

Morning Program

Aruddha Devi Dasi

An enthusiastic daily morning program at home is very important when we are home schooling our children. We are all creatures of habit and if we inculcate good spiritual discipline in children they will maintain it throughout their adult life. Also, there is great benefit to starting the day with remembering the Lord, chanting his holy name and reading His books. The mind becomes peaceful and happy so that they can think intelligently about spiritual matters. The morning program will help control their restless minds and reduce misbehavior among them. If we do this with sincerity and faith and maintain the mood of Krishna consciousness throughout the day, we can actually have little saints running around the house - naughty, just like children are, but often times in a transcendental way.

First of all we should keep an altar at home with pictures or Deities, preferably Gaura Nitai. We also need an arati tray with all the items of worship, as well as a whisk, peacock fan and conch shell. Try to put the children to bed early and then after they have had a good eight or nine hours of rest at night, wake them up, help them shower and get ready for the morning program. Try to never miss a morning program. If the children are late in waking up due to a festival or some other occasion, do the entire morning program of mangala artik, Tulasi puja, Deity greeting, and guru puja with them later, separate from yours. They can take turns dressing up as pujaris and kirtan leaders. Be always enthusiastic, dance and chant loudly. After the arati is over, encourage them to offer food to the Deities so they understand the importance of offering and eating only prasadam. If they are old enough they can chant mantras or they can say their own sweet prayer asking Krishna to please eat so that everyone can get benefit from the prasadam. After breakfast we can read the scriptures with them such as the Srimad Bhagavatam. Pick out a story, for example Prahlad Maharaj, and read only translations with them. Discuss with them the finer points of the story according to their level of maturity.

Depending on the age of the children we can adjust the length of the morning program. We can shorten the program to 10 or 15 minutes or whatever is practical. It is important to keep the whole experience of Krishna consciousness a positive and enjoyable one. Simplifying the program (arati with only incense and flower) is okay for small children who generally have short attention spans. However, we should not dispense with the morning program altogether just because it is too troublesome or the children are reluctant to participate due to playfulness. We should be determined to start the day with chanting and hearing about Krishna. Besides being spiritually beneficial, the morning program also keeps the family together. Among non-devotees it is common to plan family weekend events such as watching a favorite show on television together, bowling or going to church on Sundays but for devotees this can be accomplished twice a day, everyday. The family that chants and reads together stays together!

Chanting japa

I gave my sons bead bags when they were three and when they turned six I encouraged them to chant one or two rounds. We always chanted together. I did not let them chant japa on their own because bad habits could develop if left on their own and chanting could become a chore or a burden. As we did our japa I would inspire them to chant better, explaining to them that Krishna will dance on their tongue if they chanted purely. This fascinated them and they tried to chant better.

Prabhupada did not want children to be forced to do japa. In a letter to Bhanutanya in 1972,

he wrote: “Why they are inventing these such new things like marching and japa like military? They should run and play when they are small children, not forced to chant japa, that is not the way.”

However, he said, children should be encouraged to chant japa , even small children. At one time he was upset when small children were not allowed to use japa beads while chanting because they were disrespecting them. In a letter to Yadunana in 1975, he wrote: “I have just been informed by my servant, Srutakirti, that the young children, under twelve, are not allowed to use their japa beads while chanting. This policy is not good. Why this change has been made? I never said they should not use their beads. That is our business. They must be taught how to respect their beads. How they can learn unless they use them?

Children who are encouraged in a positive manner to chant japa will gradually learn by imitating the adults. As they get older they will double or triple the number of rounds and desire for initiation from a spiritual master. If they have good role models they will quickly make advancement.