

# Good Association

**Aruddha Devi Dasi**

There is a saying that “Example is better than precept.” Even though in the Krishna conscious movement we follow both, Prabhupada often stressed the importance of good example over precept. He explained that if one cannot show by example then the precept has little value. “Unless one is firmly convinced about Krishna Consciousness, I don't think the children will learn properly from such a person. Whatever the elder members are doing, the children should do if possible. But for teaching the teachers themselves should be fixed up initiated devotees, otherwise how the children can get the right information and example?”

According to the Vedic system, the teacher must not only be learned about spiritual matters but also good in character. Therefore parents who are home schooling their children must also follow the four regulative principles namely no gambling, intoxication, meat eating and illicit sex and be initiated devotees or aspiring to be initiated. Why?

Prabhupada gives the example of the movie “Tarzan.”: “Children imitate whoever they associate with. You all know the movie Tarzan. He was brought up by monkeys, and he took on the habits of monkeys. If you keep children in good association, their psychological development will be very good—they will become like demigods. But if you keep them in bad association, they will turn out to be demons.”

Prabhupada said children are like a blank slate or like soft dough. "However you put them into the mold, they will come out—like bhārats, capatis or kacauris. Therefore if you give children good association, they will develop nicely, and if you put them in bad association, they will develop poorly. They have no independent psychology." He said all of them are born innocent but as they grow and associate with bad company, they acquire bad habits. So if they always associate with sadhus or devotees then they are unlikely to develop these bad habits. To clarify this point further Prabhupada gives the example of a person who smokes or drinks. In the beginning nobody likes to smoke or drink. It is simply learned by association. Similarly it can be given up by good association.

Therefore, if children are placed in the association of Krishnaconscious parents and other elder members of the society they will quickly advance spiritually due to good habits. What steps can we take to give our children good association at all times?

### **Our own association as Krishna conscious parents**

As parents it is helpful to first fix ourselves up in devotional qualities before we take up the task of educating our children. By following the regulative principles, getting up for mangala aarti, chanting 16 rounds of the maha mantra and reading Srila Prabhupada's books, we can actually develop these qualities quickly and easily. We will also be inspired to help our children to do the same. Otherwise there will be no inspiration and our instruction will have little effect on them. We need to give our children both practical and theoretical knowledge. Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu showed by his own example how to be an ideal devotee of Krishna. He asked his disciples to write wonderful literature on the philosophy of Krishna consciousness but He personally came to show how to live that philosophy in a simple and sublime way by the process of chanting and hearing about the pastimes of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. When we take up this process of chanting and hearing enthusiastically our children will also take it up and benefit.

### **Association and service to sanyasis, gurus and other senior devotees**

Association and service to great souls who are living scriptures themselves is an important aspect of homeschooling and should not be underestimated. When our children serve and associate with such spiritually advanced devotees who have detached themselves from family and material acquisitions, their character rubs on the children, and they develop humility and a service attitude. It has an eternal impact on their young impressionable minds. We all need heroes and heroines in our lives, leaders whom we can emulate and feel confident that they will not disappoint us. We see in the world today children have heroes such as rock stars, singers, athletes who have questionable personal character even though they possess special talents. Due to a lack of proper guidance children emulate them and the result is detrimental or even hazardous. So if we give our children exemplary heroes, they will feel confident about who they want to be when they grow up. During their childhood my sons' heroes were three sanyasis who visited us regularly in Boise and gave us spiritual guidance. The boys grew up admiring their qualities and trying to emulate them, and eventually traveled with them several times. To my surprise, recently Gopal wrote this thankful letter to Ganapati Swami, with whom he had closely associated during his childhood. It was only then did I really understand the impact that this kind of association has on a child. Here is an excerpt from that letter.

"Recently I was greatly missing you. I was thinking how wonderful you are and how kind and merciful you have been to me. I was feeling bad that I have not written to you in such a long time. I am very sorry. This year was my first year as a D.Phil student, and it was quite demanding.

I read your Vyasa Puja offering to Srila Prabhupada this year, and somehow it really touched me. It also brought back many memories of your visits to Boise, and your selfless preaching in Boise, both in the University and to our family. Some of the best memories of my life are being with you in Boise--when I had the chance to go with you to the book tables, to harinams, and evening home programs. I also remember the time when you took my brother and me to Vrindavana, Mayapura and the Science and Religion conference in Calcutta. All these things continue to stay with me and I continue to hanker for your association again.

When I read your Vyasa puja offering, I was thinking that maybe, if Krishnais merciful, in my next life I could once again assist you in some small way in your sankirtana."

Your insignificant servant

Gopal Hari das