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Positive Discipline

Two Hindus from different cultures are raising a child in Chicago, famed for its elevated trains. Mother is placing holy ash on the infant's forehead for protection and blessings. They have vowed to raise the child using the principles of positive discipline.



Disputes, worldly associations and quarrels should be avoided. Not even spiritual disputations should be indulged in, whether good or bad. Jealousy, slander, pomp, passion, envy, love, anger, fear and misery should all disappear gradually and entirely.

Devakalottara Agama, Jnana Pada, 77-78. RM, P. 116



Monday
LESSON 183
The Bane Of Battering

The whole world is reevaluating how we treat women, children, the aged and infirm. Ways of behaving toward our fellow human beings that were normal and acceptable a hundred years ago are no longer acceptable. We now comprehend, as never before, the tragedy of a battered wife or an abused infant. Shamefully, we do not always live up to the Hindu ideal in these areas.

What is that ideal? It is this: Never injure others. Hindu children are always treated with great respect and awe, for one does not always know who they are. They may be incarnations of a grandmother, grandfather, aunt or uncle, dearly beloved mother, sister, brother, respected father, a *yogi* or *rishi* returned to flesh to help mankind spiritually. We must ask, "Who are these souls? What is their destiny in this life? How can I help?"

Parents love their children, or at least they should, and the principle of *ahimsa*, nonviolence and nonhurtfulness -- physically, mentally or emotionally -- does apply in the parent-child relationship, as well as in the husband-wife relationship. Children must be nurtured prenatally without being hurt in the process. Children must be allowed to develop physically, emotionally and mentally without being hurt in the process. We know they are sometimes mischievous and can get on your nerves, but the religious parents who are avowed to *ahimsa* are in truth more mature than their children and are able to handle situations as they come up without recourse to pinching, hitting or verbal abuse. Only in an *ahimsa* home can we bring children from one stage of physical, emotional, mental growth to another and still nurture spiritual qualities.

To hurt a child in any way is to drive that child into fear and cause the development of anger and resentment at an early age. Parents are supposed to lift their offspring into the higher nature, of love, forgiveness, friendliness and security, not to drive them into the lower nature, of hate, mistrust, resentment, offishness and insecurity. Obedience through fear is not a desirable obedience.

Psychologically, parents breed guilt by telling their children they sacrificed everything for them, gave them so much, saying, "Look what we are getting in return. You are worthless and ungrateful." Guilty people are not creative, often not reasonable and are lacking willpower, for their inspiration has been destroyed. Their self-image is at the bottom of the bottom, like rust on the soul. "I'm nobody, I'm nothing. She is right. I don't appreciate anything, I'm worthless." These are the thoughts of those who live in this state of mind. True, this is the Kali Yuga in which mothers give birth and then destroy their young. They do it through beating them when they are young and later through defamation of character through cutting insults to keep them "in their

place."

Conformity through threats does not build a loving family or a strong society. To bribe children into submission with sweets or promises that are never meant to be fulfilled is to engender in them an eventual mistrust of their parents and foster rebelliousness coupled with selfish expectations about life. To anger a child at an early age is to place him on the path of retribution toward others later in life. To strike or pinch a child may seem expedient in the confusion of the moment. It may provide a short-term solution. But never forget the long-term *karmic* price that must be paid. The "I own you, you owe me" attitude is no longer acceptable, and is being replaced by "I love you, you love me," in the homes of righteous Hindu families who realize that the hurtful methods do not bring positive results.

Tuesday

LESSON 184

The Sad Truth Of Hurtfulness

I have been asked, "Should parents never spank a child?" Of course, one should never spank children, ever. Those who are spanked are taught to later punish their children, and this is a vicious cycle. Have you ever seen an animal in its natural habitat abuse its offspring? Does a lion cause blood to flow from its cub, a bird brutally peck its own chick, a cow trample its calf, a whale beach a disobedient calf? How about a dolphin, a dog, a butterfly, a cat? It is only humans who become angered by and hurtfully, sometimes lethally, aggressive toward their offspring.

The wife-husband relationship is where it all begins. The mother and father are *karmically* responsible for the tenor of society that follows them. An *ahimsa* couple produces the protectors of the race. *Himsa*, hurtful, couples produce the destroyers of the race. They are a shame upon humanity. It's as simple as that. It's so crucial that it needs to be said more than once. "*Himsa*, hurtful, couples produce the destroyers of the race. They are a shame upon humanity."

A five-foot-ten-inch adult beating on a tiny child -- what cowardliness. A muscular man slapping a woman who cannot fight back. What cowardliness! Yet another kind of cowardliness belongs to those who stand by, doing nothing to stop known instances of harm and injury in their community. Such crimes, even if the law does not punish, earn a lifetime of imprisonment in the criminal's *karma*, because they always know that they watched or knew and said nothing. This sin earns lifetime imprisonment in their own mind. Beating a child destroys his or her faith. It destroys faith in humanity and therefore in religion and in God. If their father and mother beat them, whom

are they going to trust throughout their whole life? Child beating is very destructive.

Innocent children who see their father beating their mother or their mother spitefully scratching their father's body after she emotionally shattered his manhood by provocative insinuations, threats and tongue lashing have at those very moments been given permission to do the same. Of course, we can excuse all of this as being simply *karma* -- the *karma* of the parents as taught by their parents and the *karma* of the children born into the family who abuses them. But the divine law of *karma* cannot be used as permission or an opportunity to be hurtful. Simply speaking, if hurtfulness has been done to you, this does not give you permission to perform the same act upon another. It is *dharma* that controls *karma*. It is not the other way around. In Hinduism, the parents are to be the spiritual leaders of their children, not the mental, emotional and physical abusers of their children.

Those sensitive children who see their mother and father working out their differences in mature discussion or in the shrine room through prayer and meditation are at that moment given permission to do the same in their own life when they are older. They become the elite of society, the pillars of strength to the community during times of stress and hardship. These children, when older, will surely uphold the principles of *dharma* and will not succumb to the temptations of the lower mind.

Wednesday

LESSON 185

Instilling No Fear

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, giving 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, profound understanding and divine love, or downward into fear, anger, distrust, jealousy and selfishness -- personal preservation without regard for the welfare of others.

Children have an abundance of energy, and sometimes it can make them rather wild, and this can be extreme if they are consuming too much sugar. How should this be controlled by the parents? When children run around excitedly, refer to their energy as Siva's *prana* within them. Congratulate them each time they exercise control over it, but don't punish them when they don't. Instead, explain that it is important that they learn to control and use their energies in positive ways. Have them sit with you and breathe deeply. Teach them to feel energy. Go into the shrine room and sit with them until their *pranas* become quiet, and then help them observe the difference. To hit them or to yell at them when they are rowdy is only sending more aggravated *prana* into them from you. Another technique is to withdraw your *prana* from them and tell them you are retiring to another room until they calm down.

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 thus 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 society do we have? In the US today, a murder is committed every thirty-three minutes, an assault every five seconds, a rape every ninety seconds. A man beats his wife every fifty-one seconds. A woman beats her husband every five and a half minutes. A 12- to 15-year-old child is assaulted every thirty-one seconds, and one is raped every eight minutes. Will the violence ever stop? No. It can't, unless a radical change is made. We must stop the war in the home. It is as

simple as that.

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 my international Hindu church: "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 nearly two hundred beatings over fifteen years. I challenge child-beaters, "Would you beat somebody your same weight and your same height with the same readiness?" 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.

Thursday

LESSON 186

Laws Against Child-Beating

In England, in 1996, a twelve-year-old boy who had been caned 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." Hundreds of children marched through central London on April 15, 2000, to demand an end to smacking. They ended their protest at 10 Downing Street, the residence of the Prime Minister, where they handed in a letter urging him to ban all physical punishment of children.

Smacking children under any circumstance has been banned in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Finland, Croatia, Latvia, Italy, Israel, Cyprus and Germany. Progress toward legal reforms are underway elsewhere: in the UK, Switzerland, Poland, Spain, Scotland, Canada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Mexico, Namibia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, the Republic of Ireland and Belgium. In India battering is widely considered perfectly acceptable and is encouraged in homes, as well as in schools, *ashramas* and *gurukulas*, among all castes and classes. However, the Supreme Court of Delhi has recently banned physical punishment of children in the state. In the US, all states except Minnesota permit parents to use "reasonable" corporal punishment on children, and the law for schools, institutions, foster care and day care facilities varies from state to state, with even caning still allowed in some.

In schools, happily, the trend is away from corporal punishment. Almost every industrialized country in the world, and many pre-industrial countries as well, now prohibit it in school. See www.endcorporalpunishment.org for an up-to-date list. In the US, twenty-seven states plus the District of Columbia have bans, with legislation underway in many more. The national newspaper *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 Canada, only the provinces of British Columbia, New Brunswick and the Territory of Yukon have banned corporal punishment in schools.

In London, in response to a move to reinstitute beating, public school teachers said they would not cane even if lobbying by conservative members of parliament was successful, while Christian bishops and priests are trying very hard to reinstitute beating in their schools. Abolition of corporal punishment in African schools is also quickly spreading. A high-level Zambian court declared corporal punishment in schools to be unconstitutional, and the Kenyan Minister of Education, in March, 2001, discarded sections of the law that permitted corporal punishment. Laws, however, are no guarantee of protection. Consider the nation of Mauritius, where laws have prohibited battering of children since 1957 but have never been enforced, and children are mercilessly abused in schools to this very day.

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 Swaminarayan Fellowship's 654-member order of *sadhus*, 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," he said. "As a result, a very crude society is being developed."

I advise parents: if you are guilty of beating your children, apologize to them, show remorse and perform the child-beating penance, *bala tadayati prayashchitta*, 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 to those who do and bring them to your understanding that a happy, secure family is free from violence.

Friday

LESSON 187

Penance and Reconciliation

Those who have been physically abused are as much in need of penance to mitigate the experience as are those who abused them. The penance, or *prayashchitta*, for abusees is called the flower penance, or *pushpa prayashchitta*. It has been successfully performed by many children and adults to mitigate the hate, fear, resentment and dislike toward the parents, teachers or other adults who beat them, by hitting, pinching, slapping, caning, spanking or other methods of corporal punishment. This penance is very simple to perform, but often very difficult to carry out. Each person -- child or adult -- who has been beaten at any time, no matter how long ago, is enjoined to put up in the shrine room a picture of the person or persons by whom they were beaten, be it a father, mother or teacher. Then, every day for thirty-one consecutive days, without missing a single day, he or she must place a flower in front of each picture, and sincerely forgive the person in heart and mind. If no picture is available, then some symbol or possession can be substituted, or even a paper with his or her name written on it.

When it becomes difficult to offer the flower of forgiveness, because hurtful memories come up from the subconscious mind, the abused individual must perform the *vasana daha tantra*, writing down the hurtful memories and burning the paper in a trash can. This *tantra* releases the deep emotions within the individual who finds that he or she does not like or deeply resents the parent or other relative, school teacher or principal. After writing about these experiences, expressing in words the emotions felt on many pieces of paper, the area of the subconscious mind holding the suppressed anger and resentment gradually disappears as the papers are seen burning to ashes in a garbage can.

Upon recognizing and admitting their fear or hatred of their abuser, they must deal with the pangs of pain that arise each day by mystically turning the slap, beating or spanking into a beautiful flow of *prana* by placing a flower before the picture with a heart full of love. Each day while performing the "flowers

of forgiveness *prayashchitta*," the individual should mentally approach the tormentor -- the person or persons who beat him or her -- and say, "I forgive you. I don't hold anything against you, for I know that you gave back to me the *karma* that I set in motion by committing similar misdeeds at a prior time." If possible, this act of verbal forgiveness should be done in person at least once during the thirty-one days, ideally face to face, but at least by phone, if the person is still on this Earth plane.

Of course, for most it's much easier to pass on the slap or beating to someone else. Parents often hit their own child, or abuse another person in order to "get it out of their system." That slap has to go someplace, and turning it into a flower is very, very difficult. This *prayashchitta* brings up all those awful memories. This discipline brings up all the pain. It brings all the injustice to the surface of the mind. Nevertheless, this *tantra*, or method, has been a great help to many. It is difficult to forgive, and some had to work very diligently within themselves to face up to being able to place that little flower lovingly before the picture of a parent or a teacher. Many have tried and failed again and again when deep-seated resentment emerged, but finally succeeded in true forgiveness, whose byproduct is forgetfulness. They all feel so much better today. Now they are responsive, creative and happy inside. Yes, hitting people is wrong -- and children are people, too.

Saturday

LESSON 188

In Defense Of Battering!

There is an old saying in Tamil that is often recited before or after slapping or beating a child: *Adium uthaium uthavu vathu pol annan thambi uthava maddar*. It means, "Even the help of one's younger and older brothers cannot compare to the benefit of being kicked and beaten." It seems this proverb, printed in certain school books, is taught to students.

This makes me ask the Hindu community worldwide: What fearful expectations are we nurturing in young minds by repeating such a cruel, stupid edict? Study until midnight to avoid a plastic rod across the back? Obey the teacher or get hit with a strap or cane, then slapped in the face at home for getting beaten in school? Are there more *shlokas* promoting *himsa*, violence, in the home, more guidelines for corporal punishment? Is it our intention to pass this despicable attitude from generation to generation? Unfortunately it seems to be so. My young Asian monks can recite the above verse from childhood memories. Parents seeking to defend corporal punishment of children will also quote a saying from *Manu Dharma Shastra* (7.198), "*Sama, dana, bheda, danda*," which means "using kind words (or negotiation), bribery, sowing dissension, and punishment (or striking)."

These are the four successive steps in achieving success against an enemy of the realm. It is advice for kings, not parents. I, for one, hope the rules will change in this nuclear-family age, for there are more seeming reasons to hit and fewer places where a beaten child can find solace and love, without the presence of grandma, auntie and others.

The working mother slaps her children at home because they add stress to her already stressed-out nerve system. Father has a tough day on the job and takes it out on his son's back or face with the hand, strap or cane. Does it give a sadistic joy to hear young children cry in pain and humiliation? Does it enhance the feeling of "I'm in charge here; you are not!"?

In the past century we've had two world wars and hundreds of smaller ones. Killers come from among those who have been beaten. The slap and pinch, the sting of the paddle, the lash of the strap, the blows of a cane must manifest through those who receive them into the lives of others. But there is a price to pay. The abuser one day becomes the abused. This is a law of life seen manifesting every day. It is called *karma*. Action gives an equal or more intense reaction, depending on the intent and the emotion behind it. Corporal punishment is arguably a prelude to gangs on the streets, those who will riot on call, and others who suffer in silence and hide behind a desk or in a routine profession, fearing reprimand and punishment, never talking back or offering an opinion.

Sunday

LESSON 189

Time Out And Time In

Is there a covert consciousness that accounts for the fact that for forty-eight years, until early 1996, I didn't even know that children of my international congregation were being beaten? Perhaps. Hindus know it's wrong in their heart of hearts, but are blindly obeying the cultural attitude expressed in this *himsa*, violent, senseless proverb, and thoughtlessly reacting to their own stress and anger. They don't even look for a better way. Well, there is a better way.

It has been over fifty years since my ministry started, way back in 1949. Now, in its maturity, there are uncounted encounters to rely upon, much experience to guide the fellowship and much energy to march into the future of futures. Among the concerns, one has become crucial to parents, who ask, "Are there better ways to raise our children? We are entirely dedicated to *ahimsa*, noninjury, physically, emotionally and mentally. But how is this lofty ideal possible to follow when troubled by emotions that are too easily released by taking them out, in the fire of the moment, on those we love?"

How can misdeeds that happen in the home be absolved, and examples set that prevent their repetition generation after generation?"

For parents seeking effective nonviolent alternatives, they are readily available today in excellent books. One strategy educators recommend is called time out, one minute for each year of the child's age; hence ten minutes for a ten-year-old. This tells the child that if he doesn't behave in a reasonable way, he will be separated from other people. Time out, sitting quietly in a room, works best in conjunction with its opposite, time in. Time in is quality time spent with the child in an activity he enjoys, and just being together. Time in includes letting children share their feelings, positive or negative, with parents lending a receptive, understanding ear.

There are new methods and new principles, such as in Nandinatha Sutra 138: "Siva's followers never govern youth through fear. They are forbidden to spank or hit them, use harsh or angry words, neglect or abuse them. They know you can't make children do better by making them feel worse." This goes along with the innovative approach being taken by psychologists, sociologists and educators, in consideration of the turmoil that engulfs today's world. The truth is being accepted that methods that rely on what experts call "punishment power" -- scolding, taking away privileges, spanking -- do not elicit more desirable behavior in children or adults. Rather, they produce hostility, resentment and the desire for retaliation. In communities around the world, our family missionaries are conducting study groups on Dr. Jane Nelsen's *Positive Discipline* as a public service to help parents raise their children without violence.