

EXPLORING THE HIDDEN DEPTHS BY PHIL BECQUE, UNITED KINGDOM

I was the third child born to an orphaned mother. Underlining just how pervasive karmic tendencies can be between close relatives, my mother too was to die, leaving behind a young family. She died from cancer at the age of 33. I was 3 years old, so I have no real recollection of her. She was reportedly very calm and level-headed. If it is true that qualities pass from parents to their offspring, then I probably inherited those qualities from her.

In any event, I seem to have accepted the loss of my natural mother so completely that I was only dimly aware that I had an emptiness where other people had a fullness. Other children would express very deep emotions about their mothers. None of their feelings resonated in me; I didn't seem to have the emotional equipment to register them. I must have seemed somewhat cold and detached from others as I grew up.

My father remarried when I was 4. I can't say that I liked my stepmother at first, but as I got to around 14 years old, we would talk about our homespun philosophy, centering on the premature deaths of her first husband and my mother. As a result, we became much closer.

I left school at 16 to start work in the electronics industry. I had a handful of close friends at that time with whom I would go on holiday. Tragically, my best friend died when we were in our eighteenth year, a mere eight weeks after contracting a particularly virulent form of cancer. I had been unable to register real sorrow before; now I made up for lost time. I was thrown into the pit of hell. I was sharing a flat with two other young men and had to pay frequent visits to the toilet, where I would sob uncontrollably. I couldn't bear to express or share this emotion with anybody else. I was going to have to understand death later. It's difficult to say how or why I pulled out of this nose dive but when I did, I reasoned that I, too, could be dead within eight weeks, or even tomorrow, so there was no point in holding back. I became a rampant hedonist, getting into as much sex and drugs as possible. I can't say that I used women any more than they used me, but I can certainly say that I didn't understand them. It was 1970, so this was very much in tune with the times. To further my hedonist leanings, I started working in the music business. Somewhat ironically, while I was trying to trash my life, my karma to encounter strange new life-enhancing philosophies was really taking off. The music studios where I was working attracted all sorts, so before long I had bumped into the *I Ching*, transcendental meditation and, finally, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I have to say that each one prepared me for the next, so they were all valuable at the time.

I knew I had unfinished business as far as my deceased friend was concerned, though for quite a while I couldn't put my finger on what it might be. Chanting about this, I revisited my feelings about my friend. I remembered going to his house to pay my last respects. I was shown upstairs to his bedroom where his body now lay; so motionless. I couldn't quite take in the stillness; it was as if his body was absorbing my sensations. I felt as if there was a gaping vacuum inside my chest.

An unknowable emptiness—is this what death is? I looked at his face—it was quite different from how I remembered. He was very much thinner of course, as a result of the cancer, but the difference was not related to that. Though still obviously recognizable, he looked completely different—not like a sleeping person. I couldn't take it in at the time but now, as I chanted, something struck me very forcibly. All of the characteristics that had

made him a person, all of his artistic nature, his sense of humour, his energy — all were gone. But where? Can everything that makes a person what they are vanish without trace? No, there had to be more.

As I continued to practice, many of the elements in my life that had so confounded me now seemed to be gaining some sort of order. Nichiren Daishonin says, "...hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1137). Likewise, some psychologists say that all the relationships we build are based on the ones we initially forge with our parents.

I came to realize that for me, the most significant of these was my relationship with my natural mother. It was not limited to, or restricted by, the physical dimension. Maybe I was carrying around inside me a sort of latent subconscious soup. If so, I could discover more about it at any time — not necessarily of my choosing but by some accidental confluence, on a deeper level, rising to the surface in the way that an aquifer gives rise to many fresh-water springs.

One night when I was chanting about my mother, I had the most fantastic realization. Simply, I deeply resented the fact that she had abandoned me! It didn't matter to me that at the time of her death it was beyond her power not to abandon me. This resentment, this "disregard," was what I had been carrying around for the best part of twenty-five years: a subterranean cavern of foul water and bitterness. It had affected many of my actions in the most unhelpful way. But if I was consumed with gnawing resentment, there was a very good reason.

For a long time, I had imagined that I had a lot of empty emotional space where others had the full set. To some extent this was acquired from my environment in the form of excuses that others would make on my behalf, or that I would adopt for myself: "Ah, his mother died when he was 3, so it's not surprising that he should see things this way."

The deeper the resentment I felt, the greater the value I ascribed to the ideal relationship of mother and child. Not only had I been deprived of this, I also felt unable to repay my debt of gratitude directly to my mother. After all, she had given birth to me. Fortunately, as I realized while chanting, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the direct route — the life-link even beyond death — that allows us to say "thank you," or whatever we need to express, in order to resolve our disquiet and regain our equilibrium. In the same moment that I discovered that aquifer of foul water, I transformed and connected with a deeper self. I had changed poison into medicine. This was a natural process. If I could do it, so could anyone else.

I chanted very sincerely that evening. Even now, the memory of it is enough to propel me forward. Through chanting, I have re-established my relationship with my mother and have been able to express my gratitude to her. In the process of doing so, I have overcome the subconscious resentment that poisoned my life and relationships. And so I can say with certainty that we can change the effects of our karma, just as Nichiren Daishonin tells us.

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