

## TEACHING AND DISCIPLINING IN THE MODES OF MATERIAL NATURE

According to the Bhagavad-gita, one's activities can either be in goodness, passion, or ignorance.

There is no being existing, either here or among the demigods in the higher planetary systems, which is freed from these three modes born of material nature.

Bg. 18.40

Teachers will be affected by the modes of nature. Their style of teaching and discipline will, therefore, also be affected. In this chapter we analyze how the spectrums of discipline techniques are influenced by the three modes of material nature. This analysis is meant to remove common roadblocks to discipline and thus facilitate teachers, especially less-experienced teachers, in quickly attaining a well-disciplined teaching and learning environment.

### Teaching in the Mode of Ignorance

That action performed in illusion, in disregard of scriptural injunctions, and without concern for future bondage or for violence or distress caused to others is said to be in the mode of ignorance.

Bg. 18.25

The worker who is always engaged in work against the injunctions of the scripture, who is materialistic, obstinate, cheating, and expert in insulting others, and who is lazy, always morose and procrastinating is said to be a worker in the mode of ignorance.

Bg. 18.28

That understanding which considers irreligion to be religion and religion to be irreligion, under the spell of illusion and darkness, and strives always in the wrong direction, O Prtha, is in the mode of ignorance.

Bg. 18.32

And that happiness which is blind to self-realization, which is delusion from beginning to end and which arises from sleep, laziness and illusion is said to be of the nature of ignorance.

Bg. 18.39

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A teacher in ignorance is angry and violent. He forces students to comply with his wishes, but he is completely blind to how his actions affect the Krsna consciousness of the students. Such ignorant actions, from beginning to end, cause suffering for both teacher and student. The choices such teachers make and the results of those choices will always be incorrect. Insults to students will abound from his lips.

A teacher's hostility is a product of the mode of ignorance. A hostile teacher gets his own needs met, but at the expense of disrespecting or ignoring the needs of his student. Such a negative, iron-fisted approach has at its base a philosophy that "being tough" on the students is for their own good. A hostile teacher plans what to do if the children do not follow his rules, but when rules are actually broken, the hostile teacher ignores his pre-ordained consequence and deals with the offense in a whimsical, albeit iron-fisted manner. He divides the students into friends and enemies; those who surrender are rewarded, and those who do not are berated, intimidated, and abused.

A hostile teacher may feel he has no choice, and that the inappropriate behavior of his students forces him to act in an excessively sarcastic or violent manner. Nevertheless,

such teaching, immediately and for the future, injures his own Krsna consciousness and the Krsna consciousness of his students.

And that happiness which is blind to self-realization, which is delusion from beginning to end . . . is said to be of the nature of ignorance.

Purport: For the person in the mode of passion there might be some kind of ephemeral happiness in the beginning and at the end distress, but for the person in the mode of ignorance there is only distress both in the beginning and at the end.

Bg. 18.39

### **Teaching in the Mode of Passion**

But action performed with great effort by one seeking to gratify his desires, and enacted from a sense of false ego, is called action in the mode of passion.

Bg. 18.24

That worker who is attached to work and the fruits of work, desiring to enjoy those fruits, and who is greedy, always envious, impure and moved by joy or sorrow, is said to be in the mode of passion.

Bg. 18.27

O son of Prtha, that understanding which cannot distinguish between religion and irreligion, between action that should be done and action which should not be done, is in the mode of passion.

Bg. 18.31

That happiness which is derived from contact of the senses with their objects and which appears like nectar at first but poison at the end is said to be of the nature of passion.

Bg. 18.38

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A teacher in passion takes personal offense if his students do not obey him or others do not appreciate his methods. He works hard, but his moods change according to the results of his work. He is envious of teachers who obtain better results. He cannot distinguish what is truly best for his students, and he often prompts them into action with the lure of short-term pleasures. These dealings are sweet in the beginning, but as they neglect the ultimate good of the students, they eventually become as bitter as poison.

Although it may be temporarily easier and more pleasing to the senses and mind to avoid confronting the inappropriate behavior of students or to neglect following through with consequences such non-assertive avoidance leads, in time, to an increase in disruptive behavior in the classroom.

That happiness which . . . appears like nectar at first but poison at the end is said to be of the nature of passion.

Bg. 18.38

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### **Teaching in the Mode of Goodness**

That action which is regulated and which is performed without attachment, without love or hatred, and without desire for fruitive results is said to be in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.23

One who performs his duty without association with the modes of material nature, without false ego, with great determination and enthusiasm, and without wavering in success or failure is said to be a worker in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.26

O son of Prtha, that understanding by which one knows what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what is binding and what is liberating, is in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.30

That which in the beginning may be just like poison but at the end is just like nectar and which awakens one to self-realization is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.37

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A teacher in goodness is regulated, self-controlled, and tolerant. He is not attached to the results of his efforts and dutifully teaches without wavering in success or failure. He naturally knows what actions his students should take, and he is able to clearly communicate them to his students. His strictures may at times be difficult, like poison, for his students; but in the end, the results are as sweet as nectar. Assertiveness is one quality of a teacher interacting with his students in the mode of goodness. An assertive teacher explicitly instructs his students in clear terms. He clearly explains what will happen if the students do not comply with his instructions, and he consistently follows through with those consequences if non-compliance occurs.

Although consistently dealing in an assertive way with students may not be easy, it nevertheless produces effective classroom discipline.

That which in the beginning may be just like poison but at the end is just like nectar and which awakens one to self-realization is said to be happiness in the mode of goodness.

Purport: All these procedures are very difficult, bitter like poison, but if one is successful in following the regulations and comes to the transcendental position, he begins to drink real nectar, and he enjoys life.

\_Bg. 18.37

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Of course we recommend teaching in the mode of goodness, but to remain consistently in the mode of goodness is not easy.

Sometimes the mode of goodness becomes prominent, defeating the modes of passion and ignorance, O son of Bharata. Sometimes the mode of passion defeats goodness and ignorance, and at other times ignorance defeats goodness and passion. In this way there is always competition for supremacy.

\_Bg. 14.10

On a good day, or during good parts of a day, teachers act in goodness, and on a bad day, they act more in passion or ignorance. We will now delineate the characteristics of teaching in ignorance (hostility), passion (non-assertiveness), and goodness (assertiveness). My goal in doing this is to help teachers become more aware of their tendencies so they can more consistently teach from the mode of goodness.

### **Hostility**

That understanding which considers irreligion to be religion and religion to be irreligion, under the spell of illusion and darkness, and strives always in the wrong direction, O Prtha, is in the mode of ignorance.

\_Bg. 18.32

A hostile teacher does exactly the opposite of what is required to help his students become Krsna conscious. His response to his students' behavior may "get the rules followed," but ignore the physical, emotional, and Krsna conscious needs of the children.

Hostile teachers are generally angry, negative, and condescending. Their students understand: "He doesn't like me," or, "He thinks there's something wrong with me." Discipline is viewed as retaliation, not Krsna conscious training aimed at molding the students' behavior. How the discipline will affect the students' attitude towards Krsna consciousness is not considered.

What is important is the "battlefield" of the classroom, and the hostile teacher's mandate to "win at any cost." Anger, unkindness, yelling, screaming, and violence are the hostile teacher's weapons of retribution.

When a hostile teacher responds to a student's inappropriate behavior, he:

1. puts down the student with an ad hominem statement, which blasphemes the student but doesn't clearly communicate what the teacher wants.

"Of course you don't understand! You never listen!"

"How many times do I have to yell at you in one day?"

"Why don't you act your age!"

2. expresses his negative value judgment of the student.

"You really are a space case!"

"What you did was really stupid."

"Acting like a demon again, aren't you?"

"I've never seen a student as lazy as you!"

"You're really a rascal, aren't you?"

"Quit acting like a five-year-old."

Usually both "put-downs" and negative value judgments are expressed in an angry voice.

They are also often expressed in front of a student's friends.

3. uses or threatens consequences which are overly severe.

"If you do that again I'll kill you!"

Or more legal, but neither effective nor practical:

"I'll take away your sweets for a week!"

"You'll lose your free time for a month!"

Excessive consequences are obviously difficult to enforce, and usually the hostile teacher will not even want to enforce them when his anger cools.

4. physically responds with anger by smacking, pulling a student's hair, squeezing his arm, cheek, shoulder, or neck and the like.

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These frustrated responses are meant to hurt the student, not reform him. Teachers, of course, do not enjoy hostility. They act in that way only out of frustration or out of fear of losing classroom control.

Hostile teachers are quickly seen as "the enemy" by students. Thus the students adopt whatever practices they can: lying, cheating, feigning illness to avoid the violent consequences of a confrontation with a hostile teacher.

The classrooms of hostile teachers are usually camps of hostility, with the smaller being the victims of the bigger as the students emulate the model of their teacher. Berating, belittling, teasing, poking, and fighting characterize the student-to-student interactions.

Non-Assertiveness

That understanding which cannot distinguish between religion and irreligion, between action that should be done and action which should not be done, is in the mode of passion.

\_Bg. 18.31

Non-assertiveness in a teacher is born of the mode of passion. A non-assertive teacher does not clearly communicate to his students what he wants from them. If he does, he does not back up his words with appropriate action. He is often uncomfortable confronting his students' inappropriate behavior. Such a teacher is unsure of himself and his abilities, and he feels basically powerless to deal with the behavior of some of his students. Students quickly become aware of the teacher's lack of confidence, and some students take advantage of this whenever they can. Non-assertive teachers are frustrated with the uncooperative spirit of their students.

The frustration he experiences is his own fault. He neither clearly informs his students when they act inappropriately, nor encourages them when they act appropriately. When confronted with a student's misbehavior which should immediately be stopped, he instead says:

"I want you to really try to stop stealing." (make an effort)

"You had better think before you act so foolishly!" (think before acting)

"You cut down on your foolish behavior immediately!" (improve)

"You should be feeling terrible about your stealing." (feel repentant)

"Don't let me ever catch you stealing again!" (don't get caught)

"You should learn that if you want something, stealing isn't the way to get it!" (learn appropriate behavior)

"Why are you always in trouble for stealing?" (discuss reasons)

These statements demand only intermediate, vague changes in the student's behavior.

Although these intermediate goals are well-intentioned, they don't directly communicate to the student what the teacher actually wants: "Stop stealing!"

A non-assertive teacher makes statements that communicate a fact, but which do not directly communicate what specific action is required. He may say: "You're late, aren't you?" Or he may ask a question: "Why are you late?"

If a non-assertive teacher says "stop fighting," he doesn't include consequences to impress upon the student that he must eliminate his inappropriate behavior. Or, if a non-assertive teacher does threaten negative consequences, he doesn't follow through. (Chapter 7 has more about the methods, strengths, and drawbacks of using consequences.)

Non-assertive teachers ignore behavior that they wish had never occurred. In their desire to avoid confrontations with their students, they do not respond to inappropriate behavior, even though they may have already stipulated a rule directly prohibiting that behavior. They also ignore, and thus do not encourage, the positive and favorable behavior exhibited by their students. Increasing favorable behavior by "feeding it attention" is discussed in chapter 8.

Thus non-assertive teachers, feeling unsure of their power to influence the behavior of their students, do not exert the power they actually possess. They allow their students to argue with them, and often, after some time, they give up in frustration and defeat.

One price a non-assertive teacher pays for not holding to his basic classroom structure is that he must engage in a continuous struggle of wills with his students. Students will test their non-assertive teacher continuously to discover whether or not they must actually obey. Because they do not receive appreciation from him when they act appropriately, they have little motivation to do so.

Assertiveness

"Assert" means "to state or affirm positively, assuredly, plainly, or strongly." An assertive teacher does three things:

1. He clearly and firmly communicates to the students the basic rules and regulations of the classroom. The assertive teacher directly lets the student know when he is acting inappropriately. He also directly tells the student what appropriate actions he expects.
2. He strengthens his influence, when needed, with the use of consequences. He then, if needed, consistently backs up his promise of consequences with action.
3. He provides positive reinforcement, when suitable, for the student's appropriate behavior.

To maintain the basic classroom structure in this way is not easy. It requires that the teacher be in the mode of goodness.

One who performs his duty without association with the modes of material nature, without false ego, with great determination and enthusiasm, and without wavering in success or failure is said to be a worker in the mode of goodness.

Purport: A person in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is always transcendental to the material modes of nature. He has no expectation for the results of the work entrusted to him, because he is above false ego and pride. Still, he is always enthusiastic till the completion of such work. He does not worry about the distress undertaken; he is always enthusiastic. He does not care for success or failure; he is equal in both distress and happiness. Such a worker is situated in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.26

An assertive teacher responds to his student's inappropriate behavior by clearly communicating to the student his disapproval. He then informs his student what he wants the student to do.

O son of Prtha, do not yield to this degrading impotence. It does not become you. Give up such petty weakness of heart and arise, O chastiser of the enemy.

\_Bg. 2.3

Teachers should follow in Lord Kṛṣṇa's footsteps:

"Stop fighting in the temple room. Stand in line, now!"

"I do not permit calling out answers. Raise your hand!"

"I don't allow drawing during math class. Immediately sit down and begin solving those math problems."

"You will stay in your seat. Now sit down!"

"Don't push to get the ghee lamp. Wait in line!"

When needed, the assertive teacher backs up his directions with consequences. This maximizes his influence on a student's behavior. An assertive teacher knows that the consequences, if they are to help influence a student to choose more appropriate behavior, should be as meaningful as possible. If this means taking away an activity (free time), sending the student to the headmaster, or writing to or telephoning a student's parents, the teacher will do it. The assertive teacher does not threaten vainly; rather, he consistently follows through on his promises. He may tell a student that if he disrupts, he will spend his free time in the corner. Then, if the student does disrupt, the assertive teacher makes sure the student spends his free time in the corner.

An assertive teacher consistently responds to a student's inappropriate behavior.

When a student acts appropriately, an assertive teacher quickly recognizes it and expresses this recognition to the student. This may be done verbally: "Good work," or "Keep up the good work." It may also be done non-verbally: a smile or pat on the shoulder.

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Plainly stated, an assertive teacher has knowledge, expertise, and takes responsibility for training his students in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Under the authority of an assertive Kṛṣṇa conscious teacher, the students clearly know the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Thus they have the opportunity to choose how they want to behave, while knowing fully what the consequences will be for their behavior.

It is not that all students will "like" an assertive teacher being liked is not the goal of a teacher, but they will respect him. An assertive teacher, by his behavior, will establish an atmosphere wherein the potential is maximized for the Kṛṣṇa conscious growth of the student.

### **Teachers Must Get Their Needs Met**

Once in drought-riddled South India, Srīla Prabhupāda was asked if he was a Dvaitist or an Advaitist. Srīla Prabhupāda's reply was practical and strong. "Dvaita or Advaita! What is the difference?" He went on to say that the people are hungry and need grains, but there are no rains. When these basic needs are lacking, what is the difference whether one is a monist or a dualist?

Similarly, in order to teach and influence a student, teachers should not be shy or negligent about demanding from the students those ingredients he truly needs to survive while doing his service. If a teacher cannot get his own needs met, regardless of his educational philosophy, he will not be able to teach and his students will not be able to learn.

A teacher's concern about meeting his needs is not selfish; it is practical. For example, a teacher may need quiet, or for students to stay in their seats, if he is to effectively teach writing. In such situations, he has the right to insist upon both. If a teacher needs the respect of his students (which he does) in order to teach them, he must dutifully demand that no student answer him back.

A teacher's needs will be met when he establishes the following:

1. A basic classroom structure that maximizes the teacher's own strengths and minimizes his weaknesses.
2. The right to demand that a student's behavior fit within that pre-determined basic classroom structure. It is a given that the structure is one that not only satisfies the teacher's needs, but also promotes the Kṛṣṇa conscious development of the student. In other words, the structure that a teacher establishes to satisfy his own needs cannot be in opposition to the best interests of the students.
3. A situation wherein a teacher needing assistance with a student, receives active support from the student's parents, the headmaster, the principal, and other teachers.

### **Handling the stress of teaching**

Stress often attacks teachers even if they have satisfactorily set up a classroom structure which facilitates getting their needs met. If the stress is severe enough, teachers feel tension, anxiety, and even depression. They become emotionally drained. Not only does stress cause anxiety for teachers, it also gives rise to activities that make children disruptive, which in turn fills the teacher with more stress. Usually stress transforms itself into anger directed toward oneself or one's students.

How should teachers deal with the irritation, frustration, and anger caused by student behavior? Of course, increasing one's Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the best solution.

There is no work that affects Me; nor do I aspire for the fruits of action. One who understands this truth about Me also does not become entangled in the fruitive reactions of work.

\_Bg. 4.14

Teachers should dutifully perform their service to the best of their ability for Krsna's pleasure. And they should be detached as Krsna is detached\_ from the results. Of course, the tendency for all conditioned souls is to avoid situations laden with anxiety and to lean towards a peaceful situation. Arjuna was filled with similar feelings when he wished to avoid fighting at Kuruksetra. Krsna's reply, however, was that he should fight and not leave the battlefield.

The Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart, O Arjuna, and is directing the wanderings of all living entities, who are seated as on a machine, made of the material energy. O scion of Bharata, surrender unto Him utterly. By His grace you will attain transcendental peace and the supreme and eternal abode.

\_Bg. 18.61-62

Furthermore, The Nectar of Devotion describes the desire for being free from material anxiety as the desire for mukti, a desire that one must rid himself of if he wishes to advance in Krsna consciousness.

Mukti means to become freed from material anxiety and to become one with the Lord. These desires are compared to being haunted by ghosts and witches, because while these aspirations for material enjoyment or spiritual oneness with the Supreme remain, no one can relish the actual transcendental taste of devotional service.

\_The Nectar of Devotion, p. 33

Teachers should take to their service with knowledge, determination, and full Krsna consciousness.

Therefore, Arjuna, you should always think of Me in the form of Krsna and at the same time carry out your prescribed duty of fighting. With your activities dedicated to Me and your mind and intelligence fixed on Me, you will attain Me without a doubt.

\_Bg. 8.7

To ensure that one's Krsna consciousness is strong enough to minimize the stress in teaching, check the foundation of your own Krsna consciousness by questioning yourself on the following:

- Does the quality of my rounds need improvement?
- Is my attendance at the morning program strong?
- Am I getting sufficient time to read Srila Prabhupada's books?
- Am I getting time to associate with my Kṛṣṇa conscious friends and other adult devotees?

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It is especially important to minimize anxiety within the classroom. A teacher experiencing anxiety will naturally communicate his anxiety to the class. Soon he will have a class full of students who are also experiencing anxiety.

Here are some management suggestions on how to approach solving a teaching problem in such a way that anxiety and stress are reduced.

1. Contemplate upon and determine the cause of the anxiety. Approach the problem directly and with determination. Don't delay in attempting to solve the problem.

That worker who is . . . lazy, always morose and procrastinating is said to be a worker in the mode of ignorance.

\_Bg. 18.28

And that determination which cannot go beyond dreaming, fearfulness, lamentation, moroseness, and illusion such unintelligent determination, O son of Prtha, is in the mode of darkness.

\_Bg. 18.35

2. Think about the problem and its causes in a frank, detached manner.

That action which is regulated and which is performed without attachment . . . is said to be in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.23

Pinpoint exactly from whom, what, when, and where the anxiety is caused. Detachment is necessary to objectively answer the following questions:

- a. What did the student or students actually do?
- b. What did I do?
- c. What happened just before the disruption?
- d. What was I doing at the time?
- e. How did the class react to the student's behavior?
- f. How did I react to what he did or said?
- g. How did I manage similar behavior previously?
- h. Was it the particular student that aroused the anxiety within me or was it the incident itself?
- i. What in that particular student do I find intolerable?
- j. Have I had enough positive dealings with the student?
- k. If the student has ever shown positiveness toward me, how have I reacted?

Analytically facing the problem in a detached manner generally reveals clues to the solution.

3. Approach experts for help.

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.

\_Bg. 4.34

Although this  $\square$ loka especially applies to spiritual progress, receiving knowledge in any field depends on association and advice from those who are experts.

Describe the problem as precisely as possible. Asking "How can I deal with Krsna dasa?" will not be as effective as asking "What should I do when Krsna dasa insists on slamming the door?" Questions about specific problems will get specific answers.

4. Consider a variety of solutions for the problem. Some ksatriya daksya (resourcefulness) is useful, but know well that the inspiration for an effective plan ultimately comes from Krsna.

I am seated in everyone's heart, and from Me come remembrance, knowledge, and forgetfulness.

\_Bg. 15.15

5. Do not abandon the problem until you have formulated a plan to solve it.

One who performs his duty . . . with great determination and enthusiasm, and without wavering in success or failure is said to be a worker in the mode of goodness.

\_Bg. 18.26

6. Enact your plan and depend on Krsna for the results.

Therefore the doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance should be slashed by the weapon of knowledge. Armed with yoga, O Bharata, stand and fight.

Bg. 4.42

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### **A group meeting can be helpful**

A group of adults who frequently contact the problem student can meet and discuss his case and how to deal with it. They can discuss the problem and strategies to reduce the problem. They can choose one solution, discuss the appropriateness of the chosen strategy, put the strategy into effect, and assess its effectiveness. Shared responsibility reduces the anxiety arising from the weight of a student's disruptive behavior falling upon one teacher alone.

Observe an expert teacher

Observing experienced and skilled teachers at work is always inspiring. Inexperienced teachers should especially focus on the interaction between an experienced teacher and his students. They should note how their more experienced colleagues both avoid difficult situations and manage them when they do arise. Avoid the temptation to believe that effective teachers owe their success to position, charisma, and gifts in temperament. Although this may be true, a careful onlooker can also observe skills that he may adapt to his own use.