

How to Teach the Value of the Values to Children Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati's talk to Teachers

at Purna Vidya Teacher's Training Camp, August 2014
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Pennsylvania USA

This morning we will talk about communicating values to the children. It's a very important topic wherein the right attitudes and values in life are most important for you, and then the children also grow up with the value of the values. The importance is that the values protect *ahimsā*, non-violence; truthfulness, compassion and so on. They are known to most of us, but the most important thing is the value of the values, how these values are valuable to us.

We find that the values are being compromised everywhere. Therefore, young people when they are in school wonder whether an honest person has a chance in life, because dishonesty seems to give a lot of premiums. They see lots of violence all around, lots of abuse of human rights, and so they wonder and require lessons about values. It is true that following values is indeed difficult. So as in any other topic, first the teacher should be very clear about what the values are and how the values are valuable.

In communicating with students the first requirement is the clarity of what the teacher says as well as a conviction of what the teacher teaches and, hopefully, also putting that into practice. Ideally the teacher is a role model for the students. That is why from the ancient times it is our tradition that the children go to a *gurukulam*, which is the home of the guru,

and stay with the teacher because the teacher not only taught in the classroom, but also demonstrated this in his own life, setting an example.

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavadgītā: *Yadyad ācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janaḥ*¹. Whatever a *śreṣṭha* or a leader, anybody who is an important person, whatever that person does, the people who respect him will follow. Most people cannot think for themselves. Therefore, they will follow what the leaders or important people do. Both the teacher and the parents are leaders. So, this course is meant for both teachers and parents, where the parents become teachers of the children.

However, when the parent becomes the teacher of the child, teaching this Vedic Heritage, *Pūrṇa Vidyā*, it is likely that some subjectivity may come; father may have an agenda for the child. The father may want the child to become successful so that the father thinks *he* is successful. Very often parents ask us, "Swamiji, what did we do wrong? Where did we fail, because the child is like this?" It means that they see their own success as the success of the child and their failure as the failure of the child. Therefore, when the father communicates to the child, it is likely that there is an agenda of what the child should become. When mother communicates also there is an agenda. Parents, of course, have great love

¹ Bhagavadgita, Ch 3, 21. Whatsoever an important person does, that alone the other people do.

and affection for the child, but also there is an attachment and an agenda for the children. So while communicating with children, the parents need to stay away from this personal agenda as best as possible. They should treat the child like a teacher would, objectively, as a child, as an individual person having his own needs or her own personality. The teacher is not the father or the mother and does not have an agenda for the child. The teacher just wants to communicate. The teacher wants the wellbeing of the child, no doubt, but no agenda, because the teacher does not judge himself or herself based on the performance of the child. So objectivity is important in communicating with children.

When it comes to values, it is a very difficult theme or subject to communicate. Two things are important for values: first, understanding the value of the values and second, interpreting a value in a given situation. So, value of value, why is non-violence a value? Why is truthfulness a value? Why is honesty a value? Why is forgiveness a value? The scriptures, and the parents, and the teachers, all of them describe these as values, why? We grew up knowing that these are values, but we didn't know why they are values. We were perhaps more reverential to our parents. We followed what our parents told us without questioning. There is an advantage in that and there is a disadvantage. The advantage is that sometimes the parents are not educated in giving a reason for why they are saying what they are saying. But if a child insists on knowing the reasoning then the parents will have to find out.

Then, in *pūjā* why should we have to utter these words three times? Why should we do this and not this? I don't know. So, we simply follow these things traditionally

without asking questions of our parents. Very often nobody knows why things are done the way they are done. It was all right as far as we were concerned and our parents were concerned. It is not all right for today's generation because it is a generation that thinks.

Also, today children are brought up with an emphasis on individuality. Particularly in the West, a child is encouraged to make its own decision. Whether it wants this brand of cereal or that brand of cereal, whether it wants to put on this dress or the other one. And thus, it is wonderful that the child is encouraged to take responsibility right from that age. It is also appreciated when they do work. Therefore, a child is brought up to think that "I'm something!" It is important for a person to feel that I am something. There is a sense of self-worth in that I can take responsibility and have my way. So thus, there is an emphasis on individuality.

But that also will bring about certain defiance. When my individuality is encouraged, I want it to be encouraged all the time. I may not be willing to bend when I do not agree on certain things. Therefore, today's generation will want to do things only if they are convinced about it, and not otherwise. This is fair. We were not that generation that we had to be convinced because reverence and respect was there. We heard so many stories from the Purāṇas and we never questioned. You should be very careful what you tell your children because first of all when you say something you must be prepared for questions. Before you tell them a story think about what they can ask and be ready with an answer. When the answer is not there, then don't tell them the story.

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