

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

continued.....

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.

For example, we can look at the story of Parashurama. His father's name was Sage Jamadagni. One time Sage Jamadagni was very angry with his own wife. She was Purashurama's mother. He was angry for a fault that she had committed which, at that time and for those considered values, must have been a very serious fault. In the morning she used to go to a lake for a bath, but one morning she saw something and her mind was a little polluted. She came back and Jamadagni said to his elder son, "Cut off

her head!" The eldest son said no. The second son said no, and the third son also said no. So, the fourth son is Purashurama. "Cut off her head, Purashurama!" Jamadagni said, and he did. The father was very pleased. He said, "My son, what can I give you?" Purashurama replied, "Bring my mother back." So everything worked out well.

This story will have interpretations, if you go to scholars and ask them perhaps you will find interpretations as to why this was done. It was done, supposedly, for the purification of the mother, whose name was Renuka*. But the child hearing the story, says to mom or dad or teacher, "What? The son chopped off the head of his mother? Is that the right thing to do?" Now what do you answer? So, before you go ahead and tell the stories, better be prepared for a possible question. And avoid saying things which may be hurting them, hurting their sentiments, and which apparently does not make sense. It may make sense in some ways, conveying some spiritual values and so forth, but you do not know and the child is not able to understand that.

*Renuka and the clay pot

Renuka was known for her chastity and devotion to her husband. Such was her faith, that she was able to fetch water from the river in a pot of unbaked clay, with the pot held together only by the strength of her devotion. One day while at the river, a group of *Gandharvas* in a chariot passed by in the sky above. Filled with desire for only a moment, the unbaked pot she held dissolved in the river. Afraid to return to her husband, she waited at the river bank, uncertain of what to do next. Meanwhile, Jamadagni noticed his wife had not returned. Through his yogic powers, he divined all that had taken place and was enraged. The rishi called his eldest son, handed him an axe and asked the boy to kill his mother. Horrified, the boy refused, and so Jamadagni turned him to stone. He then asked each of his sons, and as they refused, one by one, he turned them to stone. Finally only his youngest son, Parashurama, was left. Ever obedient, the boy beheaded his mother. Pleased, Jamadagni then offered two boons to Parashurama. The boy asked that his mother be brought back to life and his brothers be returned from stone to flesh. Impressed by the affection and devotion of his son, Jamadagni granted his request.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parashurama>

These *Purāṇic* stories are the most difficult thing to communicate. I find that every story raises questions. "What! Lord Shiva chopped off the head of Ganesha! His father did that?" These are the questions. These questions didn't occur to me when I was a child. I read the stories and enjoyed them. Today's generation is more perceptive, I guess. For us, Lord Shiva is God. Whatever He does is right. To the child's eyes Lord Shiva is father and Ganesha is son. If I look upon Lord Shiva as God, I can justify it. But if you look at him as father and at Ganesha as son and father is doing this to son, it cannot be justified. For us Parashurama is God, so whatever he does is all right. But for the present day generation, he is son and Renuka is mother. I never thought that the son is doing it; I thought God is doing this. And God is cutting off the head of Ganesha, everything is okay. All's well that ends well; so when everything ended well, it was all right for us.

All I am saying is that communicating with children requires a lot of sensitivity. Only then the child will understand what you are saying. Because what you understand is not exactly what the child will understand from what you said. What confusions can be created in the modern child? What possible questions can there be? So, all these need to be taught when telling these stories and particularly in communicating these values.

As teachers we should be clear about two important things concerning values. One is to understand the value of values, how these values are valuable to us. How non-violence is valuable to us. How truthfulness is valuable to us. How forgiveness is valuable to us. First I should understand how non-violence is valuable to me, because of this very basic consciousness that I want to live and live happily and my neighbor also wants to live and live happily. I do not want my neighbor to do anything that comes in the way of my pursuit of happiness and freedom. And I know that my neighbor does

not want me to come in the way of his or her pursuit of happiness and freedom. This is known, meaning that you are born with this consciousness. And as PujyaSwamiji says, if you did not have this consciousness, it would have been a manufacturing defect because then you would not know. This consciousness forms a norm of how to interact with others. I know that just as I don't want to be hurt, you also don't want to be hurt. And I know, therefore, that when I hurt you deliberately, I am doing something wrong. I am aware of that.

This is not the case with all the living beings by the way. A cat doesn't have that consciousness. There are two parts to the consciousness and a cat has only one part. A cat knows that it does not want to be hurt, but a cat does not know that a mouse also does not want to get hurt. So, a cat has no sense of guilt in making the mouse its breakfast. Therefore, it can survive. A human being cannot survive because every time we violate the values, we feel guilty. And guilt will kill you. You can't survive. So, God has deliberately not given the other half of consciousness to the creatures. Every creature is given only one part of consciousness: that I want to live and live happily. I do not want to be hurt. Every creature has love for life. But they do not know that other creatures also have love for life. Without any hesitation, without any guilt, they can hurt others, because this is the kind of instinct that is planted in them.

They live instinctively, meaning that they do not have a free will. Therefore, they do not have to deliberate before making a choice. What is freewill? Freewill is that because of which we deliberate before we do anything. What is instinctive behavior? No deliberation at all. You just behave, which is what Swamiji would call a one-step response. So, whatever occurs in the mind, you do it. Whatever instinct comes, do it. That is the one-step response.

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