

Motivation for Obedience

By Urmila Devi Dasi

LORD KRSNA DEMANDS surrender, and Srila Prabhupada explains that without obedience one cannot attain to the Lord's kingdom. So how do we teach our children obedience? Here are some ideas:

BY EXAMPLE: We need to show our children how happy we are to obey the scriptures, Lord Krsna, and our spiritual master. Children will think it fair that we ask them to do something we are also willing to do. They will imitate our example.

BY REASONS: I try to be sure I can explain to the children the reason for whatever I ask. They may not always agree with me, but at least they know I'm not asking selfishly or whimsically.

BY CONCERN: An important way to show that we care for our children is to listen to their concerns, their likes and dislikes. Children will follow an adult they feel understands them. What motivated people to follow Srila Prabhupada's guidance was in large part that he constantly showed them care and understanding.

BY TALKING: At least in the West, children today don't respond well to authoritarian commands. So we need to learn indirect ways of instructing. And whenever possible we can adopt a relatively democratic process, asking for our child's suggestions and reaching an agreement about what is to be done, how, and when.

It's important, though, to hear from the child *before* we make a decision or give an instruction. Better to say, "Let me think about it" rather than an automatic "No" that later changes to an "Oh, all right." We shouldn't change our decision if the child's response is to whine, argue, or criticize. Otherwise, the child will learn to use these responses to get us to renege on a firm decision.

BY CUES: Children are restless by nature and need time to run and play. Giving children certain times and places for normal frivolity will help them behave at other times. Srila Prabhupada told teachers to give children, between academic classes, a ten- or fifteen-minute break when they would have, as he put it, "nothing to do." This way of motivating good behavior is called "putting the bad behavior on cue."

BY REWARDS: A reward for good behavior can serve as a powerful motivator. Too often we notice a child's misbehavior but fail to acknowledge his obedience. External rewards,

such as sweets or toys, have some value if used carefully and occasionally, but a far better reward is to sincerely commend the child for behaving or performing well. For example, Srila Prabhupada's letters to his disciples are full of praise, describing the disciples' specific activities and showing how those activities please Krsna.

Sometimes we inadvertently reward misbehavior, as when we let a child do what he wants after he has been rude or offensive. The desire for happiness motivates all behavior, so we may need to examine carefully what happiness the child thinks he is getting when he behaves badly. We then need to help the child get a taste for spiritual happiness.

BY CHALLENGE: Srila Prabhupada wrote that a good manager inspires subordinates with fresh challenges. Children should strive to improve in all areas of service to Krsna. The standards we set for a child should be a bit higher than the child's present level, but not so high as to be discouraging.

Challenges can include some friendly competition, which Prabhupada said "gives life." Excessive competition can lead to envy, cruelty, and cheating. But if the competition comes with a team spirit—an understanding that we are working together to best serve the Lord—we can keep competitive enthusiasm and yet avoid competitive trouble.

BY FLEXIBILITY: Whether a child is shy or outgoing, fast-paced or slow-paced, people-oriented or task-oriented, stirred by ideas or awed by facts, he or she can use those tendencies in Krsna's service. No type of personality is intrinsically good or bad, and children with different natures find inspiration or discouragement differently.

When the method we're using with a child fails to work, we tend to simply keep at it. That's like speaking to a foreigner one's native language, louder and louder. Instead, when what we are doing fails to inspire our children to obey the Lord and cooperate with us, we need the flexibility to try a different tack.

BY DEPENDENCE ON KRSNA: Only Krsna knows our children's hearts, so only He knows perfectly what will help them think, act, and speak properly. We therefore need to depend on Him constantly by chanting His name, studying His instructions, and praying for His guidance.

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