The Family in Buddhism
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Spiritual Clarity and Discrimination Build on Strong Family Principles

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A family consists of a married couple and their children. It is a group of people tied by the same blood. We are a member of a family from the time of our birth until our death. The relationship between the members of a family is based on love and trust, and the whole group forms the most basic and oldest unit of society. It is the oldest in that it has always existed throughout history, although there have been changes due to the influence of society.

As the members of a family live together, they evolve a common ideology and value system. Thus they cooperate and understand each other, all working towards a common goal. The most remarkable aspect of this cooperation is the economic one. The basic couple forms an economic unit and share their income with the group.

A family has a strong feeling of "we" which is the result of deeply internalized emotional satisfaction of the family. While pursuing a common goal through common values, a family tradition is born, and so the family becomes a cultural group.

The personality of each member of the family is built up within this framework and so creates the foundation of human development.

The ups and downs of a family depend on the head, whether they follow a matriarchal system or a patriarchal one. Great Master Sotaesan, the founder of Won Buddhism, declared that the essential ways to regulate the home are:1

1. Practice a stable occupation and secure adequate clothing, food and shelter. Balance income and expenditure every day and try to be thrifty and save money.
2. The head of the family should not neglect the acquisition of a broad education and continual study. The education of the young should not be neglected, and care should be taken in executing obligations to the elderly.
3. The members of a family should live in harmony with one another, freely exchanging opinions and ideas.
4. Inwardly, each member of a family should have a moral teacher for the enlightenment of the mind. Outwardly, each one should conform to the laws of the land.
5. Reference should be made to moral families of the past and present so that the family can be guided in successful methods of harmonious living.

The Principle of Indebtedness to the Grace of Parents

Among the principles of Won Buddhism there is one that emphasizes indebtedness to the grace of parents.2 For without parents we could not be born and we could not develop. In addition, this principle has a much larger meaning. Not only is it recommended that we practice the Principle of Recital of the Grace of Parents but that we also try to repay as much as we can to others who are not as capable as we are. The actual

practice of this Principle is as follows:

1) We should go through the Essential Ways of Training: the Threefold Learning;3 the Eight Articles;4 and the Essential Ways of Human Life, namely the Four Graces5 and the Four Essentials.6

2. When our parents are unable to support themselves, we must take care of them as much as possible so that they may retain the comforts of both body and mind.

3. While our own parents are alive, and even after their death, we should take care of the parents of others as if they were our own.

4. After our parents have passed away, we must enshrine their picture and their history, remembering them for a long time.

Through this practice, we can earn respect from everyone, and our own children will naturally discharge their duties, the principle says. In addition, we are enjoined to care for the less fortunate. This will result in the receipt of public help even through to other lives.

The Equality of the Rights of Men and Women

The traditional Korean family is centered around the father. This resulted in only men having the possibility of exercising power and having rights. In comparison, the wife's freedom was highly restricted, and she had to shoulder the burden of caring for and raising the children, looking after the parents, running the house and working in the fields. Women were uneducated and had no right to inherit property. Polygamy was only outlawed in 1915. The heavy restriction of women

created discord in the family and consequently in society. Won Buddhism pointed out this unjustness and recommended that after marriage, the husband and wife should be financially independent and that they should make it their goal to fulfill their duties and obligations. In addition, men and women should be treated well in accordance with what they do, and they should be accepted equally in the performance of their duties and obligations.

The Change of Division, Of Responsibility and the Problem of Child Care

Since its foundation in 1916, Won Buddhism has declared the equal rights of men and women. As women's rights have improved, their role in society has become more active. This is the result of the change from an agricultural society into an industrial one. This change brought about a reduction in the number of family members and an increase in the possibilities of education for women. This has resulted in more and more women being in social positions. Now key family issues are equally discussed by husband and wife, and sometimes the wife's power is decisive concerning family wealth and the education of the children. The roles of husband and wife have also changed, as they share responsibility for the management of the house and upbringing of the children.

Whereas there have been many positive changes in the status and situation of women in modern society, the problem of the nurture of children is still there. There are too few institutions for children.

The author operates a daycare nursery for the children of poor

couples who are both employed. The nursery, "Mia Day-care Center," was established by Mr. Lee Kun-hee, the chairman of Samsung Welfare Foundation. Located in a low-income area, the nursery employs nineteen professional teachers, a person in charge of the kitchen and four to five volunteers (followers of Won Buddhism) to care for two hundred children every day from 7:30am to 7:30pm. It is a nursery of very high standards, being spacious and well equipped.

In the experience of the author over the last few years, even the troublemakers learn good habits in the nursery. They learn to eat well, put things away, to wait their turn and cooperate with others, as well as the usual subjects which are taught to them.

Korean parents tend to overprotect their children, which creates problems. However, proper teachers can overcome these problems. The present writer is convinced that children nurtured in an ideal educational program develop better personalities. The earlier this is undertaken the better.

Conclusion

I have done no professional research on families and home life. As I was requested by Father Luis Dolan, I have simply written from my experience of the teachings of Won Buddhism in action. I believe that if all family members are harmonious and without personality defects, then the family will be happy. If the family, the basic social unit, is healthy, then society will be healthy, and all the people in the world can live in peace and harmony.

Rev. Park Chung-Soo is the distinguished leader of the Gangnam Branch of Won Buddhism in Seoul, Korea. She has traveled extensively throughout the world for her humanitarian and inter-religious work and established schools, day-care centers and kindergartens. She writes regularly in the international Won Buddhist newspaper and has published several books in Korean.

Notes: 1. The Scripture of Won Buddhism, 13.2.70; 2. Ibid., 2,2,12.; 3. Ibid., 4.1.28. In the Scripture, the Threefold Learning is: a) The Cultivation of Spiritual Stability, b) The Study of Facts and Principles, c) The Selection of Right Conduct; 4. Ibid., 4,1,28. In the Scripture, the Eight Articles are: The Four Articles of Progress: a) Belief, b) Courage, c) Query, d) Sincerity; The Four Articles of Abandon: a) Disbelief, b) Covetousness, c) Laziness, d) Foolishness; 5. Ibid., 3.2.21. In the Scripture, the Four Graces are: a) The Grace of Heaven and Earth b) The Grace of the Parents c) The Grace of Brethren d) The Grace of the Law; 6. Ibid., 3,2.21. In the Scripture, the Four Essentials are: a) The Cultivation of Self-Ability, b) the Wise Man First, c) The Education of the Children of Others, d) Respect for those Dedicated to Public Welfare.