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PUBLISHER'S DESK

Spare the Rod and Save the Child

Corporal punishment is not discipline, nor is it an effective means of guiding young ones' behavior

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There is no greater good than a child. Children are entrusted to their parents to be loved, guided and protected, for they are the future of the future. However, children can be a challenge to raise up into good citizenship. There are many positive ways to guide them, such as hugging, kindness, time spent explaining, wise direction and setting the example of what you want them to become. Most children were adults not so many years ago, in previous births. The mind they worked to develop through the great school of experience is still there, as are the results of their accomplishments and failures. They have been reborn to continue to know, to understand and to improve themselves and the community they are born into. Parents can help or inhibit this process of evolution. They have a choice.

There are six chakras, or centers of consciousness, above the muladhara chakra, which is the center of memory, at the base of the spine. Above the muladhara lies the chakra of reason. Above that is willpower. There are seven chakras below the muladhara: the first being fear, below it anger and below that jealousy. The choice of each individual parent is to discipline the child to advance him or her upward--into reason, willpower and divine love--or downward into fear, anger, distrust, jealousy and selfishness (personal preservation without regard for the welfare of others).

Beating, spanking, pinching, slapping children and inflicting upon their astral bodies the vibration of angry words are all sinfully destructive to their spiritual unfoldment and their future. Parents who force their child to fear and hate them have lost their chance to make him or her a better person by talking, because they have closed the child's ears. Those who beat or pinch or hurt or slap or whip their children are the enemies to religion because they are pushing the next generation into lower consciousness. Is that religious society? No. Such behavior is not even common in the animal kingdom. It's below the animal

kingdom. But that is what we face in the world today. That helps explain why there are so many problems in this modern age.

Sadly, in this day and age, beating the kids is just a way of life in many families. Nearly everyone was beaten as a child, so they beat their kids, and their kids will beat their kids, and those kids will beat their kids. Older brothers will beat younger brothers. Brothers will beat sisters. You can see what families are creating in this endless cycle of violence: little warriors. One day a war will come up, and it will be easy for a young person who has been beaten without mercy to pick up a gun and kill somebody without conscience, and even take pleasure in doing so.

What kind of a society do we have? In the US today, a murder is committed every 21 minutes, an assault every 29 seconds, a rape every 5 minutes. A man beats his wife every 12 minutes. Will the violence ever stop? No. It can't. The anger has to go someplace.

I recently attended a ceremony in which criminals being released from the Kauai jail gave testimony before leaders of the community that they would not repeat their crime. With tears in their eyes, all said they had been beaten by their family in early life, driven out of the home, into drugs, excessive alcohol and into crime and finally jail. Each one had the same sad story to tell.

I instruct the lay missionaries of our fellowship: "Talk to the children, ask if their parents beat them and then talk to the parents. At first they will say "Oh, once or twice." But if you persist, you may find it's much worse than that. Think about it, even if a child is only hit once a month, that adds up to hundreds of times over 15 or 20 years. I challenge child-beaters, "Would you beat somebody your same weight and your same height with the same anger?" They would say no, because that's against the law. It's called assault. But hitting a little kid-is that also not against the law? More and more, it is.

In England, a 12-year-old boy who had been caned recently by his stepfather made headlines in a human rights court by challenging British laws that permit parents to "use corporal punishment, but only to the extent of reasonable chastisement." Happily, the trend is away from corporal punishment in schools. Every industrialized country in the world now prohibits it in school, except the US, South Africa, Canada and parts of Australia. In the US, 27 states have bans, with legislation under way in many more. USA Today wrote in 1990: "As millions of children across the USA prepare to go back to school, teachers are laying down their weapons--the paddles they use to dole out corporal punishment. A teacher does best armed only with knowledge. Corporal punishment is a cruel and obsolete weapon." In London, in response to a move

to reinstitute beating, teachers say they will not cane even if lobbying by conservative MPs is successful.

I've had Hindus tell me, "Slapping or caning children to make them obey is just part of our culture." I don't think so. Hindu culture is a culture of kindness. Hindu culture teaches ahimsa, noninjury, physically, mentally and emotionally. It preaches against himsa, hurtfulness. It may be British Christian culture-- which for 150 years taught Hindus in India the Biblical adage, "To spare the rod is to spoil the child"--but it's not Hindu culture to beat the light out of the eyes of children, to beat the trust out of them, to beat the intelligence out of them and force them to go along with everything in a mindless way and wind up doing a routine, uncreative job the rest of their life, then take their built-up anger out on their children and beat that generation down to nothingness. This is certainly not the culture of an intelligent future.

Nor is an overly permissive approach. A senior sadhu from the Swami Narayana Fellowship's 652-member order who visited us recently echoed our thoughts on child-beating and emphasized the need for firm, even stern, correction and teaching right from wrong. "Parents these days fail to impart what is good and what is not good. As a result, a very crude society is being developed."

I instructed my Hinduism Today editorial staff to surf the Internet's World Wide Web on the subject. They discovered dozens of agencies dedicated to preventing child-abuse and teaching nonhurtful alternatives. The Center for Effective Discipline (CED), for example, provides a free packet of material, including the pamphlet series, How to Raise a Well-Behaved Child (Phone: 1-614-221-8829). For raising babies and toddlers it teaches not being afraid to "spoil the child," giving rewards for good behavior, distracting the child if he or she is doing something you don't like (or removing him or her from the problem situation) and helping the child develop good sleeping patterns. The preschooler pamphlet advises taking time to listen, bestowing praise, setting a good example, relating consequences to behavior, giving responsibilities and dealing with misconduct with one minute of "time-out" (a reflective time alone in a private room) for each year of the child's age. The school-age edition stresses using logical consequences, teaching children how to deal with angry feelings, taking away privileges when misbehavior occurs and helping youths plan better behavior by talking with them calmly and logically.

What, asks CED, does spanking teach children? "It may teach them to hit others who are weaker and smaller when they have problems,...to solve problems with violence....Spanking often makes children angry. It makes them feel they are bad." CED also notes that children are only likely to stop a

behavior when the spanking adult is nearby. Finally, CED reminds us, "Children eventually get too big to spank. How will you discipline your teenager if spanking is the only way you deal with your child now?" It's too late to talk then. *Positive Approaches to Discipline*, a CED booklet by K.F. McCormick, M.D., makes a distinction that many parents often miss. "Discipline is far more than punishment for misbehavior. In child-raising, discipline refers to the teaching of ethics, rules of conduct, the ability to plan, to defer gratification and to learn from experience....The real goal of discipline is the formation of an internal guide for behavior."

I advise parents: if you are guilty of beating your children, apologize to them, show remorse and perform penance to atone. Gain their friendship back, open their heart and never hit them again. Open channels of communication, show affection. Even if you never beat your children, be alert in your community of others who do and bring them to your understanding that a happy, secure family, as shown above, is free from violence.

Internet web sites on child abuse:

* National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse (best site)

<http://www.childabuse.org/>

* National Child Rights Alliance, <http://www.ai.mit.edu/people/ellens/NCRA/ncra.html>

* Children's Rights Project, <http://www.vix.com/men/mitch/crp/ref195.html> * R.C.'s Child Abuse Prevention Page; <http://www.dayton.net/~rculpepp/rcchild/>

* National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information: <http://www.calib.com/nccanch/>