

DRAWING THE LINE: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP AND “UTANG NA LOOB”

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We ever so often hear that “children are our future.” Parents work through blood, sweat, and tears to raise their kids and pin to them the hope of a better tomorrow. From early on, children are given a responsibility of doing better not only for themselves but for the parents that supported them and the family that cared for them. It is truly a heartwarming story to hear about children giving back to the people who helped build who they are today. However, for some parents this payback should be more than just goodwill, it is something that they are entitled to and their children are obligated to give.

It raises the question of just when and how do we draw the line? Most importantly, when the idea and weight of the debt of gratitude or “utang na loob” often weighs heavy on the small, fragile shoulders of much of the Filipino youth.

“Utang na loob” is a value and tradition that is upheld in most Asian countries like the Philippines. It is also often used as a weapon when a parent-child relationship is on the rocks. “Utang na loob” dictates that children are indebted to their parents for having been provided with food, clothing, shelter, education, and love to name a few. It is not a stretch to compare it to a loan that someone was coerced to take and then compelled to pay. Moreover, the children do not know how much more there is to pay or when if ever, would it expire?

Ethics and morality mandate that forcible collection of invisible debt is wrong, especially from parent to child. Parents are obligated to care and provide for their children and not the other way around. Accountability should be anchored on the free

decision. Parents are the ones to decide to have a child, and thus the responsibility of raising one falls on them alone. Many would argue that those who cannot provide for their children do not have the right to have them in the first place. “Utang na loob” has no place in the parent-child relationship. It is inappropriate for parents to demand a return on investment (Celestino, 2014). Fostering this kind of connection turns parents into investors and their children, investments that would someday earn them returns. It creates the notion that the love and care they have provided have a price tag that is impossible to afford.

On the other hand, this does not give children a ticket to disrespect their parents and discredit their hard work. The act of paying back their parents and their sacrifices should be a fruit of filial love. These actions should be effects of appreciation and understanding of their parents and everything they have done.

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