

You're not Really an Adult Until Your Father Dies: Reaching the Highest Stage of Filial Piety

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In the current era of the development of our Unification movement, and the primacy of central blessed families, filial piety is an important measure of our behavior and an undeveloped aspect of the Divine Principle. So what is it and how does it work?

According to Taoism.net:

“Filial piety consists of several factors; the main ideas include loving one’s parents, being respectful, polite, considerate, loyal, helpful, dutiful, and obedient.”



In our American experience, this narrow definition seems like an old-fashioned way of thinking about one’s responsibilities. The Sixth Commandment is “Honor thy father and mother,” but most Christians read that as respect, not worship. They reserve worship and absolute obedience for the invisible God.

Confucianism does not have the common Judeo-Christian understanding of an invisible personal God. Rather, Confucius emphasized the ethical framework that automatically led to goodness, perhaps the way a good diet automatically leads to a healthy body. His idea of the “Mandate of Heaven” was meant to occur naturally as people recognized goodness and naturally surrendered to it.

Just as Christians often misunderstand Jesus and put him on a pedestal to be worshiped, those from a Confucian-influenced culture often worship the emperor or leader instead of respecting and learning from him or her.

So what is the proper balance of respect, honor, obedience, and natural surrender toward a parent, leader or central figure? In our early church days, we experimented with absolute external obedience to our appointed central figure, calculating that God would work through them somehow. I was able to overcome many concepts and personal limitations with that ethic.

As a parent, I expected my young children to obey me absolutely, especially when health and safety issues were involved. I have labeled this approach, the formation stage of filial piety and it is how our early church operated.

As children become older, they are not under our direct supervision and we depend on their training, education and family tradition to guide their choices, especially when out of our immediate control. When our children went to school, we expected them to respect their teachers and obey the rules and not embarrass the family. Situations they hadn’t encountered before were discussed at the dinner table or in private sessions with the parents. Children who separate from their parents or elder brothers and sisters guidance and live a secret life at school often get in trouble and make poor long-term decisions. This adolescent phase of guided filial piety I consider the growth stage.

In America, “teenage rebellion” at this phase is considered normal and sometimes healthy. If this rebellion is still in effect when the child is 30, there is a problem. The goal of the parent is not to raise a robot, but to raise and teach a balanced human being both internally and externally. It is necessary to disagree with your parent on some

issues and to experiment with your own free will and original mind at this age, otherwise one cannot safely advance to the final stage of filial piety.

It is not necessary to hate your parents, publicly disrespect them or argue at length. Conflict emerges when children disregard their parents' wisdom, or when the parents strangle the growing free will and conscience of their young adult children. The delicate dance of disagreeing with each other, yet loving and communicating with one another is the most difficult part of this stage. Time and prayer seem to help, as young people exercise their sacred free will and older people exercise restraint.



The final stage of filial piety, the completion stage, is where grown-up tribal messiahs must live. They consult their original mind through their conscience and God to make decisions. It is instructive to remember the story of how Rev. Moon obtained God's approval for the Divine Principle. He had to go back three times and ask God for approval. God did not play "fair;" he tested Rev. Moon and caused him to doubt his work and his understanding. His deep prayer life and commitment to the understanding of his heart and conscience made him come back to God again and again.

This analogy is useful in that it describes the balance between individual certainty and the authority of God. Reverend Moon could have reacted angrily, argued, and then stormed out, sulking at the lack of appreciation he received. Instead, his patient review of his understanding and humble approach demonstrated his commitment to not just being right, but to living right, within the bounds of filial piety. At the highest level of filial piety, a child honors not just the direct word of the parent and not just a set of complicated rules promulgated by the parent, but an intuitive grasp of the ideals and hopes of the parent. A

truly filial son or daughter may not attend, obey or superficially agree with the parent, but will deeply understand the dreams of that parent and work to make them come true.

In America, we might be afraid that we will become confined to a small-minded vision of our parent. In many families, parents are blinded by their hopes for their child and insist that they become a doctor or lawyer. A child who wants to serve God by being a teacher does not do well if he or she externally submits to those expectations. In reality, the parent is often seeking happiness, wealth and fulfillment for their child, and at the end of their life, if the child finds those things through teaching, the parent will be delighted and honored in spite of their child's decision.

What about the child that chooses passivity? What if they want to "just follow" and take direction from a strong-minded individual? Can a blessed central family truly follow their conscience and never disagree with their central figure, even quietly? I don't think so. None of our central figures are omniscient; they may know some things more than us, but each of us has a role to play in a successful relationship. Abdicating that role to avoid conflict is cowardly and does not serve the whole purpose. A second victim of the passive follower is the leader. Since their object declines to digest their direction with conscience and experience and offer constructive feedback, the leader is left without valuable input. They often lead whole organizations astray because they have no information other than their own opinion.

Heart is the balancing mechanism in relationships. A person living guided by his or her heart will often make the right choice between disagreement and accommodation. Unless we achieve that level of spirituality, we are condemned to offer less than our best in honoring God, True Parents and each other.

The Unification movement finds itself at a historically pivotal time. Many religions fail after the death of their founder. Others set down roots that allow them to thrive. I think that a key predictor of our success will be our approach to filial piety. There is an African proverb that says: "You are not really a man until your father dies." This can be interpreted as the time when the sons and daughters must take it upon themselves to reach the highest stage of filial piety. I look forward to the movement built by thousands of families responding to the highest challenge to make both God and Rev. Moon's hopes come alive in this chaotic world.

John Redmond has served in CARP, AFC, and spent ten years in higher education in Colorado. He is the proud father of four interesting children, and has high expectations for the American Unification movement.