

CHAPTER 17

Let's Give the Floor to Parents

Relations with our parents often leave much to be desired. It probably would not be easy to find someone who considers his or her familial relations to be perfect. Can any of us say that our parents are always understanding, supportive and trustworthy?

Yet, when a conflict arises, do you ever try to see the situation from your parents' point of view? Why do you think that you and your parents disagree? Do you know their interests in life and what they are concerned about? Why do they see problems where you cannot?

Let us imagine a meeting of our fathers and mothers. What might they talk about?

Children in their parents' eyes

- ✘ I don't know about you, but in the last two years there have been changes in our family, which, frankly speaking, we are not happy about. I feel a gap growing between my daughter and me. I think our children are leaving us for their own world with its own laws. There is no room for us there.
- ✘ Oh yes, my son seems to think his mother and I are hopelessly obsolete. Of course, he is right—at school we didn't have many of the subjects they have now, and I just can't understand a lot of their homework. But that's no reason to think he is the cleverest person in the world and to treat us with such open contempt. In everything he says it seems he's implying, "It's no good talking to you about it. You won't understand, and anyway it will bore you!"
- ✘ You know, I feel these problems are partly our fault too. Of course, we are from a different generation, and the problem of the generation gap has always existed. But still, we are older and more experienced, so let's not just complain about them, but look for a solution. As far as I remember, when I was 15 I often felt like my kids feel right now. I also hated people who criticized me all the time. I thought I was already grown-up and could determine my life by myself.
- ✘ So what do you suggest? Should we let them do anything they want? Should we forget about our responsibility as parents? We feed and dress them, but they are never satisfied! They want freedom! And tell me, please, who will keep them out of trouble? They are always up to mischief, but when it is time to be accountable for what they've done, they're not there!
- ✘ The thing is, they are proud of their "adulthood" and feel grown-up, but they behave like babies. If you want to be respected and trusted, then you have to earn the respect first.

- ✘ Look, here is something I don't understand. Whom are we discussing here—some abstract teenagers or our own children? I personally love my daughter and try to understand her and her point of view. I think every person is worthy of respect just because of the person he or she is. It doesn't have to be won in some special kind of way. Of course, you are right, our children often ignore our advice and try to have their own way. But you must agree that we are also to blame.
- ✘ Can anyone here say that they have never hurt their son or daughter, even by accident? And if we have hurt them, how many of us are ready to admit it, apologize and ask for forgiveness?
- ✘ We can't just indulge our children in everything! Take my son, for instance. I have approached him in various ways and tried to talk him. He is no fool. He reads a lot, but when it comes to school ... this year alone his school has called me three times: First he skipped classes, then he was rude to his teacher ... Well, I can understand that he is an adolescent and wants to assert himself, or maybe it was just the right weather for cutting a few classes. I used to be 15 too. But how can you justify his blatant disrespect toward his teacher? Besides, I don't think he has ever tried to imagine how I feel when I have to meet his teachers or the headmaster. Oh yes, he resents all the moralizing. But what about me? Why should I be responsible for his actions? If you are so grown-up, then, please, spare your father your teachers' complaints.
- ✘ Me, I have no special problems with my daughter, but still I feel concerned. She has changed so greatly in the last year. She used to be happy and communicative, but now she always wants to be alone. As soon as she comes home from school, she rushes to her room, locks herself in, and God knows what she dreams about. She answers all my questions absentmindedly, as if nothing catches her attention. She's become silent and reserved. Something is happening to her, but I don't know what it is. I don't know how to make her trust me. Am I not her mother, do I not love her enough? Then why is there such alienation?



- ✘ We have the same situation at home. I used to complain that my son was so sharp and aggressive. At a single word he would explode and slam the door or argue with us. But now it's even worse—he just ignores us. Everything I say to him he ignores. You might as well talk to a wall! To be honest, I have no patience with him. We have arguments every week because I cannot allow our son to ignore us completely!
- ✘ You know, I think many of our problems are just due to the fact that we are trying to maintain our power over our children who are growing up. They feel it and work out a defense, insolence or indifference. My daughter also has become sharp and quick-tempered during the past year, but I try not to pay attention to it, and instead show that I regard her as an adult whose opinion is important to me. I have begun to tell her about my problems, and sometimes ask advice from her. And I see that it helps Olga and makes everything easier for me too.
- ✘ As for me, I am raising two children alone. You work like a horse in order to feed and dress them; on the way home you spend an hour or two standing in traffic; then come home and begin cooking and cleaning. There is no time for parenting, for understanding. Sometimes I get so tired during the day, and when I get home I see my elder daughter just sitting there and listening to music without lifting a finger to help. When she sees me, she makes a face (moralizing again!) and leaves the house as soon as possible. “Ma, I am going for a walk.” And in the kitchen there is a pile of dirty dishes. How can I not lose my temper? Can't she see how hard it is on me? She is a girl, and a future housewife. I feel so hurt and lonely. If not her, then who will understand me? So Lena runs off and I am left sitting in the kitchen crying.
- ✘ I think everything is fine. My daughter has grown up. She has her life and I have mine. Are children really the only purpose for our life? As for me, I don't feel like an old woman yet.
- ✘ Well, the children are going to stay under our wings for a long time, whether we want it or not! In our family all the problems are about money. My son is 3 inches taller than me, but he still thinks that his mother and I must indulge all his whims. And clothes! He doesn't want to wear the jacket we bought him last year anymore—it's out of fashion. A magnificent two-cassette tape recorder is no good—he wants a video player! And allowance! Tell me please, how much allowance does a 15-year-old need? I think they are grown-up enough to solve such problems by themselves, without turning to Daddy and Mommy each time. You need money? Go and earn it! There are a lot of job opportunities out there nowadays.
- ✘ Yes, of course, you're right. Our children lack initiative. But you know, earning money by themselves isn't the solution either. Take my Alex. Recently he went to some corporation to make some money. I should have been happy, but instead I have even more troubles. First, every evening I have nightmares. Maybe someone has attacked him, taken his money or beaten him. He never comes home before 10, and once he came with a black eye. I ask him, “What's the matter?” and all I get is silence. And he has begun to feel so grown-up and financially independent that his parents can't tell him anything anymore. A week ago I saw a pack of cigarettes in his bag. I confronted him. “Do you smoke?” “Well, Mum, I'm not a child anymore!” he tells me. And the other day on my way home I met him with some girl who was wearing a super-mini and too much makeup; it was awful! Of course, now he is a desirable boyfriend. He can buy her chocolate and take her to the cinema. But the fool does not understand that the girls are interested not in him but in his money and in having a good time. But he won't hear anything about it. “I am an adult. I know with whom I should go out.”



- ✘ Oh, you are so right. This subject is better avoided. Take my Helen. She just seems to fly from one romance to another. On the one hand I am glad that boys like her, that she is popular with them. But isn't it too early? And one more thing: If she doesn't take her affairs seriously now, what will happen in three or four years? How is she going to build a relationship with her future husband? But as soon as I try to talk to her about it, she waves me away: "Mum, life is different now. And besides, it is too early for me to think about a family. Wait till I am 25, then perhaps ..." What words must I use to explain to her that at 25 it may be too late to change one's attitude about life?
- ✘ I have quite the opposite problem. My son—he's 15—has fallen seriously in love with our friends' daughter. His whole purpose of life revolves around Kate. If you could only know how I'm afraid for him. He thinks it's true love. And of course, he thinks that no one has ever experienced such a feeling before and that no one can understand him. Kate is a nice, calm girl. She likes Igor, but nothing more. This makes him suffer even more.
- ✘ My son is suffering from loneliness. I can see how unhappy and lonely he is, how much he needs support, but I cannot talk to him about it. He keeps it all inside of him and is afraid to let anyone get close. Does he really think I won't understand? I was also 15 once, and I was in love with a classmate. He doesn't realize that I suffered just like he. It was a deeply painful experience. Had there been a wise adult near me at the time, how much easier it would have been for me! And how much I want to be such a person for my son! Then he would at least feel that there are people who really care about him, that not everyone rejects him.
- ✘ My daughter has recently fallen in love too, and her boyfriend is very keen on her. But frankly speaking, I am even more worried. They are only 15! Oh yes! First love! I

understand it. But isn't it too early? My Irene and her Sergei are locked onto each other. Nothing else exists for them—no books, no theatre, no other people. They live for each other and are absorbed in their own problems. At the beginning of the romance Irene was all beaming, but now she is exhausted by feelings she cannot cope with. Our children don't understand yet that love is not a magnificent and light feeling, but something much more serious and powerful. But she regards all my attempts to speak to her about it as a parent's usual nagging. How can I protect her from making mistakes? I cannot just forbid her from doing things. The forbidden fruit is sweet, you know. But every day I get more and more concerned. Both she and her boyfriend are too young to control their feelings. Don't they see the line they shouldn't cross at 15?

This discussion could go on forever. Because all parents are anxious about their children, they all suffer from the misunderstandings and alienation that spring up in family relationships. There are as many problems as families. But one thing unites everyone—both parents and children: All of us want to be happy. All of us want to be loved and understood.

Perhaps some of the thoughts above have reminded you of similar problems in your own family and will help you to see the people with whom you live in a new light. Perhaps you will feel their worries and sufferings, and see that in spite of all their shortcomings (and who has none?) they wish you well and love you. When you are suffering, they suffer too. They want to help you. And maybe, although they don't show it, they hope for your understanding, help and support just as much as you hope for theirs.

So let us try to understand the world of adults. In a few years you too will be an adult, then you will have a family, children and your own problems with the generation gap. Then you will be looking for a path to the hearts of your own children. If you think about this, maybe it will help you to try to understand your teachers and parents more.

For Your Journal



Recall a conflict that happened in your family and describe it first from your own perspective. Include not only the subject matter of the conflict but also your feelings at the time. Then describe the same situation from the perspective of the other person, such as your parents. Try to imagine their feelings, and describe the situation the way they would. Then suggest a possible solution to the situation in which neither party feels hurt or insulted.

The Blind Man's Daughter

An old Korean folk tale

There once lived a most devoted couple who, after many years of waiting, finally were blessed with a lovely daughter, whom they named Shim Chung. Sadly, the family's happiness soon turned to sorrow when Shim Chung's mother, worn out by childbirth, died while the child was still a baby.

To make matters worse, her father was blind, and reduced to begging daily for food for himself and his little girl. But their kind neighbors all helped, and she grew up to be a beautiful and faithful daughter. As soon as she was old enough, she began to work in the village so that her father could rest at home. Her care for her father and her sweetness and smiles gained her a reputation throughout the district.

One day the family had an unexpected visitor, a wealthy lady from a nearby town. "Shim Chung," she said, "why don't you come and work for me for a few months? I will treat you like my own child, and your father will lack nothing. If you like, I can adopt you as my daughter." Shim Chung was strongly opposed to this last condition, but her father was very pleased that his daughter would have a chance to see a little more of life. "Please, do go," he urged, "I'll be fine!" However, as he sent her off, he began to shed bitter tears. "What a poor father I am, to let my daughter go away from home to work! If only I could see, I could get a job and take care of her as a father should!"

As the days went by, his bitterness and regret grew, until one morning in great distress he rushed out of the house, not thinking about where he was headed. Suddenly—splash! He had fallen into the river. "Help, I can't swim!" he cried. Before he could come to harm, he felt strong hands on his shoulders, lifting him out. His rescuer introduced himself as a monk, and to him the father poured out his sorry tale.

"I understand," said the monk. "If you want to see, I will pray to the Lord Buddha for you if you make an offering of three hundred sacks of



rice. Then you will be cured.” Not thinking of how he could possibly pay, the distraught old man gave his promise to the monk, who nodded gravely in acknowledgment.

Once he got home, the enormity of his foolishness hit him. “What a fool I am,” he thought, “to promise heaven what I can’t give.” He was crying like that when Shim Chung came home, and between sobs he told her the whole story.

“Don’t worry, Father,” she said, though she was deeply disturbed. “We’ll think of something.” When her father had calmed down, she went into the village to think. Her feet led her down to the harbor, where she saw a boat docking. Some of the sailors were arguing with some village women. Pushing her way to the front of the little crowd, she discovered that the sailors were soon to make a great journey to see the Emperor. In order to survive the journey, they wanted to sacrifice a virgin to the king of the seas. According to a tradition, by doing so they would be spared from dying in a storm. To the father of such a girl, they would pay enough money for ...three hundred sacks of rice.

“Go away!” said the village women. “We don’t need your money ruining our families!” How shocked they were when Shim Chung calmly stepped forward and offered herself! The deal was done, and home she went to tell her father that she had found the money to fulfill his pledge. Sad to say, he was so relieved for his own sake that he did not ask where it had come from, thinking that perhaps she had borrowed it from her benefactress. Only as she was leaving for the last time did she break down in tears and tell him her terrible bargain.

“What a fool I am,” he groaned again. “What good will it do if I gain my sight but cannot see my daughter?” But it was too late for regret. On the high tide Shim Chung sailed away. The sailors were much taken with her beauty and hoped that there would be no storm, so that they would be able to spare her life. But before long a violent wind blew up, and they knew that they would have to make their grim sacrifice. “Don’t worry,” said Shim Chung. “I chose this way and I will save your lives for your wives and children.” With tears they bound her hands and feet and threw her into the waves, which at once subsided.

Shim Chung was taken to the Sea King in his ocean palace. Moved by her filial piety and her beauty, he took pity on her and invited her to live with him under the sea. For the few days she was there, it seemed that the sun shone a little brighter through the waves above. But at length she came to him and begged “Noble king! Please let me return to the land of the living! I miss my poor father and I am worried about him.” Though he was sad to see her go, the Sea King felt that he had to honor such a dutiful daughter. So when Shim Chung was sleeping, he had her placed in a giant lotus blossom which he sent floating gently to the surface.

The next morning, fishermen from the nearby country were astonished to see the golden blossom floating on the water. “Let us take it to our king,” they thought. “Surely he will give us some rich reward!” And so the lotus was brought before the king, who ordered it to be opened. Imagine his surprise when from inside the flower stepped the most

beautiful girl he had ever seen! It was love at first sight, and with great celebration they were soon married.

Shim Chung was very happy with her new husband, who was a kind man. She sent word at once back to her village, but her father was nowhere to be found. Scorned and rejected by the scandalized villagers, he had taken his stick and begging bowl and vanished into the countryside.

Shim Chung thought of her father every day and often cried for him in private. One day she had an idea. "Let's hold a banquet for three days," she proposed to her husband, "and invite all the blind men in the country!" She felt sure that this would bring her father to the palace.

However, the first and the second days of the banquet passed with no sign of him. Even though hundreds of blind men streamed into the palace grounds, she looked among them in vain. On the third day she had just about given up hope when she heard the familiar "tap tap" of her father's cane as he ambled round the corner. His rags were worse than those of all the other beggars, and his back stooped in shame for the way he had lost his daughter. He had in fact decided that he was unworthy to come to the banquet, but his empty stomach overcame his remorse at the last moment.

"Father!" cried Shim Chung, but he shrank away. "Who are you?" he quavered. "A ghost or a witch? My Shim Chung is dead, dead on the ocean floor where I sent her by my stupidity." Only after many embraces could he believe that his daughter was still alive. "Heaven saved me," she cried, "because I loved you so." She kissed him, and at that moment his eyes were opened. The daughter whom he thought he would neither hear nor see again stood before him in splendor.

Something to
think about



- What is the moral of this story?
- The story mentions the concept of filial piety. What is that?
- What do you think of the relationship between the blind man and his daughter?
- Do you think it is true that if you sacrifice for the benefit of someone, as the daughter did for her father, that eventually you will receive some kind of blessing in return?