

Purity is the Force

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Srila Prabhupada gave us a wonderful motto: Books are the basis, purity is the force, preaching is the essence and utility is the principle. Let us see how we can incorporate these principles into our home schooling.

There are many things we can do within the home to make it pure and conducive to learning for our children. For example we can have an altar with Deities so that they can be the center of our lives, we can engage in good spiritual sound vibration such as chanting of the maha mantra, we can always cook and honor prasadam, and we can associate always with like-minded devotees. While we introduce these auspicious things in our home we should also be careful to avoid certain things that destroy this purity and pollute the body and mind. The activity that most single-handedly destroys serenity, purity and good sense is watching television. Countless reports, statistics and studies have shown that television has very bad effects. For our purposes all the principles of religion are broken while watching television because it encourages violence, illicit sex, gambling and intoxication.

One may say that watching good programs on television, such as the Discovery channel and other educational programs, is okay. Maybe there is nothing wrong in watching these programs because children improve academically. This is not true. Even if the children pick up a few facts about nature, they do not become more intelligent or creative as a result. This is because TV encourages passive learning—the tube is a one-way download from the screen to the mind. Reading and hearing, on the other hand, encourage active learning—the child has to make a little effort to gain the information and to create a picture in their imagination. As a result, both the benefit and the joy of reading are much greater.

Even if one accepts the educational value of some shows, which child stops watching TV once the Discovery program ends? For example, studies show that drinking one glass of wine is good for health. This may be true, but who stops at one glass of wine? A little educational TV inspires children to watch more non-educational TV. Furthermore, there is no educational program that comes without dozens of commercials, which have undesirable elements such as meat, sex and intoxicants.

Some people are afraid that without TV the children will look foolish and will not be able to converse intelligently with their peers and will become social misfits. This is not true. Our

intelligence and knowledge is not coming from TV but through books such as Srimad Bhagavatam and Bhagavad Gita.. Knowledge of the scriptures is real knowledge and not temporary. So we take only so much worldly knowledge as necessary to operate in the world and for this kind of knowledge we can read books instead of watching television.

Studies have shown that children are very impressionable in their early years and are easily influenced by their environment and association.

Watching television also wastes time. Statistics have shown that the average child in America watches approximately six hours of television daily. If this is true, or even partially true, then what can the child accomplish in life? All of his or her leisure time is spent in watching television or playing computer games. Hobbies such as playing music, doing artwork, cooking and gardening are not cultivated. If a child goes to school eight hours a day, and sleeps about eight hours a day and sits in front of a screen six hours a day, then there are only two hours left in the day which are spent in taking care of the daily necessities. This type of lifestyle largely destroys the child's creativity and makes him physically and mentally lazy which means that he does not have to think. Television is a one-sided transmission, from the "box" to the mind of the child. Watching television is so mentally easy that the child loses the taste for things that are intellectually challenging, such as reading and mathematics. The same is true of computer games. Children who spend hours with a computer or TV screen lack social skills and find it difficult to focus on other things. This is why so many teachers have problems getting their students to study.

Activities such as playing music, carpentry, sculpture, painting, drama, dance, handicrafts and sports expand the talents of children. If time is spent on these activities, by the time they grow up they will have a wealth of talents and skills that they can be proud of and utilize in Krishna's service. On the other hand, if they watch television growing up—for ten to fifteen years— by the time they are adults they will be "TV conditioned" and will not gain anything. Next week we will discuss the other three principles of the motto that Srila Prabhupada gave us.