

THE SERVICE OF PARENTING

Sometimes, as parents, we may worry about our service to the community. Indeed, how to find some time to serve the temple between the baby diapers, prasadam preparation and the homework to complete with the elder one? Thus we can feel discouraged or even guilty for not fulfilling our duties perfectly, at home as well as at the temple, thereby forgetting what parenting actually means in our spiritual life.

Faced with these issues, we need to remind ourselves how much parenting is already a wonderful service in itself, in which we can serve the Lord through the jivas He entrusted to us. Our children have been specifically chosen by the Supreme Lord to be with us. Not to be on the thirteen other planets but to be on the earth with us. Not to be in all the other countries but in this one particularly. Not to be in any other families but in ours! For Srila Prabhupada, *“a child is a rare gift given by Krishna, but at the same time a great responsibility: every parent has the responsibility to see that his child grows up Krishna conscious.”* (Letter to Hamsaduta, 15 August, 1967).

Therefore, by becoming parents, we are the first spiritual masters of our children, at an age when they are particularly malleable. In the Srimad Bhagavatam, becoming a parent is set on the same level of choice as becoming a spiritual master:

SB 5.5.18

*gururnasasyātsva-janonasasyāt-
pitānasasyājjananīnasāsyaāt-
daivaṁnatatsyāñnapatīś ca sasyān-
namocayedyaḥsamupeta-mṛtyum*

TRANSLATION

“One who cannot deliver his dependents from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a father, a husband, a mother or a worshipable demigod.”

Srila Prabhupada, in his purport of this verse, precises that *“one can stop birth and death only by returning home, back to Godhead. However, who can go back to Godhead unless he understands the Supreme Lord in truth?”*

In *bhakti*, we come back to Godhead by offering everything to the Supreme Lord. This attitude is required to take care of relatives, whether they are disciples, a wife or children. But understanding the Supreme Lord is never finished. As devotees and with humility, we have decided to engage ourselves completely in this process whereby our knowledge and our love for the Supreme Lord increases every day. And the good news is that on the way, our children are not a burden but they are here to help us!

According to this previous verse, Gopi Gita Devi Dasi – Regional Secretary for Ministry of Education and Vice Principal of TKG Academy Gurukula in Dallas – also develops this point in her course on “Parenting with Bhakti”:

*“Becoming a mother or a father is equivalent to becoming a guru. The mother and father are the first gurus of a living entity. Out of millions of families for this soul to take birth in, Sri Krishna has chosen your home for your particular child to reside in. He has very carefully matched up your child’s qualities and desires with yours and has chosen this combination **for both of your spiritual and material growth**. Each parent should have full confidence in their service”.*

So we have to know that our children teach us also. We learn how to be good devotees thanks to their presence. How inspiring it is to notice when they do things well, with love and devotion! They teach us to be patient, always available to serve, not attached to sleep or silence (because if we are attached to these, we suffer a lot as parents!). And when we are puzzled by their behavior, it is often that they have something to teach us. We all have some examples of our children reminding us of some truth at the very moment that we seem to forget it. As the common proverb says: *“Truth comes out of the mouths of babes”.*

In some specific circumstances, our children might speak or act relying on values that we taught them, whereas we would not even be able to apply those values in such cases ourselves! They often have some qualities that are similar to our own, and we can be happy about that. But we also have to notice when they have our faults... This can be the time to work on them, sometimes asking for their forgiveness. By seeing us progress on these points, they will be inspired by us and see that the process we propose to them works! After all, the Supreme Lord is the first mother and father. Krishna takes care of every child and every parent. As the parent grows, the child will grow with him.

In that sense, what a wonderful service it is to be a devotee parent and a devotee’s parent! When we feel discouraged, we can try to see and appreciate the lessons our children give us with their innocence and purity. We can see their intelligence, their sensitiveness, their generosity, their different talents, and thank the Supreme Lord for these gifts. We know that the spiritual masters are here to serve us in helping us to go back to Godhead. Like them, we are here to serve our children and help them to go back to Godhead. Thus, if we adopt the right service attitude, detached from sense gratification and from the fruits of our endeavors, we may inspire our children to serve God and His servants, and as guides, take part in their own spiritual journey.



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