

Schooling Krsna's Children

An Alternative to Nondevotional Schooling

by Sri Rama Dasa

Hundreds of Krsna conscious centers now dot the world, and sincere devotees live in thousands of other communities. Still, ISKCON has only about thirty schools for all its children. In previous columns, I've talked about some of the reasons for our slow development in education, as well as plans for growth. But talk of the future does little for parents who must address the need for Krsna conscious schooling today.

Many parents have given up hope of finding a Krsna conscious school for their children and are sending them to nondevotee schools. Judging from letters I receive, quite a few parents find this solution unsatisfying. I don't blame them.

Here's the biggest secret in the teaching world: The main purpose of education is not to give students knowledge and skills—*it's to put across to the next generation the culture and values of this one.*

That's why the values and character of the teacher are all-important. In devotional service, association is everything. Lord Caitanya advised devotees to avoid the association of nondevotees. How then can we neglect applying that instruction to our children? Every devotee child has the right to be educated by another devotee. Our duty as parents is to give them that chance.

Till we pull together a well-developed ISKCON school system, an increasingly popular alternative is home education.

Who should try home education?

Home schooling is for parents who want to take direct responsibility for their child's education. The decision often comes down to this: "There's no Krsna conscious school nearby, and I can't bear sending my child to a school with nonspiritual values. So I'll teach my kids myself." If you're willing to take the steps needed, you can do a good job of teaching—and comply with local laws.

But since most of us were educated in institutions, home education paradoxically seems foreign to us. Here are a few concerns, along with some short answers:

"I don't have the time."

You'll have to sacrifice some time. Raising children always takes time and effort. But a good teaching program need not monopolize your time. You can organize teaching to fit your schedule. Parents in the same community may even team up and share the teaching.

"I don't have the money."

What you'll need for home schooling costs less than sending your child to a private school (including most ISKCON schools). Of course, nothing is as cheap as a "free" public school. But there you pay by losing control of your child's educational destiny. (British readers: What you call a "public school" is what Americans call a "private school.")

"I'm not competent."

Many packaged home-school curriculums are designed for inexperienced parents. In the beginning, most parents should probably use one of these. After a few years of experience, you'll feel confident enough to be more flexible. Don't be afraid to ask help from those who've been doing home schooling longer.

"I want my child to get a quality education."

A real "quality education" is one that helps your child develop spiritual values and strength of character. It's one that helps your child become Krsna conscious and free from material existence. Apart from that, many home programs are accredited. With some planning and diligence, your child can go on to any program of higher education.