

Filial Paragons

*Ting Lan,
Who Carved Wooden Images of
His Parents in Order to Serve Them After They Had Died*

During the Han Dynasty there lived a very famous filial son whose name was Ting Lan. When he was still a child his parents died. At that time he was too young to know what had happened. But when he was old enough to understand things, he realized it was too late to be filial and take care of his parents. Every time he thought of how kind they were to him in the past in bringing him up, his heart could feel no peace. Ting Lan felt he owed his parents a debt. So when he grew up he thought of a method to show his gratitude toward them.

He carved wooden images of his parents and put them on the family altar. Each morning and evening he would offer them rice, vegetables, fruit, and other things. He treated them exactly as if they were still alive, and he continued to do this for days and months without stopping.

After respectfully making offerings to them for some time, Ting Lan's wife gradually became more and more disrespectful and lax. One day, when he was away, she took a needle and purposely stuck the finger of one of the images. The image bled!

When Ting Lan returned home, he noticed that one of the images was crying and realized that something was very wrong. He demanded that his wife tell him what had happened. After she had told him, he felt very distressed that his wife was so unfilial to his parents. The most important thing in his life was to serve his parents, and because his wife was disrespectful, he decided that would leave her in order to continue with his filial practice.

There was a saying in China that when sons marry they forget all about their parents, but Ting Lan certainly did not fall under this category of children. He chose to give up his wife so he could continue to be filial to his parents. This kind of sincerity and compliance is beyond that of ordinary people. A poem commemorating his filial devotion goes like this:

*He carved wooden images of his parents,
As if they were still alive in the world.
This is a reminder to children:
All should be filial to their parents.*

*translated, reviewed, and edited by members of
the Buddhist Text Translation Society*