand so many things now that I didn't understand when I was growing up. I didn't know how hurt you were by some of the things I said and did/until I was hurt the same way by my own children.

Until I traveled that road myself, I had no idea how hard you worked, with never a complaint, or the burdens you carried doing the everyday things I took for granted.

I didn't know how many times I could have made you happy by just saying, "I love you, Mom" – or "I appreciate what you are trying to do for me" – but I know now, because it would mean the world to hear those words from my own children.

a.

It took me all my life to learn what a mother is. I wish there was some way I could let you know how much I appreciate your years of sacrifice and unselfishness, your efforts to keep us on the right track, and everything you did to help your children grow up straight and strong. Thank? Mom, you are the greatest.—Your Daughter.

This letter, although addressed to 'mom', also applies to dad. Children may not be as close to dad as to mom and mom may be easier to talk to than dad, but it doesn't

mean dad is not there for his children and his feelings for them are not any less. *Let your parents know you care for them whether they are living or have moved on to the next life.*

But, there's a word of caution for parents.

As you know, parents are responsible for the upbringing, the nurturing of their children ^{by} provid^{ing} food, shelter, safety and education, so that they can grow up and become self sufficient and independent people.

Parents, through their support, including emotional support and a loving home, make it possible for their children to grow and develop into secure and confident adults so that they can meet the challenge of becoming economically and emotionally independent people. In other words, parents are there to help their children so that they can take care of themselves and gain their independence as individuals.

But parents must be willing to give their children the space to grow.

Kahlil Gibran, the Lebanese novelist, poet and artist wrote on parenting:

(Many of you are familiar with his ^{words of wisdom,} thoughts.) He said and I quote: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you, but not from you, and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love, but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts. ^{And so forth} You may house their bodies, but not their souls. For

their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you". And so forth—unquote.

You don't own them. They are independent little people entrusted to you, please take care of them.

So we can say that parents should be helping their children to gain the freedom to be who they are *and parents should encourage their children to learn the skills to be independent.*

In my work at the University, there was a case of a bright student who really loved music. But his mother was so against his studying music and said she would help him financially only if he studied law. So he devoted several years going to law school and received a law degree from Northwestern University to satisfy his mother. Then he remained in Chicago, studied music and is now a musician entertaining in night clubs. He has not used his law training since leaving law school. He just went to law school to satisfy his mother. We cannot force our children to bend to our will. They will find a way to get around us.

We should respect our children and treat them as loved ones and not as enemies to be subdued. And yet we should remember that parents are the adults who should provide guidance and a good role model ^{for} for their children to follow. ^{But} parents should not be too lenient and give in to everything their children want. That will lead to

confusion and unhappiness. Parents should care enough to take the time to teach the children what is proper and correct. Anyway, it's a delicate balance between being too strict or too lenient and is something we learn to balance by doing.

But sometimes even when parents are loving, a child may have difficulty understanding that and problems may occur. A story from Japan touches on this matter.

An only son was born to a well to do farmer and although the family should have been happy, the son was ^{somehow unhappy & bringing unhappiness to his parents,} causing trouble to his parents.

And he became more and more irresponsible as he grew older. He would do such things as hurt the farm animals and bully the neighbor's children and make them cry. As a young adult, he drank a lot, gambled and fought with strangers and hurt them terribly. And when his parents scolded and complained to him, he would argue back and call them names.

He became totally uncontrollable ~~wicked man~~ ^{kick his son out of the house & disown him} and soon friends and relatives urged the parents to ~~disown their son~~ which was the worst punishment possible. The parents said, maybe they should, but they couldn't make the final decision and in the mean time, the son was ^{doing things which brought more} committing unspeakable acts, bringing shame to the family.

There is an old saying which goes. "The old cow licks her calf, and the tigress carries her cub in her mouth" It is saying even animals take care of their young. If it is a natural instinct for animals to love their young, how much ^more bitter it is for a human being to disown or abandon his son.

~~But the relatives insisted that because of the son's reckless behavior it was bringing disgrace to the whole family and to the whole village.~~

^{the relatives insisted that} Therefore, if the parents did not disinherit the son, the relatives would have to separate and cut themselves off from the couple.

So one day, all the family and relatives gathered at the parents home, bringing their hanko or family seal with them, so they could put their stamp of approval on the disownment document which would separate the parents from their irresponsible son.

When the son, gambling as usual, heard of this, he got angry and said he was going to barge into that meeting and put fear into the whole family-clan. He said he was going to swagger in there like a Kabuki actor and demand enough money so he could set up a tea house and enjoy himself to his hearts content. So he hurried over to the

home. But when he got there, he decided to sneak in from the backyard and listen in on the discussion/so that he could crash into the gathering at the right moment.

b. So as he hid there he heard his relatives speak out against him as they pressed their family seals on to the disownment document. When the document was finally placed in front of his parents for their seal to be pressed onto to it, ^{they} his mother cried out,

"Wait a minute. It is true that if we give our house to our undutiful son, in less than three years, the house and our son may be ruined. If we disinherit our son, we will have to adopt another son, and what if he did not turn out well. Who can say that would not be the case? Even though we should lose everything and become beggars for my son's sake I would feel no resentment against him." And she cried loudly. His father also

said, "Although ^{but} he has brought us pain and suffering, he is our only son and we will look after him and follow him as beggars on foot. We shall not trouble you, our relatives anymore/ and we ask for no charity. However, we may die before this thing is over/and we have but one life to lose. For our dear son's sake/ we are willing to lay ourselves down/and die by the roadside.

The irresponsible son who was listening silently/ was pierced to the core by the great love shown by his parents. He finally realized how cruel and foolish he had been/ and how irresponsible he had been as a son. From that day on, his life turned around 180 degrees. He turned into a dutiful and pious son/ and he served his parents as a tender and loving child. *He had seen the light.*

b. This story was told by a priest, named Kyu-o to teach us a lesson of how the love of parents/ can transform the irresponsible behavior of a wayward son. Although it is a story of the relationship between parents and child, the priest ^{explained that he told the story really} told the story to tell us about the unconditional love of Amida Buddha. *That parental love can be very similar to the love of Amida Buddha.*

That even though we may act foolishly, may hurt others in anger, or act in an uncharitable way/ Amida Buddha does not in anger punish us/ and condemn us to hell. Instead, in His gentle way, He embraces us compassionately within His Light revealing to us who we are. By means of His Light we are able to see ourselves exactly as we are and bring about change from the inside.

So as parents, we should learn from this story that hate is overcome not by hate, but by love. It is love and compassion which bring about positive changes in our lives.

So in gratitude for Amida Buddha's unconditional love for us, both parents and children should share the blessings that they are receiving constantly and live in peace and harmony. On this occasion of Parent's Day that is the message ^{we should} ~~to~~ live by.

In closing I wish to again read the passage ^{recited at} ~~from~~ the beginning of my talk. In Gassho, "

With a heart full of love and gratitude, we repeat the Sacred Name and take refuge in Amida Buddha and His teachings. On this day when we honor our parents, living and dead, may my family and friends be surrounded by the Life, Light and Love of the Other Power. Namoamidabutsu

Parents' Day / Mother's Day
 Parents' love closest to
 Amida Buddha's love
 Story of Dr. Sebero
 Anno.
 Kahlil Gibran
 Lebanese novelist.
 On parenting
 Story from Japan of
 irresponsible son