

The Scriptures are the Basis of Home Schooling

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Srila Prabhupada said that from the very beginning, the children should be taught Sanskrit and English, so that they can read all of his books. Then they would become more than M.A. and Ph.D. level because the knowledge in these books is so advanced. They would be well educated, happy, satisfied and even go back home, back to Godhead.

Srila Prabhupada specifically encouraged reading Srimad Bhagavam in his Gurukula schools for the children. This is evident in numerous lectures. In 1974, in a lecture on Srimad Bhagavatam (1.16.22), Srila Prabhupada confirmed that the Bhagavatam would equip any child to know every subject matter in the world. They would need nothing else. Please read the following quote carefully.

“So in the Srimad-Bhagavatam you will find everything, whatever is necessity, for the advancement of human civilization, everything is there described. And knowledge also, all departmental knowledge. Even astronomy, astrology, politics, sociology, atomic theory, everything is there. Vidya-bhagavatavadhi. Therefore if we study Srimad-Bhägavatam very carefully, then you get all knowledge completely. Because Bhagavata begins from the point of creation. Janmady asya yatau.”

By giving them this foundation, the children will be confident of their spiritual identity and also do well academically. Prabhupada's books inspire logical and critical thinking, which are the main elements of academic education. Even a basic understanding of Bhagavatam philosophy far exceeds the level of thinking that is found in most college courses.

Srimad Bhagavatam covers all subject matters. By teaching children through the Bhagavatam, they will have a head start on all subjects, and later when they have to study these subjects through non-devotional books they will have the proper Vedic perspective and will not be misled into atheistic materialistic thinking. Studying Bhagavatam is easier with children because it contains the philosophy of Bhagavad-gita in the form of stories. Our experience has been that even a six-year-old can start reading directly from Prabhupada's books, and because of the books' potency the child's language abilities will increase very quickly. Once they have a good command of the language arts, they can master any subject.

Prabhupada wanted a Krishna conscious education for our children. He also wanted all subjects to be taught in a Krishna conscious manner. He emphasizes this in a letter:

“As soon as possible we should open our own school and teach children KC through English medium, that is one of our programs. Our school will not be government recognized because we cannot follow the government syllabus. We want to teach only Krishna Consciousness. . . . try to introduce immediately KC instruction to the students through English medium. . . . Our girl disciples may be engaged for teaching them: a little English grammar, reading and writing, geography, arithmetic, history, sanskrit, but all of them should be Krishna Conscious—that is Bhagavata program.”

How to study Srimad Bhagavatam

I decided to try Srila Prabhupada's formula in my home schooling. I started teaching them through Srimad Bhagavatam when they were eight and six years old. At that age, neither of the boys could remain attentive while reading long purports so in the early years we mostly read translations of the Srimad Bhagavatam. This was very nice because the intriguing stories kept them reading with enthusiasm. We would stop frequently and discuss the stories and the

spiritual lessons that we can learn from them. Gradually the discussions became deeper and in order to answer their questions, the children would be naturally drawn to read the purports. Sometimes I would scan the purports in advance to pick out ones that they might like to read. Depending on their ability to understand philosophical issues I would try to go as deep as possible to discuss the subject matter, all the while establishing the supremacy of the Vedic scriptures.

What was amazing that just by reading Srimad Bhagavatam for two or three hours daily their language and comprehension skills became very good. I would give them occasional writing assignments but mostly we read and discussed. In five years not only were they reading at college level, but their understanding of finer points was amazing. They had learned good reasoning, logical thinking, debate, and communication skills. When they went to college they had little problem doing American history, geography, science, English literature such as Shakespeare, humanities, anthropology and sociology for the first time. I was surprised how this happened! They scored high in every subject and the teachers said their understanding and maturity was better than all the kids in their class. We have had the same experience with other children who have followed the Bhagavata method.

Is It Practical?

Another question that may be raised is whether it is practical to teach only through Prabhupada books. Will education through the scriptures prepare them only for a life of preaching and other devotional activities? Will the children have enough skills and knowledge to be able to live in the world, take a job, get married and carry the social and financial obligations that go with the ashram?

In our case we found that the scriptures equip us to do both things because they teach us not only the purpose of human life but also the nature of the material world and how to live in it while preparing to go back to Godhead after death. The knowledge in them is complete--there is nothing lacking, either materially or spiritually. For example, Srila Prabhupada states that by reading Srimad Bhagavatam, "one can understand ever psychological situation in the world."

The Bhagavatam also teaches the children good behavior and character through stories such as those of Queen Kunti, Prahlad Maharaj, Dhruva Maharaj, and Kapila Deva. In fact, many of the devotees described in the Bhagavatam, such as Prahlad and Dhruva, are children themselves, so the children have perfect examples and heroes to follow. These stories are not fictitious; rather they are the pastimes of Krsna, His incarnations, and His devotees. By reading about their activities, one directly associates with these great personalities, and by such association, one begins to develop their same character. As the child grows older, he or she also begins to appreciate their instructions.

Thus, not only do the children get academic qualifications and good character by reading Srimad Bhagavatam, but they also become pure devotees. As further confirmation of this, Srila Prabhupada states in another lecture, "Reading of Srimad Bhagavatam is pure devotional service. The only reason we have all these other engagements in our Krsna Conscious society is because we know that you cannot read Srimad Bhagavatam all the time."