

Children as a Blessing

By Urmila Devi Dasi

CARING FOR CHILDREN in the service of the Lord is a great blessing, a gift from the Lord given out of mercy. One can hardly claim to deserve such a gift, whether by educational achievements, spiritual dedication, or even just the willingness to do the work.

A blessing? Sure, children can be smiling and glowing, but just as often they're fighting and moping. Their growth in knowledge and skills, which gives parents and teachers a wave of satisfaction, depends on the parents' earning a livelihood, cleaning messes, doing laundry, soothing hurt feelings, and tackling all the other complications children bring.

"I never want to have kids!" a young woman tells me, and I think about how modern society increasingly views children as a burden. Contraception, abortion, day care, after-school care, and more, seem the keys to personal freedom. Certainly caring for children with love, making sure they're properly educated both spiritually and materially, is no simple task. We may think of all we could do with our lives without children, such as how we could have more freedom to travel or serve Lord Krsna in more exciting ways.

Few want a job as teacher anymore. Teaching and working with children are no longer esteemed positions. Teachers are often underpaid and given substandard support. Things are so bad that even spiritually minded people, who tend to possess the good qualities and motives required of a teacher, may never consider working with children.

Like teaching, being a parent is also unfashionable. Today's women often prefer career and prestige over motherhood. And men avoid marriage and supporting the children they father, seeing the responsibility to raise children as an impediment to fulfilling their own desires.

When society was more simple and agrarian, children were an economic asset—more hands to help with farm chores, more caretakers when the parents became old. In that pre-industrial culture, children were a practical kind of blessing, one that even a self-centered materialist could appreciate.

The ancient stories of the *Vedas* and other scriptures often tell of people who greatly desired children, who felt that having many children was a gift from God. We might be inclined to credit such an attitude simply to a different culture. "Sure, kids were fine for them, but today kids are mostly a burden."

No doubt, for a materialist caught up in modern life, children are no gift. They cost money, lots of money. They may interfere with the parents' careers, do little to help the family, and get involved in things that bring them and their families anxiety and grief.

But children with lives connected to Krsna are radiant with a simple yet deep faith that God is a person, a cloud-colored cowherd boy who reciprocates with His devotees in loving activities. The connection such children feel with Krsna is real and natural. It is the reality for which

childhood faith is designed. And, of course, a child sheltered from the nastier elements of the world has an innate purity.

Children devoted to Krsna are the kind of associates described in the scriptures as best for one's own spiritual advancement. By working with children to insure their spiritual success, we gain the best hope for our own, because the qualities of our associates greatly affect our own qualities.

And in the *Bhagavad-gita* Lord Krsna Himself guarantees pure devotional service, the supreme spiritual goal, to those who teach the science of God to devotees of God. That gift, the fulfillment of all genuine religion, brings true freedom—freedom from selfish desire and the suffering it brings.

Do the spiritual peace, happiness, and satisfaction that come from caring for Krsna's children mean freedom from life's difficulties? No, the spiritual path includes a struggle too. But the quality of that struggle is quite different. The struggle to bring our children spiritual knowledge and bliss is a source of happiness because that struggle is a measure of our real love not only for the children but for God as well. When we show our love for God, He is pleased and we, as part of Him, feel pleasure too. When we truly give our children Krsna consciousness, we can say of them, "What a blessing!"

Urmila Devi Dasi and her family run a school in North Carolina. She is the major author and compiler of Vaikuntha Children, a guide to Krsna conscious education for children.