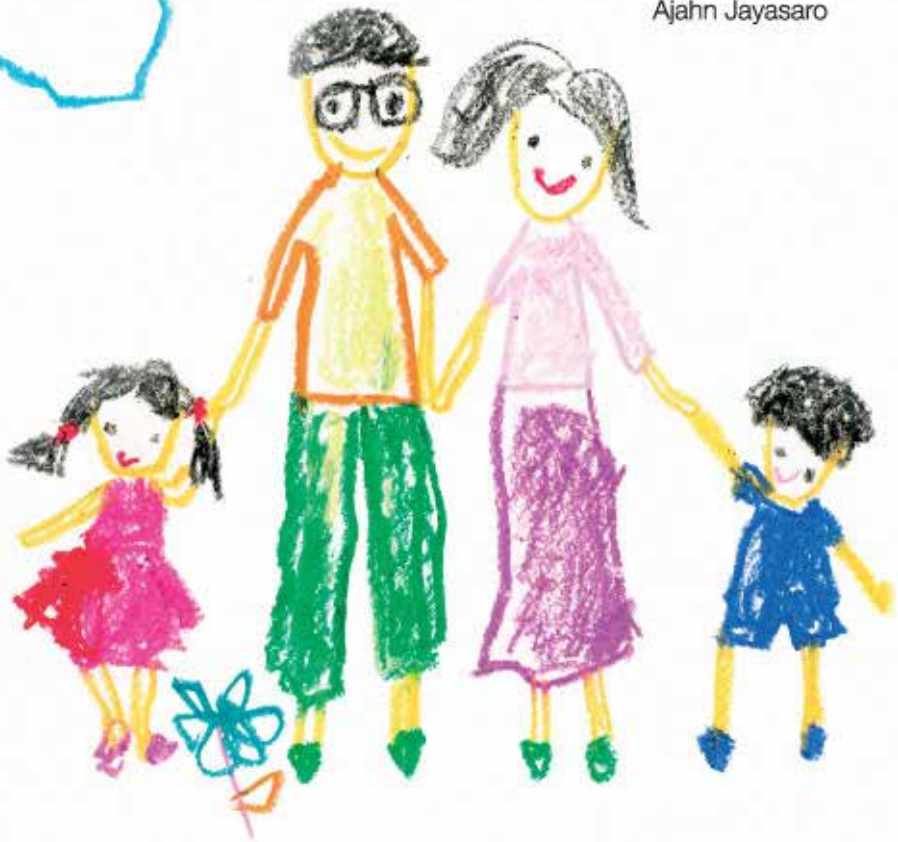
Daughters & Sons

Ajahn Jayasaro



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Many years ago before I was ordained as a monk, I believed that wisdom came from experience. So I left my home country of England for India, roaming around and gathering life experience in Europe and Asia. The more difficult it was, the more I liked it because I felt that difficulties helped me to know myself better, and that was beneficial to my life.

But the overland trip to India was a little disappointing. It was not as challenging as I expected, and so on the way back I resolved to travel from Pakistan to England without any money. I wondered if it would be possible to hitchhike all the way back, and I also wanted to know how it would feel to have nothing at all.

It was quite an adventure, several occasions I will never forget. I would like to tell you about one of them. By the time I arrived in Tehran—the capital city of Iran—I was exhausted. I was as thin as a stick, my clothes were all dirty and crumpled, and I must have looked pretty awful. I was shocked when I saw myself in the mirror of a public restroom. As for my mind, it was more and more like that of a hungry ghost, constantly worrying about food: "Will I get anything to eat today or not?" Whether my stomach would be empty or full depended on the kindness of fellow human beings. I had to rely on my *parami* because there was nothing else to rely on.

And then I met an Iranian man who felt sorry for me and also saw a chance to practice his English. He treated me to a cup of tea and gave me a small amount of money. At night, I slept on the street, hidden in a small, quiet alley. I was afraid that policemen would beat me up if they found me. In the morning, I walked to a soup shop that I remembered served free bread. While I was walking along the street, trying not to look at the tempting restaurants in the

corner of my eyes and not to smell the aroma that lingered in the air, I noticed a woman walking toward me. She looked stunned when she saw me. She stopped in her tracks, stared for a moment, and then walked up to me with a scowl on her face. Using sign language, she told me to follow her, and being a seeker of experience I did. After walking for about ten minutes we reached a townhouse, and rode an elevator to the fourth floor. I assumed we were going to her apartment, but she still had not said a single word. No friendly smile, just a fierce face.

Once the door was opened, I saw that it was indeed her apartment. She took me to the kitchen and pointed to a chair, signaling me to sit down. Then she brought me many kinds of food. I felt as if I was in heaven. It made me realize that the most delicious food in the world is the food you eat when you're truly hungry and your stomach is growling. The woman called out to her son and said something to him which I couldn't understand, but I noticed that he was around my age. The son came back after a while, with a pair of pants and a shirt. When she saw that

I'd finished eating, the woman pointed to the bathroom and signaled me to bathe and change into the new clothes. (I guessed she planned to burn my old ones.) She didn't smile at all, said nothing, and made herself understood with sign-language. While bathing I thought that maybe this lady saw in me her own son and was thinking: "What if my son traveled to a foreign country and had a hard time like this?" "What if he was in such a pitiful situation?" "What would that be like?" I thought that she must have helped me with a mother's love. I decided to appoint her my 'Honorary Persian Mother' and smiled to myself alone in that bathroom.

When I was ready, the woman took me back to the spot where we met and left me there. She merged back into the stream of people who were walking to work. I stood there watching her disappear into the crowd, and deep inside knew that I would never forget her in my entire life. I was very moved and my eyes were teary. She gave so much to me even though we didn't know each other at all. I was as skinny as a dried corpse, my clothes were dirty and smelly, and my hair was long and messy. But

she didn't mind that at all, she even took me into her house and took as good care of me as if I was her own son, without expectation of anything at all in return—not even a word of thanks. It has been over twenty years now, and I would like to publicly extol the virtue of this sulky faced *bodhisattva*, so that everyone will know that even in a big city, there are still good people and there may be more good people than we think.

This woman was not the only good-hearted person I met. I received kindness and help from people in many countries while I was traveling and collecting life experience, even though I did not ask anyone for anything. It made me determine in my mind that in future if I was in a position to help others in the same kind of way, I would. I wanted to help to sustain the spirit of human kindness in the world. Society can seem a hard and heartless place sometimes, but I thought we can each try to be at least a small oasis in the desert.

I didn't get all the way back to England. I lost my passport near the Turkish border and returned

to Tehran where I made friends and got a job teaching English. After a few months, with some money in my pocket, I returned to India. My nineteenth birthday found me living by the side of a lake with a Hindu monk. He was an inspiring teacher whose practices were similar to Buddhism and he taught me many things. While I stayed with him, I had plenty of time to contemplate my life. In the afternoon I liked to climb up a nearby mountain, sit under an old tree, and enjoy the breeze. Looking down to the lake below and the desert that expanded all the way to the horizon allowed me to think clearly. One day my mind became full of questions. Why was it that whereas I was so impressed every time I remembered the kindness of the people who had helped me during my journey—those who gave me food or shelter for a night or two— I'd never felt the same way about the kindness of my parents. They'd looked after me for eighteen years, given me food every single day—three or four times a day—and they'd still worried that the food might not be delicious enough for me. They'd given me both clothes and shelter. They'd taken me to a doctor when I was sick, and when I was ill they'd seemed

to suffer more than I did. Why was I never impressed with that? I suddenly felt that I'd been shamefully unjust. I realized how much I'd taken them for granted. At that moment, it was as if a dam burst. Many examples of my parents' *boon khoon*, their generosity and kindness, came to my mind, so overwhelming, so impressive. That was the beginning of my gratitude toward my parents.

I continued to imagine how difficult it must have been for my mother when she was pregnant. At the beginning she must have had morning sickness, and later on it would have been difficult for her to walk. All kinds of movement must have been cumbersome and painful. But she accepted the suffering because she believed that there was something worthwhile in it, and that something was me.

When I was young I had to depend on my parents for everything, but why did I feel indifferent—as if it was their duty to give and my right to receive? After a while, I realized that I gained the opportunity to practice Buddhism, in order to develop a true inner refuge, because

my parents had provided me with a stable, dependable external refuge when I was young. They'd given me a strong foundation for my heart to take on the battle with the defilements.

When I was 20 years old, I traveled to Thailand to be ordained as a Buddhist monk. My parents made no objections because they wanted their son to live his life the way he wanted and to be happy. My parents chose this over their own hopes for me. Last year my mother confessed to me that the day I left home was the saddest day of her life. I was very moved by this. What impressed me the most was the fact that she had been very patient and concealed this suffering from me for twenty years, because she didn't want me to feel bad about it.

After I became a monk, sometimes I couldn't help reproaching myself. While I lived with my parents, every day I'd had the opportunity to do things for them in return for their love, and hardly ever did so. Now I had the desire to express my sense of gratitude in tangible ways but could not: I was a monk and lived thousands of miles away from them. What a pity. And

yet I could do what monks have done for over two thousand years, and sent them thoughts of loving kindness every day.

In Thailand we regularly refer to the 'boon khoon' of parents. There is no exact equivalent to this concept of 'boon khoon' in the English language, but we may explain it to mean the belief that whenever we receive kindness or assistance from anyone—especially when it is given freely—we incur certain obligations. A good person is one who honours those obligations, and the deepest of those obligations is to our parents. The Buddha taught us to develop both a deep appreciation of the debt of gratitude we owe to our parents, and the intention to repay it as best we can.

This is not a value that I was brought up with. In Western cultures there is, of course, love and attachment between parents and children, but generally speaking the sense of mutual obligation is much weaker. Values such as independence and individual freedom are given more weight. A special, profound bond between parents and children may be felt by many, but

it is not articulated as a moral standard that upholds the society, as it is in Buddhist cultures like Thailand.

The importance we give to the boon khoon of parents may be traced to the Buddha's teachings on mundane Right View, the basis for understanding what's what in our lives. In the Pali texts, the Buddha says that we should believe that our father is real, and our mother is real. Are you confused as you read this? Why did the Buddha think he had to tell us that? Isn't it obvious? Who doesn't know that we've been born into this world because we have truly existing parents?

The thing to understand here is that these words are idiomatic. What the Buddha is saying is that we need to believe that there is a special significance in the relationship between parents and children, a significance that we should acknowledge and honour. The relationship between parents and children is mysterious and profound. The Buddha teaches us that there is no heavier kamma than to kill one's mother or father. In Pali, it is called *anantariya kamma*—

kamma so heinous that its terrible results cannot be avoided, no matter how sincere the perpetrator's regret might be. So whereas Angulimala could become an arahant despite having killed 999 people, it would have been impossible if he had killed just one person, if that one person had been either his mother or father.

The Buddha did not teach the profundity of this relationship merely as a skilful means to promote family values. It is a timeless truth that he discovered and then revealed for the benefit of the human race. It is an important Buddhist principle that the relationship between our parents and us is deep and profound, and probably has been going on for many lifetimes. Hence, we should accept, respect, and care about this relationship.

We might say, in summary, that in this lifetime we are resuming 'unfinished business' with our parents. In some cases, this unresolved state of affairs may manifest in a bad way, such as when a baby is abandoned by its parents, or a child is physically or sexually abused by a parent.

There are such cases, and there seem to be more everyday. But the terrible things that some parents can do to their children do not disprove this special relationship. The present lifetime is just one scene of a long drama, and we do not know what has happened in the past. As a caring society, we should of course do everything we can to protect children from abuse, to make clear how unacceptable we find it, and to deal with guilty parents according to the law of the land. But at the same time we may protect our minds from anger and despair by reminding ourselves that we are seeing one small segment of a complex saga, largely hidden from our eyes. Considering this truth, perhaps victims of abuse may be able to find their way to forgiveness for all involved.

Fortunately, there are very few parents who are completely evil to their children. Most are, as the texts say, like Brahma Gods towards them, motivated by unwavering love, compassion and sympathetic joy. In a number of discourses, the Buddha teaches us how to return our parents' profound beneficence. One of the best known is the teaching called *The Six Directions*, which the

Buddha taught to a young man named Sigalaka. A part of this teaching states that:

In five ways, young householder, a child should minister to his parents as the East, (saying to himself):

i. Having been supported by them, I will support them in my turn.
ii. I will help them with their work.
iii. I will keep up the honour and the traditions of my family.
iv. I will make myself worthy of my heritage.
v. I will make offerings, dedicating merit to them after their death.

(DIII.189-192)

The teachings in this discourse reflect the ideal structure of a Buddhist society. The emphasis is on people's responsibilities towards one another, on duties rather than rights. Nowadays, it is heartening to reflect on how many people in Thailand try to practice according to the principles above. But there is another discourse that I would like to refer to here, one that is

less well known and less practiced. In this discourse the Buddha said that even if a child were to put his or her mother on one shoulder and the father on the other shoulder, carry them around for one hundred years, provide them with well-prepared food that they enjoy, bathe and massage them, allow them to excrete and urinate on their shoulder, or give them huge sums of money, provide them with a high-standing and powerful position—even if the child does all this for their parents, he or she will still be unable to adequately repay them for all they have done for their child.

However, if the parents have little or no faith in the Dhamma and if a child can help to arouse the parents' faith, or if the parents do not practice the five precepts or practice them inconsistently and if a child can help improve the parents' moral conduct, or if a child can make stingy parents delight in giving and helping others, or help parents develop the wisdom to overcome mental defilements and end suffering, the child who succeeds in these tasks can be said to have truly repaid the debt of gratitude that he owes to his parents.

There are many points to ponder in this discourse. I believe the Buddha taught it tongue in cheek. If you don't think so, just try to picture yourself feeding your parents while they sit on your shoulders. No need to think about a hundred years, you probably wouldn't be able to take their weight for five minutes. Some mothers (I'm thinking of my own here) wouldn't want to get up there in the first place in case they fell down and broke an arm or leg. I think the Buddha used such hyperbole because he wanted us to reflect that, wow!— even if I was to do unbelievable things like that it wouldn't be enough, let alone what I do for them now. He wanted us to see that this is a huge debt, and no matter how hard we look after our parents in the normal ways, it is only as if we were paying back the interest on the debt. When we are in debt, the owner of the debt is not interested in how much we have paid off in the past, but how much remains to be paid in the future. Similarly, in considering our debt to our parents, rather than remembering all the things that we've done already, we should think about what remains, what we haven't done yet. The debt

we owe to our parents is not an ordinary debt, it is a sacred obligation.

The Buddha teaches us that besides serving our parents as laid down in *The Six Directions*, a Buddhist should try to encourage his parents in all that is good. The child should seek to become a *kalyanamitta* or 'good friend' to his parents.

Here we may see more clearly that the idea of a Buddhist society is of one where people try to be good friends to one another. Parents should try to be good friends to their children, and children should try to be good friends to their parents. An older sibling should try to be a good friend to a younger one, and a younger sibling should try to be a good friend to an older sibling. A husband should try to be a good friend to his wife, and a wife should try to be a good friend to her husband. We should help each other in the task of reducing the negative emotions in our hearts and working together to create a life and a society based upon loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom.

In the discourse I mentioned above, the Buddha singled out four virtues. I would like to repeat them now and expand upon their meaning.

***Saddha* (faith)** is the belief that the Buddha is a perfectly enlightened being, that his teachings are true, and that the Buddha's teachings will result in liberation for those who practice them seriously. It is the belief that there are people who have practiced the Buddha's teachings well and become liberated by them. It is the belief that of all the beings in the universe, this group of noble liberated beings is the most worthy of respect. It is the belief that as human beings, we control our own fate: whether things will be good or bad, whether we experience happiness or suffering, is up to us. Our lives do not depend on any spirit, ghost, angel, god, or divine power, but depend on our own actions of body, speech, or mind—both in the past and, most importantly, in the present. Saddha means, in essence, faith in our potential for enlightenment, and the conviction that the most important thing a human should get from his/her life is freedom from suffering and its causes.

***Sila* (virtue or precepts)** is the beauty and nobility of conduct. It refers to the ability to refrain from saying or doing anything that harms oneself or others. Sila is liberation from bad kamma created through body and speech. Sila is stable when protected by an intelligent sense of shame with regard to unwholesome actions (*hiri*) and an intelligent fear of the kammic consequences of such actions (*ottappa*). Sila provides the necessary moral standard for those who are determined to grow in the Dhamma.

***Caga* (generosity, renunciation)** refers to detachment from material things, delight in generosity, charity, and helping others. People with caga are kind and caring, not stingy or self-aggrandizing.

***Panna* (wisdom)** is the kind of knowing that extinguishes suffering and the defilements that cause it. Human beings are vulnerable to suffering at all times, even though nobody wants to suffer even the slightest amount. We suffer because we do not understand how suffering arises and how it ceases. Why don't

we understand? Because we don't understand ourselves and we are not trying to understand as much as we could. As long as we don't understand ourselves we will always be a victim of our emotions. It is like being in a dark room with a cobra. Would it be possible to walk around in such a room without being bitten by the cobra? It would be hard enough to avoid bumping into the furniture.

Panna in the initial stage works on the level of perception. It is a function of the memories that we accumulate from hearing, listening, and reading the Dhamma. We condition our emotions—both good and bad—with perception and ideation. Those who listen to and remember the Dhamma can reflect on it until they understand, and then they can cultivate the path of skilful consideration. Having trained in this way, then when the mind falls into an unwholesome state it does not become completely overwhelmed, it doesn't fall into a rut, it quickly rights itself. When someone who has never studied the Dhamma is treated badly, for example, he will usually become angry and depressed. But one who has

studied the Dhamma may bring to mind the reflection that even the Buddha himself was the subject of abuse and denigration, and so why should he be exempt from it? This thought can lead to an acceptance of the situation. By recollecting wise reflections we can start to let go of negative emotions, and start to wean ourselves away from the refuge of alcohol and pills. This level of panna discriminates between good and bad, the beneficial and the harmful. It gives us a peaceful and realistic vision of our life and the world. But it is not an infallible refuge, especially when strong emotions have arisen.

A higher level of panna is the wisdom that provides knowledge and understanding in the mind of those who have pure sila and stable *samadhi* (concentration). At this level, wisdom is no longer a thought. It is much faster than thoughts, like a supersonic airplane flying faster than sound. Wisdom is to clearly see all things as they are, to the point that we no longer enjoy attaching to them as *me* or *mine*. This is the wisdom that utterly penetrates the truth that everything, including our thoughts and feelings, belongs to nature and has no owner. It is the

wisdom to realize that our life is not a fort in a barren land, but it is a river that flows calmly through the garden of the world. When we develop the wisdom to see this, we can let go.

The Buddha taught that encouraging faith, virtuous conduct, generosity and wisdom in one's parents' hearts is the highest service to them, but he did not overlook the more basic kinds of service. He taught that a good child should take care of their parents. Taking care of parents starts with material items, but does not end there. Giving material gifts or providing comfort is a symbol of love, but it is not a proof of love and certainly shouldn't be a substitute for it.

The way that daughters and sons relate to their parents varies from family to family, since it depends on many factors; for example, how many children there are in the family, their age, whether they are still living at home or elsewhere, near or far away, etc. When parents get old, a good son or daughter helps to take care of them. If it is really not practical to do so (and not just a lame excuse), then they should go to visit their parents often, or at least call or

write regularly, to ask after them and tell their parents about what is going on in their lives. To know that their children miss and care about them is a medicine that gives parents peace of mind, and can be a medicine more effective than those they may receive from their doctor. We give our parents what we can give. It is wonderful if we can pay the medical bills when our parents are sick, but if we are poor and cannot afford such help then we should give what we do have—such as time. Sitting with them, reading for them, or nursing them as best we can (for example, giving them a massage, bathing them, or feeding them)—these things may be more valuable to our parents than any material gift or money.

The discourse I quoted above tells us that the greatest factor conditioning the happiness and suffering in our lives are thoughts and emotions, or in other words the mind itself. It is for this reason that the Buddha says that it is a great merit for those who can help their parents to develop wholesome qualities and experience happy joyous mental states. It is a kind of giving that enables our parents to gain a priceless gift.

It is good and feels good to give material gifts to our parents and to give them treats, to take them out for meals or to take them on holiday for example, but these kinds of gifts are always somewhat limited. Material things, in particular, can break down and fall apart and can even be a cause of such anxiety for the elderly that they become a double-edge sword. The support and care given to parents can only help them in this life time. The Buddha said that in addition to these praiseworthy ways of showing our love and gratitude to our parents, we should not overlook their spiritual welfare. Good qualities that arise in the hearts of our parents have no drawbacks. They're not dependent on external conditions, nobody can steal them, and they provide provisions for the next life.

For this reason, the Buddha calls the inner virtues a noble treasure or noble wealth. They are noble because they are the means to attain the true nobility of complete freedom from suffering. We should provide as much happiness and comfort to our benefactors as we can, but at the same time we should not forget what lies beyond that. Mitigating the suffering our

parents endure in their wandering through the samsaric realm is still inferior to reducing its root causes.

To summarize, the Buddhist principles regarding how we honour the debt of kindness we owe to our parents depends on our beliefs that:

1. Continual rebirth is painful (suffering), and freedom from the cycle of rebirth is true happiness.
2. Rebirth is conditioned by defilements (*kilesa).*
3. Humans can let go of defilements, and they should do so.
4. Letting go of defilements and cultivating good qualities is the practice leading to true happiness.

The question is: how can we encourage our parents to cultivate saddha, sila, caga, and panna as the Buddha suggests? We should be prepared for some disappointment. We may not be able to do it at all, or achieve only partial results. Our "young branch" is relatively difficult to

bend, why should their "old branch" be easy?[1] Don't be irritated or frustrated by your parents, and don't give up on them, or else your mind will become clouded and negative. It's normal for people to resist change. So act wisely but without expectations. Do it because it is the correct thing for a son or daughter to do, but don't allow yourself to suffer through your goodness.

It's very important to set a good example. As the old saying has it, "actions speak louder than words," and the best method of persuasion may not be through speech. If we let our parents see the benefits we gain from practicing the Dhamma: if they see within us qualities of generosity, serenity, loving kindness, circumspection, and persistence, then it may give them the faith and motivation to practice themselves. Simply put, if we want to help our parents, we also, at the same time, have to help ourselves.

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[1] There is a saying in Thai "a young branch is easy to bed, an old branch is difficult to bend," meaning it is easy to teach young people and difficult to teach old people.

It is probably easiest to start by helping our parents cultivate the third quality: caga, since this has always been emphasized in the Thai society. I can't imagine that there is any other country in the world where people take more delight in giving than they do here in Thailand. A good son or daughter invites parents to join them in making offerings and donations that will truly benefit Buddhism and the society at large. We should use our intelligence in choosing what to give and where. In making gifts to the *sangha*, for example, we should be aware that the *Vinaya* forbids a monk from making any requests from laypeople who are unrelated to him, except in the case that they have already offered a formal invitation (*pavarana)* for him to do so. Don't allow yourself to feel intimidated if a monk tries to solicit donations from you. He is breaking a rule in the Vinaya by doing so and you needn't fear that it will be a bad kamma not to give anything to him. On the contrary, it would be a demerit to give because you would be supporting the monk's unethical action and the undermining of the sangha. Give appropriate gifts—how much they cost is not an indicator of how much merit is made— and give in such

a way that you can feel joy before, during, and after the act. Few things enhance the sense of connection between family members as much as group acts of generosity.

In addition, we can set an example for our parents by living a simple life, not spending money extravagantly and not being unduly fascinated with material things. By reminding our parents in this way (definitely not by preaching to them) they may be led to consider their own attitude toward material things. We can hold up a mirror for our parents to look at themselves and by doing so we do them a service, because being free of obsession with material things is another meaning of the word caga. Some fathers see a cool, new model of car and get as excited as a teenage boy, while some mothers see some new fashionable dress, exclaim like a teenage girl. Under the influence of sudden feverish desires for consumer goods, it's quite normal these days for middle-aged people to act in ways which the wise elders of the past would have considered immature. The fact that we know when to stop, we know the right measure, may remind our parents.

In other matters, it depends on our parent's personality. If they sometimes go to a monastery and are interested in Dhamma, it will probably be relatively easy for us to discuss meaningful issues with them every now and then. But if they are not interested in Dhamma; if they're still in good health and have never allowed themselves to think of the inevitability of death, then they may become defensive. Those who treat their kilesa like a precious thing, something that adds flavor to their lives, will feel that Dhamma is invasive and they will try to avoid or reject it. If that is the case, we have to accept it and respect their right. Don't nag them or oppress them. The Dhamma is not something you can foist on someone, even though you mean well. If our parents reject the Dhamma, then we have to let go for the time being, happy and willing to share what we can with our parents if and when they change their minds.

As for the parents who are interested in the Dhamma, we can take them to a monastery so that they can make merit, listen to Dhamma, and meditate in a tranquil place. If they still have superstitious beliefs concerning medallions,

black magic, fortune telling, mediums, sorcerers, etc., then talk to them about it if you can. However, you should talk at an appropriate time and place, and don't make your parents feel that you think you know something they don't know, or you're smart and they're foolish. Encourage them to exercise regularly: Chi Gong is a good choice since it is a type of meditation in itself. Find good Dhamma books for them to read, or play Dhamma talk cassettes or CDs for them. Talk to them about birth, aging, sickness, and death in a natural way, letting them see that these are not inauspicious subjects for conversation. Faith and wisdom grow from having the courage to confront the truths of life. It is not as if we could escape from these truths simply by ignoring them.

But it is also important to understand that the Buddha did not teach that being a good son or daughter means that we should do everything our parents tell or ask us to do. Refusing to do what they want is not always wrong. Why? Because there are some parents who tell or ask their children to do things which are inappropriate. It is not wrong to refuse parents

who ask us to do something illegal or to engage in vices such as drinking alcohol or gambling. Our boon khoon obligations are not restricted to our parents. We are also children of the Buddha, and his kindness is even greater than that of our parents. Our obligation to him is consequently of the highest. Thus if our efforts to express our gratitude to parents conflicts with our commitment to goodness and truth, then the wise person, in the most tactful and respectful way, takes what is right as his guide. To be a good friend to our parents does not mean to please them in every way. Without being rigid and insensitive, we have to have clear, good principles, and seek to be unbiased.

If you can find the time in the morning or evening, invite your parents to chant and meditate with you. The peace that can be experienced through meditation gives a wonderful happiness, strength, and brightness to those who reach it. People with peaceful minds often live long lives because the power of the stabilized mind can suppress the frustration, proliferation, and worries that weaken our immune system. If our parents practice meditation until they become

skillful, they will have a great inner refuge when they are sick.

To be effective, meditation must be developed in conjunction with efforts to train our actions and speech. One easy way to help our parents reduce their kilesa is not to indulge in unwholesome conversation with them. If one of our parents starts gossiping about somebody in an unkind way, for example, or attacking them behind their back we can simply keep quiet. If we don't respond or join in, then our parent will soon lose pleasure in such talk and will perhaps gain some self-awareness.

Daughters and sons still living in the family home should try to be neutral in the arguments that may spring up between their parents now and then. In a stressful time, both mother and father often try to draw their children onto their own side. A good daughter or son will not let that happen, and will aim at being an impartial referee. We should try to calm angry parents down, and be careful not to say or do anything that will make the situation worse. We should help parents to resolve their differences without

either side having to feel they have won or lost. We should try to listen patiently to our parents' grumbles and complaints. Listening to our parents, mediating when they quarrel, encouraging them in right speech: these are also ways that we can repay the debt of gratitude we owe our parents.

If we can be a good friend to our parents over a long period of time, they will start to trust and respect us more and more. Our influence over them and the opportunity to encourage them in goodness will likewise increase. But it takes time and we must not rush. We should observe how we also benefit from our efforts because it takes a lot of patience to treat elderly people correctly. As people get older they can often become grumpy, fussy, or forgetful. Being around them we can easily feel irritated by this, and so we have to be mindful to sustain our inner balance. Thus, in helping them we also help ourselves.

Actually this world is a world of benefaction. Did we grow the food that we ate today? Where did it come from? Did we make the

clothes we wear today? Where is the cloth from? A single piece of clothing that was made of cotton required cotton farmers, cotton harvesters, cotton weavers, tailors, designers, designers of the weaving and sewing machines, manufacturers, and sellers. If today we use a phone, watch TV, or sit in a car, we depend on the cleverness and diligence of how many people in how many countries? To appreciate the origin of what we have can calm down our mind, and make us aware of the web of relationship among people throughout the world that is invisible to the naked eye.

Not only are we in debt to our fellow human beings, we are also in debt to other living creatures. If earthworms did not eat the soil, for example, we would not be able to grow crops and without agriculture the human race could not survive. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to earthworms. And then there are the water buffaloes, cows, and other farm animals. Do we ever feel thankful to them?

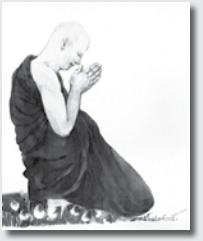
Actually I am afraid that if the human race disappeared from this world, all the other

creatures would gather together and cheer so hard that they'd lose their voices. Human beings are so ungrateful: we deplete natural resources, destroy nature, and are close to making the world itself unlivable—all for our personal gain. Behind our actions lies the delusion that we are the owners of the world and have no responsibilities towards the creatures and plants that share it with us. As Buddhists we should be smarter than this, and yet most of us have unconsciously absorbed this crazy way of looking at life from the West. As a consequence we carry on with indifference. In the future we and our descendants will have to suffer from the results of this kamma we have created, and who is to blame but ourselves? It may not be too late to solve this problem now, but we have to change our attitude so that we realize the depth and breadth of the kindness and benefaction in the world. We must try to work together to reduce the power of human selfishness. And we can start with our own family.

The Buddha says that it is extremely difficult to find someone who has never been our father, mother, brother, or sister in a previous life.

Therefore, when we reflect on the debt of gratitude that we owe to our parents and other family members, then please remember this teaching as well. Expand your efforts to express your gratitude to include all fellow human beings. Train yourself to be a good friend to all those around you and to the world in which we live.

Finally, may we all live the life of a good friend. May you be a good friend to yourself by acting, speaking, and thinking only of beneficial things for yourself and others. Be a good friend to those who have helped you, especially your father and mother. Give them what you can, help them as befits someone who has helped you so much. Most importantly, through the power of the Triple Gems may our parents and all of us ever grow and prosper with the virtues of saddha, sila, caga, and panna.



Ajahn Jayasaro

Former name:	Shaun Chiverton
1958:	Born in England
1978:	Met Ajahn Sumedho (Praraja Sumethajahn, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery, England) at Hampstead Vihara, England. Spent a Rains Retreat with Ajahn Sumedho's community in England, then travelled to Thailand.
1979:	Became a novice monk at Nong Pah Pong Monastery, Ubon Rajathani Province, Thailand
1980:	Took full Bhikkhu ordination at Nong Pah Pong Monastery, with the Venerable Ajahn Chah as his preceptor
1997 – 2001:	Abbot, Wat Pah Nanachat (International Forest Monastery), Ubon Rajathani Province, Thailand
2001 – present:	Resident at a hermitage in Nakornratchasima Province, Thailand

Panyaprateep Foundation

Panyaprateep Foundation, as a non-profit organization, has been set up by the founders, administrators, teachers and friends of Thawsi Buddhist School community since early 2008. It is officially registered by the Ministry of Interior with Registration Number of Kor Thor 1405 since 1st April 2008. Panyaprateep Foundation will be tasked to help with fund-raising activities, and has helped set up Panyaprateep Boarding School since academic year starting in May 2009.

Objectives of Panyaprateep Foundation

1) To support the development of Buddhist education based on the Buddhist principle of the Three Fold Training of conduct, emotional intelligence and wisdom (*sīla samādhi and paññā*).

2) To propagate Buddhist wisdom and developmental principles through organization of retreat programs, training workshops and through the dissemination of Dhamma media such as books, CDs, DVDs etc.

3) To create understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world, to promote eco-friendly learning activities, and renewable energy for sustainable development, and a way of life based on His Majesty the King's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

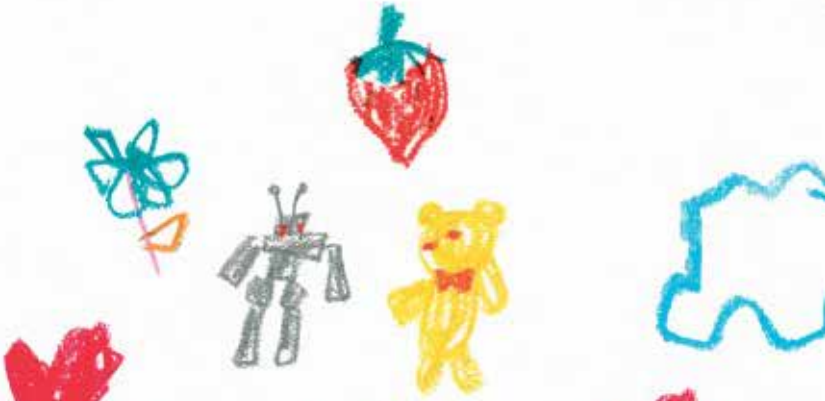
Organizational Structure of Panyaprateep Foundation

Members of the Executive Committee

Phra Ajahn Jayasaro	Chairman of the Advisory Board
Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D.	Chairman of Committee
Dr.Witit Rachatatanun	Vice Chairman
Mrs.Srivara Issara	Member
Mrs.Busarin Ransewa	Member
Miss Patchana Mahapan	Member
Mrs.Apapatra Chaiprasit	Member
Mrs.Pakkawadee Svasti-Xuto	Member and Treasurer
Mrs.Bupaswat Rachatatanun	Member and Secretary-General

The Chief Spiritual Advisor of the Foundation is Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro, a monk disciple of Ajahn Chah of the Thai Forest Tradition, and leading figure in the Buddhist education movement. The Foundation is also honoured to have Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D. as Chairman of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Foundation has sought and received the kind blessing and pledges of support from a number of distinguished experts in diverse fields to help as advisors.

These include Professor Rapee Sakrig, Dr. Snoh Unakul, Ajahn Naowarat Pongpaiboon, Associate Professor Prapapatra Niyom, Assoc. Prof. Opas Panya, Mr. Suparb Vongkiatkachorn, Mr. Kanoksak Bhinsaeng, local community leaders in the field of sustainable agriculture, such as Por Khamduueng Phasi and Mr. Apichart Jaroenma from Buriram Province, and Mr. Varisorn Raksphan, a dedicated businessman determined to show concrete examples of a way of life based on the King's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.



Daughters & Sons

Ajahn Jayasaro