

Drug Free

By Urmila Devi Dasi

IT'S RATHER COMMON now in America—a sign proclaiming "Drug-free School." But teachers, parents, and students know the idea is a joke. Intoxicants—tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine—rage through the minds and bodies of young people practically everywhere.

Studies, treatments, and educational programs have done little. Rather, children are taking intoxicants at younger ages, and use is increasing. Modern society knows that intoxication brings crime, cruelty, illness, laziness, accidents, family breakups, and early death. But what can we do to stop it?

First we need to consider why people take intoxicants. The urge to dull or distort one's awareness comes from a sense of futility and hopelessness. Modern philosophies teach our children that all existence comes from chance interactions in a universe with no one at the controls. In schools, on television, in history, science, or literature, the message is that there are no absolutes. Truth is relative. Expedience and popular whim determine value.

To children who see reality as having no ultimate goal, the future looks empty. A sensitive child can understand that life in the material world is basically miserable and temporary. And if the present life is everything, with nothing beyond death and gross matter, why not create a more pleasant reality—at least within one's mind?

Another reason for the urge for intoxication is modern society's equating happiness with escape and delusion. According to *Bhagavad-gita*, such delusion is happiness in the mode of ignorance, the lowest of the three modes of material nature (goodness, passion, and ignorance). Some intoxicants may seem to promote passion, as they speed up physical and mental processes. And some intoxicants seem to mimic the effects of goodness by imitating a sense of peacefulness (it's really just lethargy) or "consciousness expansion." Yet all intoxicants produce only varieties of illusion and delusion.

How do we give children the message that happiness equals the ignorance of distorting reality? By encouraging them to escape from life through fantasies, fairy tales, parties, and amusement parks. Television and movies further the idea that entertainment and pleasure come from entering a world of illusion. In fact, watching television creates symptoms similar to those of intoxication, such as increased violence, decreased attention span, false estimation of one's abilities, and difficulty showing compassion to others.

Influenced by the mode of passion, kids use intoxicants for social acceptance. In fact, mild forms of intoxication are so much a part of the world today, regardless of the country or culture, that not only peers but also parents and family elders routinely initiate children into smoking and drinking, or at least ingesting caffeine—in caffeine-laden drinks and chocolate.

We can keep or save our children from intoxicants first by giving them thorough knowledge of the purpose and plan of creation. From a young age, a child should know that he or she is a

pure soul, capable of achieving unlimited spiritual happiness in love of Krsna, both in this life and beyond. Children need to learn that the miseries of life result from our rebellion against the authority and love of Krsna, the Supreme Person. We get free of misery not by ignoring or covering it but by using our free will to serve Krsna. Besides receiving theoretical knowledge of such a view of life, our children should be around people whose lives exemplify their spiritual vision.

By living with people who think and work in harmony with Lord Krsna, naturally our children will experience happiness in the mode of goodness, and even happiness beyond any material happiness they can imagine. Spiritual happiness means full alertness and expanded consciousness, so children who perceive love for God will tend to avoid anything that will limit their awareness.

The natural inclination of a child to play, hear stories, and celebrate should be directed not to illusion but to the supreme reality, Lord Sri Krsna. In that way a child can transcend the material miseries rather than try to cover them.

And if a child's community is filled with people who don't include the dulling or distorting of consciousness as part of festivity and social acceptance, pressure from peers and elders will work in a positive way to give the child a sober lifetime.

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