

The Buddhist Family:

A Harmonious Family And A Successful Career

From a *Chan* practitioner's perspective the underlying principle to creating a harmonious family and having a successful career can be expressed in two phrases: 'devotion in caring for the family' and 'full commitment to career'.

Regardless of wealth, everyone in the family can enjoy good health and happiness if they are all totally devoted to caring for one another. Whatever one's job status, one can share successful experiences with others through full commitment to one's career.

An abundance of material wealth may not result in a harmonious family. The façade of glamour does not equate to success in one's career. A family will be harmonious only if every family member feels respected and cared for. And excellence in one's career can be attained through full commitment of both body and mind to one's work.

Mutual Respect And Support Among Family Members

An over-emphasis on individualism in modern society has resulted in generation gaps, the breakdown of relationships between husband and wife, and a sense of remoteness among siblings. Although living together, each family member has their own interests at heart - expecting others to conform, even fighting for power and rights.

In the end, the parents do not understand their children, and children do not appreciate their parents' well-meant intentions. Husband and wife neither trust in nor compromise with each other. Ultimately everyone in the family loses the sense of trust and security.

As a result, elderly parents are sent to old peoples' homes, teenage children become rebellious, young adults leave home to seek independence and marriages become fragile. The 'harmonious family' that everyone desires becomes no more than a dream and empty words.

However, if a husband and wife have mutual respect, understanding and fidelity, care and love, and can learn from each other, building a successful marriage and having a harmonious family will not be a difficult task.

Realistic And Diligent Career Management

The values of society are inverted and confused. Most people use property, fame, power and social stature as the yardsticks to measure the value of a career. They do not know that a successful career depends on both the positive karmic results accumulated from previous lives as well as efforts made in the present life. Hard work alone, without the positive karmic results, can not result in the satisfaction of desires for fame and power.

Many people do not understand the karmic law of cause and effect and hence, in their pursuit for selfish gains, they covet the wealth of individuals or public funds. They try to escape from the eyes of the society and take advantage of loopholes in the law while plotting to steal or rob by misappropriation and misdemeanour. These actions indirectly

cause harm to many innocent lives and disrupt society. For the time being, these people may appear to be doing well, but eventually they will be brought to justice and condemned by society. Even if they do escape temporarily, they will still be bound by the karmic laws of cause and effect.

Pursuing the ideal of a successful career is not wrong, but doing so blindly and with disregard for the karmic laws of cause and effect will cause harm to oneself and others, as well as leading one to become a crook and law-breaker.

In the modern world people pursue short-term gains. In circumstances where the ego is repressed, it is easy for discontented thoughts to arise. Therefore, the staff turnover rate in every profession is ever-increasing with many people job-hopping or switch trades frequently. Under these sorts of unstable conditions, the body and mind will be restless and this can result in disharmony in the family.

Of course, if job changes occur as one enters new phases in life, and are planned or are adjustments towards advancement, then they are necessary developmental steps towards success. However, if dissatisfaction with the current work environment arises frequently and there is no willingness to commit to the work that one is currently undertaking it will be impossible to reap the fruits of success in one's career.

A Busy Person Has More Time

Nowadays, most people are busy earning a living and often have more than one job or several part-time jobs. They may have to attend social functions at night despite being exhausted by daytime work. As a result, the family is neglected. When they spend long hours away from home, seeing their children becomes a rare occasion and communication between husband and wife is insufficient. With such a hectic lifestyle, taking proper care of the family and children becomes difficult.

However, from my personal experience and from what I have learnt, it can be said that 'a busy person has more time' because with determination a 'busy person' will make full use of his time and using good time management, will position himself in a win-win situation where both work and family are well taken care of.

Although I do not have the burdens of a secular family, I have a large family at the monastery and the care, protection and discipline of my disciples to manage. Hence, I have the three main responsibilities of being a father, a mother and a teacher to them. In addition to my tight schedule of Dharma propagation I need to devote myself to managing the monastery and caring for my disciples. I never forget to show my encouragement, care and concern for every disciple, sometimes through group discussions and at other times through individual conversations.

As a Chinese proverb goes, 'nobody knows the child better than his father'. Since I am their master I should be the person that they can turn to. Only in this way will they be willing to be my disciples whole-heartedly.

Similarly, if parents do not know their children's aspirations, personality, interests, strengths and potential, they will not be able to guide their children and assist them in choosing their future. If parents are unable to accompany their children through stages of

learning and development, they will not become their close friends, obtain their trust or make them feel secure.

Devotion To One's Family And Career

If we are committed, we will be able to achieve success in both family and career.

While teaching *Chan* practice, I often remind everyone, 'live in the present moment, and the Buddha is in the present moment.' This means that whenever one is being diligent, one makes use of every opportunity to settle the mind and bring about peace. Using the attitude of 'taking firm steps one at a time and being steady in every step', we remind ourselves of the brevity of life and the need to be realistic. Life will then be meaningful.

In reality, if we can fully devote our life to experiencing and adapting to all matters, not worrying about success or failure, then we are truly practicing the essence of 'facing it, accepting it, dealing with it and letting go of it'.

In conclusion, as long as every family member contributes his utmost sincerity and concern and empathises with the feelings of others, it will not take much time to make a family harmonious. As for career, if one can work to his fullest, giving deep consideration to every situation and complete devotion to handling problems, excellence will be attained.

Even in the absence of material gains, the resulting physical and mental stability, growth from experiences, and contributions to society will be achievements worthy of recognition.

This article was translated from the transcript of a speech by Venerable Master Sheng Yen on 12 August 1995 at a seminar "Pursuit of a Happy and Successful Life" at Dharma Drum Mountain's An He Branch in Taipei. The article forms part of the book "A Peaceful World"