

For many years I have worked with the Cambodian community as a religious adviser and mentor. Cambodian people have an extended family system that is very supportive of each individual within the family unit. Unfortunately, when they migrate to the United States, which has a nuclear family system, they find it very difficult to adjust to the way families interact here.

Kaiya and her family often visit my temple. Several years ago there was a period during which she complained about her eldest daughter, Vanni, every time she saw me. Vanni was an eighteen-year-old who had overstepped the boundaries established by her family, eager to adopt the freedom enjoyed by her American peers. She had become a night owl, was irresponsible about keeping her commitments, refused to do her share of the household chores, and didn't want her parents to meet her boyfriend. In fact, she had become a problem to her family.

Kaiya was worried because Vanni was setting a bad example for her

"Then I would hold the child still and put my finger in his mouth and find the pebble and pull it out," replied the Prince.

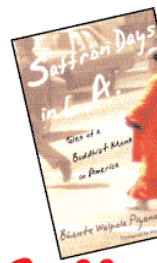
"Then the Buddha asked, 'When you do that, won't it hurt the child?' 'Yes, Sir, it will hurt the child, but it is necessary to save his life.' 'In the same way when I speak the truth as it really is, some people may feel hurt, and some may even get angry. However, I do not say these things to hurt them, but because of the limitless compassion I feel for them.' 'Do you understand what the Buddha meant by this statement, Vanni?' Vanni just looked at me and shrugged her shoulders, not seeming to care about what I had said. 'Your parents cannot sleep when you are out late at night. When they watch the TV news I am sure they get worried about you. Often the news is of murder, rape, rave parties, drug binges, drunk driving, and so forth—any or all of which, in their imagination, could happen to you.' 'Vanni, you come from a good

made cotton wicks, dipped them in the milk, and let the squirrels suck them.

"So we applied the same technique and calmed the child. This incident enlightened me as to how difficult it is to bring up a child. 'Your mother had to take care of four children, Vanni. I sympathize with her, knowing what a hard time she had. I want you to read these two letters sent by an American devotee to her parents. She specifically mentioned that I have her permission to use these letters whenever an appropriate occasion arises.' I handed her the two letters, which I will reproduce here.

Dearest Dad,

You have been the light of strength for me. In your struggle to provide a home for all of us, you suffered separation. You worked long hours, travelled far from your home, and then returned, sometimes without recognition from your children. You never executed it or did it for recognition. You did it because of your love. You did not receive the credit and warmth



Ven. Walpola Piyananda Thera, Founder and Viharachari of Dhamma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, California shares his experience of life in America in his maiden literary work Saffron days in Los Angeles, which we are privileged to serialise every Saturday beginning today. With calm and compassion characteristic of a Buddha putra he dispassionately unravels the trials and travails of the life of a Buddhist monk in an alien country captivating the hearts and minds of the reader. The stories in the collection reveal the complex, contradictory, joyous, painful, intriguing and inspiring aspects of human condition and the power of true compassion. This story depicts how Ven. Piyananda Thera had reunited an alienated daughter with her parents through the application of loving kindness.

Saffron Days in L.A.

Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America

Fifteen

Children change us

younger sisters. Kaiya had been a teacher in Cambodia, and her teachers have the authority to correct and punish the children, and she was a strict disciplinarian. She wanted her children to be brought up in the tradition of sharing the responsibilities of a united family.

And like any other mother, Kaiya also wanted her children to be educated and to enjoy the benefits of their new country. Kaiya's husband, Vipa, was very passive; he ceded all authority to his wife and agreed to abide by her decisions.

One day I received a call from Kaiya saying that Vanni had moved out of the house and was living with her girlfriend in a rented apartment. The family could not accept their daughter moving out of the family home until she was married. They were devastated and felt disgraced in the eyes of the Cambodian culture. Kaiya wanted me to advise Vanni and persuade her to move back home.

I set up an appointment for the family to visit me, and I personally called Vanni to make sure she would also be there. When we met in the Shrine Room of my temple, I could feel the hostile energy between the family and their estranged daughter. Kaiya and Vanni wouldn't even look one another in the eye. Each was convinced she was, and they made no attempt to conceal their anger.

I turned to Vanni and asked her to tell her side of the story first. I listened with an open mind.

"My mother abuses me! Was the first statement that came out of her mouth.

"What do you mean by abuse, Vanni?" I asked, not believing that Kaiya would physically harm any of her children.

"She has a list of chores for me to do every day. She wants me to clean the bathrooms, clean the kitchen floor, launder my sister's clothes, and vacuum the entire house once a week," she replied, looking as victimized as she could.

"Is that all?" I exclaimed. "Vanni, that's not abuse." The young girl ignored my comment and continued.

"When I return home late, she shouts at me. She always wants to know where I went, who I went with, and what I did. She pokes her nose into my personal business, and Vanni's pain."

"Vanni," I began patiently. "I can cite a story from Buddhist literature that might help us understand this situation better: One day, Prince Abhaya questioned the Buddha about some remarks he had made that had hurt the feelings of his brother-in-law Devadatta. Devadatta was at this time also a disciple of the Buddha.

"The Buddha replied, 'Prince, I speak the truth as it is, but I never say harsh things to anyone. If the infant you are holding in your arms were to put a pebble in his mouth, what would you do?' 'I would take out the pebble, of course.' 'The Buddha responded, 'What if it were not so easy to take it out?'"

Buddhist family. You should be aware that the Buddha strongly advised his followers to avoid unnecessary outings in the night. In the Simgalovada Sutta," he said.

Young householder, there are these six evil consequences of a person sauntering in streets at unseemly hours; he himself becomes unprotected and unguarded; his wife and children become unprotected and unguarded; his property becomes unprotected and unguarded; he becomes suspected of committing crimes and evil deeds; he becomes subjected to false accusations; he will have to face many troubles.

Young householder, these are the six evil consequences of sauntering in streets at unseemly hours." I looked at Vanni and I could tell that she still wasn't getting my message. I continued by saying, "Do you know what difficulties a mother goes through to bring up a child? It is from conception that she takes care of her unborn. All her energies are directed towards the child, even before its birth. To see to the care of the child, the parents spend restless nights, at times for months on end. They undergo immense pain, which is borne silently, to nurse and bring up their children.

"Children are indeed a source of delight and happiness to their parents, but raising them is by no means an easy task. I had an experience that helped me realize how difficult a parent's job is. It'd like to share this true story with you."

"Over two decades ago, a young Sri Lankan couple came to visit me in my humble first temple, which was located in Hollywood. At that time, there was only me and my friend Bhante Ananda. This couple were students at the time, they didn't know many people, and they had little money. They had no one else to call upon, so they asked us to take care of their six-month-old baby for a couple of hours while they attended to some urgent business. I was delighted to be the baby-sitter, as I had never had the opportunity to do this before. My friend Bhante Ananda wasn't too happy about taking on this responsibility, but he reluctantly gave in.

"Just a few minutes after the couple left, the baby started to cry. I tried to soothe him by carrying him while pacing up and down the hallway. I talked, I sang, I even chanted. I did everything I could think of to make him stop crying, but nothing worked.

"My friend thought the baby might be hungry and suggested we try giving him some milk. Then we wondered whether to heat the milk or give it to him cold. Finally, we decided to boil the milk.



deserved at times from me. You withdrew and had a hard time showing how much you loved us all and loved me. I know you loved me. I know you love me now, with all your heart. Your love and life brought me to LIFE. It enfolded me, and through your example, I was able to connect - at I have - to the happy of the Sacred. What an amazing gift. You are beautiful beyond words. All along the way, you have supported me and loved me even when it was not easy to do so. Sometimes, everyone else shared his or her love with Mom, and you were left without a hug, whether physical or emotional. I know that must have been difficult, because you have done everything in your life to help and support us. You were the one that supported me, not only through trusts of money, but in the unconditional trust of love. That was you who did that.

Eventually, you withdrew because you didn't want me or others to know how alone you felt. I still loved you even in hard times, but didn't always show it to you. I want to say to you now that I know who you are and recognize the beauty and strength and wisdom that you are. I have wept to think that you would not know this. I have cried

out in prayer that you could feel and experience the joy of my life because of what you did for me to be here, whether conscious or unconscious, that's what you did, and what your father did, and his father.

I am in full amazement of the strength and beauty of your love and commitment to my happiness and me. I am weeping with joy right now at the thought. I thank you with all my heart and soul, for all the love you are, completely and without condition.

Thank you, dearest Dad, for your love, strength, light, lessons, patience, support, laughter,

yourself. You enfolded me in your loving arms and heart and kept me nourished with the light of your love. I know it has not been easy. I am constantly amazed that you had four children in four years! How did you do it? Now I know it was because of your strength and love. And you did it with grace and balance, and a constant supply of loving kindness.

I am looking in words to describe a way to thank you, and the deepest word is my unconditional love and admiration for who you are. I recognize you. I see your beauty. I know, and want to bathe you in a nectar of love, dearest Mother, for

distinct change in her countenance, but she remained silent and still wouldn't look directly at her mother or father.

I then took the opportunity to express my opinion about how to adjust to living in American society. I spoke to Kaiya and advised her to learn how to express her affection for her children, both verbally and physically. I am aware that it is not something that is practiced in their Cambodian culture, but since we are bringing up children in America, we should exhibit our affection toward them the way the Americans do. This, I said, applied to the father as well. In the Asian culture,

throwing me up in the air as a girl to allow me to reach for the sky and to find my way home. For all the times you lent a guiding hand, the times you picked me up when I fell, the pony rides on your lap, the debates between us to sharpen my mind, the loving support of who you truly are. I want you to know, I am home, surrounded by love, warmed by the fires of life, secure in the knowing of the Sacred Presence, and now I will never be alone again. This is because of your love. I will never leave you, for you are in my heart forever. I know you never left me, you were always there as a loving guide. Thank you, dearest Dad. Thank you with all my heart!

With Deepest Eternal Love,
Your Daughter

Dearest Mom,

I have never known one such as you. You think that your mother was greater than you. This is not Truth. You are as great a mom to me as your mother was to you. For, whenever I was lost, whenever I cried out to find my way, there you were to remind me of who I was, and to show me with your deep and everlasting love the beauty of life, just with the example of being

the gift of who you have been and are to me. I know I have not been an easy job, yet you never felt that way, even when you stayed up nights and were tired. Even when you did without so we could have. Your love shone through and was my anchoring. All the joy, love, lightness, and light of my life are because of you. I would literally have died from sadness on several occasions if your loving voice had not pulled me through. I now know the greatest joy and my heart is full of Love and the Sacredness of the Source of All. This is because of you and your mom and her mom. You showed me who I am with your love. Your hard work, devotion and sacrifice allowed for the river of love to flow into my heart, and I am restored. How could I ever thank you enough?

One day, or maybe now, you will know completely that what I say is Truth. This brings me, again, greatest happiness. Are you my Santa Claus? Thank you, sweetest and dearest one, with all my heart.

With all Love, deepest Love,
Your Daughter

I observed Vanni while she was reading the letters. I noticed a

the children bow before their parents and venerate them before they leave the house and before they go to sleep. In the Western world children show their affection by hugging and kissing their parents. If the old Asian customs no longer work in this country, then we must develop a happy medium that somehow absorbs American values.

At this point Vanni got up to go and said that she would call me. The family left the temple with my blessings.

A few weeks later I was relieved to see the family at the temple. They all seemed quite cheerful, so I knew Vanni's problem was probably solved.

The Buddha's words rang in my ears:

Even if the children carry on the right shoulder, Mother and on the left shoulder, Father Fulfilling all their parents' needs for a hundred years. That still cannot compensate for the debt they owe their parents.

NB: Comments and feedbacks should be addressed to Editor, Daily News or sent via electronic mail to editor@dailynews.lk