

CHILDREN AND THE GEETA

By : Datin Dr. Lila Menon

Children are the wealth of tomorrow and should be our gift to the future. However as we look around us we cannot but feel that this may no longer be true. The children of today are either completely spoilt by over indulgent parents or abused and victimised depending on their environment.

The problem is not an easy one to tackle. Gone are the days of integrated families where good spiritual values were instilled into the children at a young age - where *daivic* qualities like truth, love and kindness were part and parcel of everyday life. As members of large families respect for the elders, sharing and caring for brothers and sisters, and helping the less fortunate became a way of life. Thus, as we grew into adulthood at least a few of these basic values usually remained ingrained in our characters.

In the world of today however families usually consist of working parents with one or two children. The parents have hardly any quality time to spend with their offspring and they try to make up for this by loading the child with expensive toys and designer clothes.

With escalating divorce rates, children from broken homes get torn between estranged parents who try to buy the child's affection with a variety of gifts. This is often the disastrous situation on the home-front.

Outside the home the child is subjected to peer pressure, drug abuse and so on. This computer era has been wonderful in improving the quality of life in many fields. However where children are concerned, though the Internet has opened up a vast fund of information for the questing mind, it has also given access to undesirable information, pornography, computer predators who stalk young vulnerable children and so on. One fears that though a child may be a computer whiz, he may grow up with no conversation skills, unable to spell properly, interested only in spending hours before the computer.

Is there any solution to this nightmarish problem which is slowly growing upon? Unless and until we realize that children should be taught the right values at a young age, the world will become a fearsome place.

As we look at the youth in war-torn countries where they are taught the religion of hate from infancy, and where they are trained to kill at an incredibly young age, we surely must realize that unless we expose our children to a climate of love and compassion, where truth and kindness become a way of life, the world will be a dismal place to live in by the middle of the 21st Century - even if we excel in all other fields!!

There is certainly no easy answer. Children are great mimics and if a parent sets up a routine of prayers in the morning and evening, the child is sure to follow that example. Simple prayers and simple stories should be told and taught at a young age. Never evade a child's questions. If you do not know the answer, refer and give the right answer.

Once they start growing up along with their formal education, they should be sent to spiritual classes where easy prayers are taught and explained, stories of our great epics the Ramayana, Mahabharata etc are narrated, significance of festivals explained and so on. This should be started as soon as the child can read and write.

In our Geeta Ashram classes, we teach children prayers and train them to chant the Geeta - it is unbelievable how quickly they learn prayers by heart and chant the *Bhakti* Yoga as opposed to adults!

Even if the full esoteric meaning of Bhagvan's message is not explained in detail, we try to instil in the children the knowledge that God is within them - that the *Jeevatman* is a spark of the Divine *Paramatman* and if they have faith in *Bhagvan* He will always be there to guide them. It is amazing how children accept this great truth which adults have not learnt in a lifetime!!

Youth is a period of exuberance where the world seems to be your oyster! However as the youth grows into an adult and is assailed by the trials and demands of everyday life, the picture slowly changes.

The one great asset he will have are the seeds of Devotion and Faith that has been instilled into his mind as a child. Even if the seeds have lain dormant for many years, they can be made to sprout and he will remember that his greatest friend and only help is the *Jeevatman* within him. Once you realize this it will be your first step on the ladder of spirituality.

May Shree Krishna - The Divine Charioteer always guide you through the battlefield of life as He guided Arjuna on the Battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Here is His assurance in chapter 9, verse 22 : Those *bhaktas* who worship me with single pointed devotion can be certain that I will be responsible for all their wants and needs What more can one ask for!

Hari Om Tat Sat