

Nourishment for Parents and Teachers

By Urmila Devi Dasi

ONCE, SOME WEEKS went by when Srila Prabhupada was not writing as much as usual. When a disciple asked him if something was wrong, Prabhupada replied that every endeavor has periods of activity and relaxation.

We parents and teachers who guide and care for children in Krsna consciousness must consider our need to relax, recharge, and get spiritual nourishment. Otherwise, we'll become exhausted.

All who work regularly with children need various types of recharging. Our body and mind need regular rest, meals, and quiet. Parents often say they can't get proper rest and rejuvenation, especially when caring for very young children. Vedic society solves this problem with the extended family; aunts, uncles, cousins, grandmothers, and a network of relatives help one another. In modern society we may have to get help from a network of friends.

Another need is our spiritual nourishment. Children learn more through experience than concepts. So they'll know more about spirituality from what we are than from what we say. To show saintly qualities, we must regularly immerse ourselves in a concentrated bath of serving Krsna through hearing about Him, chanting His names, and so on. Srila Prabhupada gave us a morning schedule of such worship. During that time, we parents and teachers should daily examine whether we are begging Krsna for mercy and guidance or simply mechanically going through the motions.

Involving our children in our morning spiritual practice will help us gain the sustenance we need. When children are very young, of course, they need some simple diversions so that we may focus on our worship. But within a short time, children included in daily morning devotions respect parents' or teachers' personal time with Krsna. On the other hand, when we leave children sleeping so that we can have our own devotions, not only do the children lose out on the benefit of attending, but gradually we will be tempted to stay sleeping as well.

Besides our basic morning program, we need to faithfully set aside time for study, prayer, and service. Our family once had a designated time to read about Krsna for half an hour each evening. Over a few months, I found myself finishing many books I'd only been able to gaze at with longing. Even a young child can look at pictures of Krsna during such a time.

Finally, we need the association of other devotees of Krsna. We have the general society and companionship of other devotees, of course, but certain types of association particularly help those committed to caring for children. One type of association we need are "fans"—devotees who cheer us on and enliven us. They may not know the details of toilet training or helping children memorize the *Bhagavad-gita* verses, but they care enough to value our service. They're enthusiastic, they give unconditional support, and they'll step in and cheer us on in difficult times.

We also need friends close enough to be honest with us about our faults. They too may not be familiar with our work, but they can see if we're disturbed rather than peaceful. Receiving correction is difficult, but without having devotees who care about us enough to give needed advice, we may suffer by going far down the wrong path.

We also need devotees with whom we can "talk shop," those who do what we do. For example, in many places ISKCON has formal seminars where principals, *gurukula* teachers, home-schooling parents, and Sunday school teachers can come together for support, encouragement, and problem solving. Some devotee communities have parent support groups with scheduled meetings.

Having parents or co-workers we can talk to regularly is best. We need to know how others in our position handle the pressures that come with guiding children. Those of us who serve the Lord by caring for devotees in young bodies must live in a way that helps us do our best job.

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