

# Schooling Krsna's Children

## *Higher Vocations*

*By Urmila Devi Dasi*

Srila Prabhupada Wanted Iskcon's educational system to produce high-class people, high not in wealth or status but in character. We often describe the ideal character of a *brahmana* (intellectual) as tolerant and austere, of a *ksatriya* (civic leader) as heroic, and so on. Yet for the training of our children, Srila Prabhupada also emphasized another quality: independence.

*Brahmanas, ksatriyas, and vaisyas* (farmers and merchants) can create their own vocations. Whether working directly in the service of Krsna or working to maintain their families, they don't need to beg from others, and they don't need much supervision. Such higher-class persons, willingly obedient to the spiritual master, are self-disciplined and therefore self-reliant. When we understand this kind of independence, we remove the problem of finding a vocational "place" for our children. They don't need to beg work from anyone, in or out of ISKCON. For the self-disciplined, independent person, is there not unlimited work, unlimited service?

Make a list with your child of ways to spread Krsna consciousness. Surely he or she will have the ability and the inclination to perform some of them. Many will also provide income. Your child can choose a service and begin to prepare for it.

Here are some ideas:

1. Open a *prasadam* restaurant.
2. Open a health-food store and sell *prasadam* and Krsna conscious books.
3. Open a shop for books and devotional paraphernalia.
4. Publish devotional books.
5. Sell Krsna conscious books retail or wholesale.
6. Farm organically with oxen and sell produce.
7. Cook and sell baked goods to stores.
8. Teach courses that include a Krsna conscious perspective.
9. Produce and sell Krsna conscious music.
10. Sell Krsna conscious art.
11. Write educational computer software for Krsna conscious schools.
12. Sell items or services useful to both devotees and nondevotees (such as groceries, cars, office supplies, tools, computers, printing, layout, electrical work, health care).
13. Develop a Krsna conscious theater company of a professional standard.
14. Start your own ISKCON center for spreading Krsna consciousness.

Here are some suggestions for fostering a higher-class mentality in your children, a mentality in which they'll find positive ways to function independently.

Don't think in terms of getting your son or daughter a good job and tying them to mundane schooling for that purpose. Let your child know that striving for "job security" by waiting upon others is less important than becoming Krsna conscious and teaching Krsna consciousness.

Put emphasis on practical education. From age eleven to age fourteen, let your children spend lots of time with adults who can train them in practical work. Most adolescents benefit from friendships with their peers. But learning practical service from adults and making spiritual friendship with them may provide a deeper relationship that is more valuable for bringing out good character.

Give the child some social, economic, and familial responsibility, at least by age twelve. For example, a fifteen-year-old can regularly volunteer some time at the local temple for a Krsna conscious project such as Food for Life. Even a twelve-year-old can do valuable service or earn money that will mean something for a family or a project. And as children mature, they can take on chores that demand more competence.

Give your children as much responsibility as they can handle. But for children under sixteen, be strict in giving strong direction in moral and spiritual decisions. Srila Prabhupada taught that children under sixteen should be dealt with so firmly that they won't even consider disobeying. Especially, it's up to you to set guide-lines on such matters as what they read, what they watch on TV, how they treat intoxicants, and how they behave toward members of the opposite sex. We don't tell a fourteen-year-old, "Now I've informed you about marijuana, but it's your choice." We simply forbid it.

If a child of sixteen or older still depends on you for money, treat him the same way you would a friend in that circumstance—and expect the same compliance with rules.

See adolescents as useful members of society and give them opportunities to feel useful.

Train children from as young as possible to use intelligence in Krsna's service.

Reward them for doing things voluntarily. Encourage vision and plans, even if undeveloped and immature.

*Urmila Devi Dasi was initiated in 1973 and has been involved in ISKCON education since 1983. She, her husband, and their three children live at the ISKCON community in Hillsborough, North Carolina, where she runs a growing school for boys and girls aged 5-18. She is the major author and compiler of Vaikuntha Children, a gurukula classroom guidebook.*