

Thoughts at the Births of Grandchildren

By Urmila Devi Dasi

THE HEAD SLOWLY appears, then the body slips and slides, and finally the feet exit—birth! The child sounds the cry of life, and everyone is relieved and joyful.

In its previous life the now helpless baby may have dived into a deep pool of learning, but now the baby is in ignorance. He or she will have to struggle to regain all lost skills and learning. Picture thoughts will give way to words, for many months garbled. The child will struggle to master the new body, learn the new language, understand the new family and society into which it has been thrust. Then will come many years of formal training in culture, behavior, academics, and skills. How much of this was known not so many years ago in another life? But the child must again struggle to attain what will be lost yet again at another death.

The stereotyped grandparent is a person of experience who can guide the grandchildren to what is most useful in life. But what can I give that will not simply be taken away?

Of course, the child needs ordinary knowledge and skills. Just as we clean dishes, clothes, and floors that again require cleaning, so we must educate and prepare children for their roles in this lifetime. But if we give our children only temporary things, neither they nor we will be satisfied.

Service to Lord Krsna is not like material acquisitions, which must be renewed each life. Whatever one has done for the Lord stays through the change of body. One can see the truth of this practically. For example, so many people find themselves naturally attracted to spiritual life, even when their present family or society doesn't encourage it.

A person who has made much spiritual progress yet failed to attain perfection generally enters a womb where circumstances will be favorable for further spiritual progress. Formerly, expectant mothers might attend gatherings of sages who would give instructions the unborn child could hear. With Srila Prabhupada's genius of using modern technology in Krsna's service, a mother can now play tapes of devotional lectures or singing. When the mother attends the *arati* ceremony of the Deity and eats food offered to Krsna, the unborn child also benefits.

As labor progresses, the mother can chant or listen to a tape. As the child appears, friends and relatives gathered to greet the new family member can chant, "Hare Krsna! Hare Krsna!"

As soon as mother and baby have recovered, they can again immerse themselves in growing in knowledge of Krsna. Srila Prabhupada wrote to Krsna Devi in 1968: "We should train all our first-day small babies in such a way that they are always satisfied and there will be no disturbance in the *Bhagavatam* lecture, and there will be no complaint. But there cannot be any hard and fast rules that only children who are grown up, seven or eight years old, can be admitted and no other children can be admitted. That is not possible, and I am not going to sanction any such rule. Rather I shall welcome a baby from the very beginning, so that the transcendental vibration may enter into its ear, and from the very beginning of its life it becomes purified."

If we give our grandchildren wisdom and realization that transcends the change of body, then we achieve the real goal of education. If a child can fully understand his own nature, the Lord, and service to Him, all of which are eternal, then there is no more need of rebirth; the ultimate lesson has been learned. Why engage our children only in an ultimately absurd struggle to gain with great intensity what will surely be lost?

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