

A Buddhist Sutra Helps Mother Accept Loss of Her Son

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Belief in Buddhism and participation in the performance of a Buddhist sutra has helped Huang Xiu-dan accept the greatest tragedy that can befall a mother – the loss of a son. He was killed in a car accident, aged only 18. Huang has also had to face the loss of other members of her family and her own serious injuries as a result of such accidents.

Huang grew up in a loving family. Her mother was 47 years old when she was born. She received medical education at school and became a nurse at a hospital, where she excelled in giving injections. Many patients asked for her to perform the injections for them. She had a happy marriage and was loved by her husband's parents. It was a happy family but she felt incomplete without children. She had no pressure from her mother-in-law, a Buddhist, who told her: "if you do not have a child, it means that you created good karma in your past life and that, in your current life, you do not have to suffer from the karmic retribution." But Huang still asked for help from the medical profession and many diviners in order to get pregnant. After eight years of marriage, she finally gave birth to a baby girl. Three years later, when she was 37, her son was born.

He was a model son, clever and thoughtful. He wanted to share the burden of paying the mortgage for the family house and the tuition for himself and his sister. After graduation from junior high school, he started a part-time job at a vegetable market; every morning, he had to wake up at 3 a.m. and left home in the dark. During his college days, he worked hard on his weekends and holidays in convenient stores and fast food restaurants and never complained. He gave all his savings to his mother to help pay the mortgage. When she was suffering from Parkinson's disease, he was always thinking of her. She felt so blessed to have such a son: who could not be devoted to such an adorable child?

Then the family was devastated by a series of auto accidents, which completely changed her life. First, her parents-in-law were traveling with a relative and the car hit a crash barrier; her mother-in-law passed away and her father in law was so badly injured that he needed 24-hour care. A few years later, Huang herself had two car accidents and needed five major surgeries. Although she survived, her brain was seriously damaged and she suffers from Parkinson's disease. Then last April there was another auto accident, which pushed her to the brink.

Her son, the child she was so eager to have, died at the age of just 18. She was overwhelmed with grief. No matter how hard she cried, she still could not get him back from the accident. Even today, nearly a year later, she keeps his bedroom neat and tidy and puts his favorite clothes and the school uniform on the bed. She hangs his favorite baseball uniform nearby and keeps his first baby shoes, as well as the first pair of sneakers he bought with the wages from his first part-time job. The room is as if he never left.

Next to his bedroom is her painting room. She always remembers that, whenever she wanted to enter this room for painting or practicing the piano, her son was in his bedroom doing his school work. She wants to keep her son's bedroom as it used to be because she wants to cherish

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every moment of happiness she had with him. She does not want to face the fact that her son has gone. Her husband said: “our son was her whole world; she felt so happy whenever our son was around her. After he passed away, all she could do was cry. She completely lost her focus in life and easily lost her temper.”



Huang was only able to escape from this nadir of grief and depression by throwing herself into the activities of the Tzu Chi Foundation. The volunteers and her friends cared and worried about her. To avoid empty time that would be filled with sorrow, she picked up her paint brushes again, attended courses offered by the community college and took part in Tzu Chi events. The most important of these was the musical adaptation of the Sutra of Water Repentance, staged in Hualien, a city in east Taiwan.

She joined the rehearsals at the end of last December, with the aim of a performance in the spring; she practiced diligently to catch up with the schedule. While she was busy remembering the text of the sutra, body movements and sign language, she spent less time missing her lost son and dwelling on the pain of her Parkinson's disease. She cried less and smiled more. The 540 participants were local residents, recycling volunteers in Yilan, a town in northeast Taiwan; some were former care recipients of Tzu Chi. Although they started to learn sign language from scratch, they were as diligent as the volunteers.

Huang used to visit temples to read sutras but found it hard to understand the meaning. After her participation in Water Repentance, she felt herself experiencing every part of her life when the musical started with the Prelude, Verse for Opening a Sutra. Every time she sang the text about “Impermanence is the underlying principle of everything; nothing is permanent. As causes and conditions come together, different things come into being, continue, decay and cease to exist...” She recalls all the impermanence in her life and gradually has come to understand that no-one can control the path of their life.

Earlier, she made a vow to become a vegetarian, to make prayers for her son; but her family stopped her because of her illness. After she heard that participants in the Sutra should be vegetarian, she decided to do so without hesitation. She believes that, once she stops killing living creatures, she will awaken a the circle of goodness. She has gained so much after participating in the performance and studying the text of the Water Repentance. Her husband said that she had changed after this participation.

The rehearsals and practice accounted for most of her rest time; she had to take pills to stabilize to ease her stiff and trembling body. But she was determined to cope with any difficulties that arose from performing in the sutra. Keeping busy enabled her to forget the pain in her body and the sorrow in her heart from losing her son. Now Huang has participated in the Water Repentance, she has memorized the text and deeply understood the content. She knows in her heart that even the Buddha had to face the karma created in past lives. Impermanence is always around us and no-one can escape from his own karma. She has accepted the

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impermanence in her life; she is a brave mother now.

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