

LETTER TO SHEN SHAO TSUNG PE CHIEN WHOSE SON SUFFERED AN EARLY DEATH

-by Great Master Lien Ch'ih of Ming

When people lose their young children, their anguish is even more severe than if they were to lose their own parents. Their grief is so deep that it tears up their very insides. At such times it is fitting that they recite Sutras and bow repentance ceremonies, transferring the merit to the child so that it can be reborn in a good place. This is indeed commendable. But, in reciting the Sutras, you should honor the Buddha's intent—great kindness and compassion, and in bowing repentances you have to clearly understand your own mistakes--your killing karma. If you do not practice kindness and compassion, and you do not cut off killing karma, then no matter how many Sutras you recite or how many repentances you bow, the merit and virtue will be insignificant. Now I have two pieces of advice for you, and it is my hope that you will exhaust your efforts in putting them into practice:

- 1) Of the Five Precepts that the Buddha established, the very first is the Precept that prohibits killing. As it is said, "An early death is a retribution for heavy killing in the past." Parents should take the clothes, toys and articles that belonged to the child and sell them. Then they should use the money to ransom living creatures and set them free, in order to atone for the child's killing karma. In this way, perhaps he can be spared falling into the three evil paths, and in his next life can attain long life.
- 2) When people give birth to children, most of them follow worldly customs and make it an occasion for celebrating for three days after the birth, or for a month, or perhaps for a hundred days after. They have parties and banquets that involve cooking and entertaining and hence a lot of killing of creatures for food. Although the killing is instigated by the parents and not by their child, nonetheless, the causes can be directly attributed to the child, and he won't be able to escape the fruits of the offenses done on his behalf. If parents wish to remember their deceased child, they should give up the killing karma associated with it altogether. Then their child's spirit will not fall into the three evil paths and in his next rebirth he will enjoy long life.

Moreover, there are two other matters that merit your attention:

- 1) Young children sometimes catch flies, knats, frogs, and tadpoles, or they topple ant hills or break spider webs. They take all of this as fun and games, and most parents do not tell their children to stop. But in this process children kill a host of tiny bugs and crawling insects, and this all contributes to the causes of having a short life. Knowing this, how can one not restrain one's child from doing those things!?

- 2) Since young children are ignorant, they sometimes speak harshly to their parents or elders. Because parents dote on their children, they spoil them and do not upbraid them. Although the child may have spoken the words in jest, the words nonetheless violate the heavenly principle of filiality, and plant the causes for a short life. So how can one be remiss in exercising precaution!