



BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR...

It seems we have a lot to offer when we give up everything, as **Zuiko Redding** shows here in the father-son story of the Buddha and Rahula.



Rahula was the Buddha's son, born just before his home-leaving. He was about eight years old when his father returned to Kapilavastu to visit his family and teach for a few weeks. The Buddha and his followers settled into a grove on the city's outskirts and the Buddha made a visit to his family. As he sat down, Rahula's mother told their son, "This, Rahula, is your father. Go and ask him for your inheritance."

Rahula approached his father and greeted him, "Pleasant is your shadow, recluse." The Buddha must have sensed that something was up, for he rose and left. His son followed, saying, "Give me my inheritance, recluse, give me my inheritance, recluse."

Rahula was not going to let go, no matter what. Rejection didn't matter – he'd just follow along and ask again. This is the determination of Bodhidharma's frown and the straight back of a Zen monk – the determination to seek the truth that will carry us forward in our practice. If we don't have it, we'll turn away at the first hard spot – well, maybe the second. This single-minded desire in the face of all obstacles is called "raising Bodhi Mind." Without it, we let rejection and inconvenience get in our way. With it, life is less convenient, but much more fulfilling.

Seeing his son's single-mindedness, the Buddha allowed him to join the sangha. He was ordained by Shariputra, who was his main teacher during his childhood.

Did this kid know what he was getting into? The cold nights in a hard bed, the myriad rules? He probably was clueless. When I was about Rahula's age sometimes my parents would have a special book or an interesting snack. "I want some, too, I want some, too," I'd demand. Weary of my persistence, my mom or

dad would let me sample the treasured thing. Oooh! Ugh! James Thurber. Club soda. French bread. I would quietly give it back and slink off. Rahula, though, when he got his wish didn't give his robe back or slink off.

Like Rahula, we commit ourselves to things—marriage, a career—that look pretty wonderful until we're right in the middle. Suddenly we are very intimate with the hardness of it all, the work to be done, and we don't feel so good anymore. Can we put aside our ideas and be with the situation just as it is? When things are totally beyond our control, can we single-mindedly continue on, moment by moment, with no thought of leaving? This is setting aside ego, and when we can do it, we live the Buddha's life. At eight years old, Rahula did this.

This does not mean we are saints. Rahula wasn't, either. He developed a habit of lying, and he sometimes wished his father were still a powerful ruler. Like most of us, he wasn't too interested in letting go of his destructive habits, but his father each time showed him a more constructive way, teaching him to use mindfulness and zazen to take care of problems. Again, Rahula showed determination. In one sutra, he is eighteen and, having been corrected by his father, he sits down by the side of the road in zazen, determined to deal with himself. When Shariputra comes along and gives him some further instructions, he accepts and follows them. With his determination, Rahula became a great bodhisattva and a great teacher.

We're in the same boat. We lie, we think about how it would be if we were really the long lost child of a great person and not part of this really dismal family. This is just how we are—we are human—and, like the Buddha did for Rahula, we can kindly correct ourselves.

To make this continuous single-minded effort is to live the Buddha's life and realize the Buddha's peace. It's very simple, gentle, and supremely difficult.



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