

Meditation—While Watching Children?

By Urmila Devi Dasi

IT'S 5:20 IN THE MORNING. For twenty minutes I've been chanting the maha-mantra on my beads: Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. A group of children aged five through twelve had been sitting around me in a circle, also chanting. Forty minutes remain for my personal mantra meditation.

I lean over and unlock a wooden cabinet with my left hand.

"Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna ..."

Please, Lord, let me realize that You are fully present in Your holy name. Let me try to hear Your name—without my mind wandering—for at least a minute.

"... Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

Jahnu, my grandson, sees the cabinet open and shuffles over in his funny, awkward run. From out of the cabinet, Arjuna and Nimai grab the pictures of Krsna they've been coloring.

"... Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare ..."

Lord, let me be Your servant.

Balarama walks over to get the picture of Lord Visnu he's been coloring (so far, in one solid color), speaking to Cintamani in his jumbled English-Spanish with intensity. I close my eyes.

"... Hare Hare ..."

Jahnu has sat down by the markers with his picture of demons taunting the saint Prahlada. I open my eyes. For each marker he opens, I have to make sure he closes the lid tightly and puts the marker back. This I do with my left hand around his tiny palms. I am trying to teach him how to do this himself, as I did with Balarama two years ago.

My right hand continues to go from bead to bead.

"Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna ..."

Please remove my envy so I can serve You nicely. Help me to fix my mind on the sound.

"... Rama Rama ..."

Lalita Madhava and Sitarani are throwing markers instead of coloring, distracting some of the adults who surround us, chanting with an intense desire for purification and love of God. I must not let the children disturb them. If I can get the girls' attention and then slightly shake my

head "No" while bending my eyebrows, I can continue to hear—pray to deeply hear—the Lord's names.

For years I wondered whether caring for children during much of my chanting time would greatly impede my spiritual progress. Finally I understood: If we serve Lord Krsna's devotees, Krsna is more pleased than when we just serve Him directly.

With an awkward tilt like a wooden puppet on strings, Jahnu now runs across the room to Subhadra, who has a bag of stuffed-animal toys. No longer having to help him close pens, I chance shutting my eyes and hope for a long, uninterrupted time to hear.

"... Hare Hare; Hare Krsna ..."

Unfortunately, in my inner playground my mind jumps down slides, and swings into the sky. I think about what I need to do today. I think about how this morning's chanting session would be a good inspiration for this column.

No—away flickering thoughts! Just hear.

"... Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

Arjuna and Nimai are fighting because Nimai started to color Arjuna's picture. They've had enough of coloring and are now taking copies of Srila Prabhupada's books and looking at the pictures. Both can read, and Arjuna can read well enough to understand most of what's in the book in his hand. Still, right now they just look at pictures, one book after another. Balarama also stops coloring and gets his own book. He's now old enough to know not to put the book on his feet or the floor.

"... Krsna Krsna ..."

The sound of Your holy name is so sweet. When will I become fully absorbed, fully meditating on the sound of Your name?

"Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna ..."

Now Jahnu has toddled back to the cabinet. On the way, he has babbled to several of the adults in the temple room, smiling, and nodding his blond curls. Following with her pull-hands/drag-legs crawl, Subhadra also approaches the cabinet. We must watch her closely; if she takes the tops off the markers, she will put the ink into her mouth. She may also crumble the other children's pictures.

This time, Jahnu points to a book. We get out a children's version of the story of Krsna killing Aghasura. There's a color picture on every page. The book goes on top of a mat so as not to be on the floor, and I turn the pages with my left hand while Jahnu and Subhadra look, enthralled.

"... Krsna, Krsna ..."

Krsna is so beautiful. Someday may I enter into His pastimes.

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.