

Schooling Krsna's Children

The Company We Keep

By Urmila Devi Dasi

CAN WE MAKE OUR CHILDREN turn out the way we want?

Srila Prabhupada once said, "If you place a child in good association, he will act properly, and if you place him in bad association, he will act improperly. A child has no independence in that sense.... According to Vedic civilization, as soon as a child is four or five years old, he is sent to a *gurukula*, where he is disciplined."

Anyone who has worked with children knows they are vulnerable to their environment. Yet children also carry from their previous lives a complex burden of good and bad *karma* and a particular tendency of character. In fact, the mentality of the parents during conception attracts a particular soul—with particular inclinations—to become their child. Because of this, enlightened parents prepare themselves so that they can be in spiritual consciousness during conception. Thus their child will be receptive to the training they will give him. Srila Prabhupada says, "You can mold the children in any way. They are like soft dough." So the mold is essential when considering the shape of the final piece of sculpture. But the quality of the material one puts into the mold is also important.

On the other hand, our children's tendencies from their previous lives and present conceptions can change. Their real personality is spiritual, filled with love for Krsna at every moment. Their natural position is that of eternal knowledge and bliss. Therefore it is entirely reasonable and possible to transcendently mold anyone, of any previous disposition. After all, the spiritual "mold" is the shape of the real self.

The principle of such molding is quite simple. We need to surround the child with saintly association, eliminating all false and negative concepts. To do so is difficult not because it is unnatural or burdensome, but because modern Western society, saturated with materialism, discourages spiritual growth.

We might feel, though, that we should not "isolate" our child. We might be afraid that our child won't be able to cope with society if raised in a spiritual atmosphere. Yet we teach our children to eat properly by feeding them healthy food; we don't give them a taste for junk food to help them cope with supermarket aisles. Nor do we give them small doses of beer or marijuana to help them conquer the urge for intoxication.

So rather than expose our children to materialism, we should train them to become saintly. Then as masters of their mind and senses, they will be happy in all circumstances. And rather than becoming allured by material life, they will create a spiritual atmosphere around themselves that will attract others.

Vedic education's most important feature is to surround children with teachers and other students who want to know their true self. Such persons live free from lust, greed, and envy and therefore do not eat meat, fish, or eggs, take intoxication, gamble, or have illicit sex. And the true teacher, according to Vedic standards, is one who is absorbed in Krsna, the Absolute

Truth. The true teacher does everything for Krsna, doesn't hanker or lament for material things, and is always in a state of spiritual happiness.

Such a teacher, however, need not neglect the material, academic side of education. We require practical knowledge in this world. Yet we should not want to acquire knowledge simply to build up another false material identity that will disappear in the next death and rebirth. Nor should we want academic knowledge for its own sake, which will also be lost when we change bodies. But when academic knowledge and practical skills are learned in the service of the higher self, the benefit is eternal.

Throughout the world, societies train children to be economically and socially productive members of their culture. They may also learn a religious faith, with its doctrine and rituals. But imagine if some children, even a small group, were molded to be above all material designations, all influences of the material atmosphere. These children could lead mankind into an era of righteousness and harmony.