

Schooling Krsna's Children

Divine Consciousness Of a Previous Life

By Urmila Devi Dasi

THE BHAGAVAD-GITA tells us that a child with good opportunities for genuine spiritual life must have progressed in yoga, or Krsna consciousness, in a previous life. Krsna tells Arjuna some symptoms of such a child. First, the child will be attracted automatically to the yogic principles, even without seeking them. Second, he or she will be an inquisitive transcendentalist. Third, the child stands always above the ritualistic principles of the scriptures.

Attracted to Krsna

Natural attraction to yogic principles—specifically, to serving Lord Krsna with love—is probably the most obvious symptom of previous devotion. That attraction shows in a child's delight in seeing a Deity or picture of Krsna and in enthusiasm when chanting in the *kirtana*. Such a child also quickly and naturally understands a theology that even for scholars seems difficult.

Keeping our children's attraction to Krsna alive—no, increasing it—is simple in theory but not always in practice. Every day we must give them ample opportunities to meet the object of their enthusiasm, and we must keep them from what will divert or dampen that enthusiasm.

The child who daily chants Hare Krsna, sees the Lord in His Deity form, keeps company with other devotees, and reads or hears the stories of Krsna or the philosophy of Krsna consciousness naturally grows in spontaneous attraction and affection for Krsna. Such a child does not have to seek that attraction or struggle to cultivate it. Since his or her heart is already fertile and the seed of devotion already there, the simple water and sunshine of devotional life quickly produce a healthy plant of love of God.

Yet many children who show natural devotion when very young can become materialistic as they mature. Generally this is because parents, teachers, and society have artificially suppressed, or at least neglected to culture, the children's innate feelings. We suppress those feelings when, for example, we have ordinary television programs playing in our house, when we send our children to schools full of friends and teachers who encourage material life, or when we in any way surround a child with influences contrary to his own devotional nature.

Inquisitive Transcendentalist

Besides showing signs of being attached to Krsna, as the child grows he or she will also show signs of being an inquiring transcendentalist.

Although children start asking questions practically as soon as they can talk, philosophical inquiry and answers become most crucial to a child's spiritual development beginning around age ten, when the child approaches physical and intellectual maturity. For the next five to ten years, a child often shows a previous connection with Krsna consciousness by an intense

interest in philosophy. True, not all children are philosophically inclined to an equal extent. Yet a supportive atmosphere can often release a flood of interest in what may have appeared a dry riverbed of a child.

A supportive atmosphere means that adults who deal with children between the ages of ten and sixteen *welcome* questions as a sign that the child is a natural devotee. The questions may sometimes seem heretical or disrespectful; still, a wise adult welcomes them with warmth and kindness. Arjuna presents his demons of doubt to Lord Krsna. So must our children air their doubts, confusion, or understanding.

Of course, happily accepting questions is not enough. The child may be unsure whether discussion is welcome. I suggest setting aside two or three times a week, in school or at home, for discussing philosophy. The child can read a section from the Vedic literature and write down his questions about that section. We can then use those questions as a basis for discussion. Sometimes, of course, we may wander far from the original topic to points the child finds really of concern.

Above the Rituals

When we find a child who is not only attracted to Krsna consciousness and inquisitive about it but also beyond ritualistic principles, we know that this is a soul who has already understood the goal of religion. But this symptom of children with divine consciousness is probably the most difficult to understand and encourage.

Why? Because we adults may ourselves think in terms of ritual and religion. We may want to teach our children that Krsna consciousness is their "religion"—that they should identify themselves as "Hindus" or "Hare Krsnas" or "Vaisnavas" the way others identify themselves as "Catholics" and "Muslims." And we may feel that our religious identity and that of our children depend primarily upon accepting a certain ritualistic formula in contrast to the rituals of other religions. If we present spiritual life in this way, our children will probably reject it.

Krsna tells Arjuna that children born in families with good opportunities for spiritual advancement have already rejected a ritualistic concept of religion in a previous life. Why should they accept it now?

We show our love for our children when we emphasize *sanatana-dharma*. *Sanatana* means "eternal," and *dharma* means "the intrinsic nature of something." Our integral nature, without beginning or end, is to love and serve God, Krsna. If we successfully convince our children that Krsna consciousness is real and universal, they willfully and joyfully embrace it as the goal of their life.

We show the reality of spiritual life when we present our child with evidence to support what we're trying to convey. The best evidence is people who are achieving the spiritual success described in the scriptures. Our children should know such people, not only from stories in the scriptures but personally. Our children should also learn of empirical findings that can be thoroughly understood only from the Vedic literature. Sadaputa Dasa's book *Alien Identities* is a good example of this kind of information. Another example is a Krsna conscious study of empiric evidence about the origins of life.

We can help our children understand the universality of the Vedic principles by showing how everyone, in various ways, is trying to know and love Krsna. While teaching our children about different religions or philosophies, we can show how *sanatana-dharma* is the most perfect expression of the essential principles of those religions and philosophies. Srila Prabhupada's discussions on philosophers and Satyaraja Dasa's books on comparative religions are very helpful. Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami also has many publications that accentuate the universal principle of *sanatana-dharma*.

Our children learn further that Krsna consciousness is universal when they see us applying it to every aspect of our life. Everything we do, eat, say, and think can be directed toward loving Krsna. Our example can take our children from the theoretical to the practical. They can then accept the practices of Krsna consciousness not as formalities or "rituals" in a negative sense, but as sensible, reasoned ways of achieving the goal of life.

When parents or teachers realize they have a prodigy to train—in music or mathematics, perhaps—they generally spare no trouble or expense to give the child the best opportunity to develop his or her talents. How much more we should do for the spiritual prodigy—the child fortunate to live in a Krsna conscious home.