

Crack in the Universe

By Urmila Devi Dasi

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY founder of Sunday school in America, H. Clay Trumbull, remembers calling to his father before falling asleep at night.

"Are you there, Papa?"

"Yes, my child, I am here."

"You'll take care of me tonight, Papa, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll take care of you, my child."

In *Hints on Child Training*, Trumbull writes,

A little matter that was to the loving father; but it was a great matter to the sensitive son. It helped to shape the son's life ... and it opened up the way for his clearer understanding of his dependence on the loving watchfulness of the All-Father. And to this day when that son, himself a father and a grandfather, lies down to sleep at night, he is accustomed, out of the memories of that lesson of long ago, to look up through the shadows of his earthly sleeping place into the far-off light of his Father's presence and to call out, in the same spirit of childlike trust and helplessness as so long ago, 'Father, you'll take care of me tonight; won't you?'

We doubt that Trumbull, in 1890 when he wrote these words, would have imagined that today up to half of the children in the West have no fathers to call to. Likewise, when Srila Prabhupada taught us to call out to Krsna as a child calls for the mother, did he imagine a society where the mother is not to be found?

Srila Prabhupada knew where society was headed. So he sometimes spoke of today's society of broken homes. He knew that when divorce or illegitimacy cracks apart a child's universe, the child has difficulty coming to civilized life, what to speak of transcendental life.

How can we raise children so that when they grow up they'll stay out of the modern culture of divorce, remarriage, and illegitimacy? Let's look at some of the causes for broken families and then consider how to help our children pull through.

First we note that modern Western culture fails to teach boys responsibility. Young men commonly have casual sex with as many women as possible, get some of them pregnant, and then deny being the fathers. And men who have divorced their wives are more likely to make car payments than payments for child support.

"There are few qualified husbands," Prabhupada explained, "because you [in the West] do not train the boys to be qualified. You are training them to become debauchees. If you train them as *brahmacaris* [celibate students], then they'll be responsible husbands. Both the girls and the

boys should be trained. Then they'll be responsible husband and wife and live peacefully. But if in their young days you give them freedom, they'll be misguided and spoiled." (Paris, August 3, 1976)

The *brahmacari* training Prabhupada wanted us to give our sons involves physical austerity, obeying the teacher and spiritual master, and in general bringing every thought, word, and action into harmony with the desire of Lord Krsna. *Brahmacari* life is invaluable between the ages of ten and sixteen, when the boy should study philosophy and live under a regimen strict yet kind.

Besides irresponsibility, another cause of divorce and unwanted children is the notion that sex is meant for having pleasure, not babies. Our children pick up that outlook by association, especially as they enter adolescence. The media are culprits in shaping promiscuous behavior, but no less at fault is the school where in the name of "sex education" children are taught to care for their bodily gratification above all else. Our children may also suffer from bad association with peers who ridicule them for having old-fashioned morals.

Finally, our children get a powerful message from how parents and teachers discuss sex and how we direct sexual energy in our own lives. Our children need to hear that sex is sacred, because it's meant only for the service of Krsna.

Without that spiritual understanding, it's easy to see marriage as a plaything. So our children must learn, as Srila Prabhupada writes in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (3.14.20), that "marriage is actually a duty performed in mutual cooperation as directed in the authorized scriptures for spiritual advancement."

People today may cringe at the idea of training children to see marriage as a duty. But duty, Prabhupada writes, brings the ideal of married life—a reciprocation of service and love. (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 3.23.1, purport) Such dutiful nuptial love will increase with time, as shown in the lives of many couples in Vedic literature.

We train our children to love duty by *brahmacarya* and by our own example. Do we do what is right even when it means a personal sacrifice, or do we bend the rules to suit ways of living that are selfish and temporary?

Bad examples contribute to the breakup of families. Modern leaders openly chat about their adultery. "Heroes" of the West, and increasingly of the East, are well-known for strings of marriages and divorces.

Yet we parents, teachers, and adult friends can be just as influential as any "hero" when shaping our children's behavior. Some communities set a good example. But divorce is spreading even among those who by culture, training, or education should know better.

To be good company for our children, we need to avoid bad company. So when we find that our own example falls short of what we want to teach, we should take a long honest look at whether keeping company with materialists is edging us into acting against Krsna's desires and against our real self-interest.

But there's still more we need to take into account. Srila Prabhupada has pointed out that another cause of divorce is lack of care in choosing partners for marriage. One way to help our children choose a suitable husband or wife is by getting rid of the dating system. Girls shouldn't have to turn themselves into merchandise and sell themselves through free samples. Rather, using astrological comparison and careful scrutiny, parents should introduce their child to a prospective match. Of course, the wishes of the girl and boy must be taken into account; we should not force our choice on our children.

Does a compatible match mean there won't be disagreements? Of course not. So to train children for lifelong marriage we must train them to tolerate the inevitable storms that arise between husband and wife. Our children should learn to tolerate by understanding that whatever happens to them is the Lord's will and that apparent troubles are sent by destiny. That doesn't mean, however, that we should condone abuse. Extreme problems call for involvement by the extended family or community.

But when ordinary difficulties come up in a marriage, our children should naturally think, "Krsna is trying to teach me something through my husband or wife. And if this lesson is painful, then I know that the pain is a reaction to my own previous acts. I can't change that by changing partners. My karma will still come."

Finally, our children need to know the consequences divorce and illegitimacy can have on their own children. Illegitimate children and those from broken homes have higher rates of poverty, school dropout, psychological troubles, and behavioral problems. They're more prone to illicit sexual activity, and use of drugs and alcohol. Is that what our children will want for their own children?

When our children understand the consequences for their own children (and for society), they can become more sober about sticking to the duties of marriage, even at those inevitable times when their own happiness may seem to be in a lull.

Our modern world is full of the cracked, broken homes of divorce and illegitimacy. Let us give our children an inheritance of rectitude, fidelity, and duty.

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