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Tools for Educating the Young

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Education is a major issue in communities around the world today. And not just in our own Hindu communities, either. Those who value their traditions everywhere are worried. They see all too clearly that children are learning another culture, or a non-culture, instead of absorbing the precious things in the various heritages. Elders, mothers and fathers, teachers and spiritual leaders are all wondering the same thing about traditional values: How are we going to pass it along, assure it will survive?

The Swaminarayan Fellowship, of which we said more last month in Publisher's Desk and who just opened a remarkable temple near London, has one good answer--involvement of the youth in all levels. They know the importance of inculturalization. Individual families have an answer--keep kids out of public schools, use home schooling systems, of which there are many around these days. India is seeking answers, as our articles in this paper these past few months have shown, striving for a balance that incorporates Western knowledge and Eastern wisdom, not an easy thing to accomplish, and as yet unaccomplished for India's 250 million

school children.

It's even hard to offer literature, since so many books for children and other educational tools are heavily slanted toward violence. Many will excuse it when a God is slaying a demon or when an indignant sage destroys some evil person, but to my thinking that is also violence, and unacceptable for putting into the minds of our young ones.

Presenting violence as a good thing, even a somehow holy thing, definitely causes problems in today's society, where hurtfulness is seen as a simple and legitimate solution to our many problems. Many parents are at a loss as to how to solve the problems confronting them. One solution they turn to is sending children off to boarding school. This is not a great answer. This is not even a good answer.

We have been enjoying an interesting series of metaphysical truths: "Stress makes you strong" and "I am all right, right now." Letters are coming in now with great gusto sharing testimony as to how these two affirmations are manifested in our readers' lives. I am very happy to hear from you all. Very happy. Yes, all we go through and experience in our daily life is a state of mind.

Now for the news about moi.We, that means me, are going to New Zealand, to three cities in Australia and then to Fiji Islands, at the invitation of the Jaffna Tamil and Indian communities. There we will formally release The Master Course, Book One,a course of study designed to prevent many

of the problems we face with the little ones. This is the first book of a children's course of seven grades in Hindi, Tamil and English created for the San Marga Ikiya Sangam, an over-one-hundred-year-old institution which through the course of time established 26 primary and secondary schools for the education of Hindus on the country's many islands. At the moment of this writing, the Sangam presses are printing the 176-page tutorial for children 5 to 7. We will be visiting 15 primary and secondary schools. During my last visit to Fiji, I presided over the kumbhabhishekam of the Sangam's eminent Agamic Murugan Temple.

The temple is a true artifact for Fiji Hindus, a sight to be seen, created by world-famous Ganapati Sthapati. It is approached at the beginning of the main street in Nadi Town. It was at that auspicious event that these seven books of a course for children were inspired through the divine grace of Lord Murugan Himself, appearing as Dandayutapaniswami, the child God who renounced the world at his parents' feet and fled to Palani Hills in the South of India. The course is one-third Saiva religion, one-third character building and one-third traditional Indian culture. It is available not only in printed form, but on computer disk as well. Yes, we will be pleased to release the entire course on Macintosh discs, with its hundreds of illustrations and thousands of pages of lessons and teacher's guides to any institution seeking to teach Sanatana Dharma to the young ones. Just send US$101. We will put this into an orphanage fund. That's more than Rs. 3,000 which will go to support the Sri Lanka Tirunavakarasu Orphanage and Gurukulam in Sri Lanka where so many orphans suffer due to the ethnic struggles there.

Any group can in this way adapt the text materials to suit their tradition. The course has been well received. According the the 30 swamis, pandits, yogis and sants who have acclaimed this little course, it's just what is needed for today's world. No, it does not have a lot of Purana stories. Yes, it does have a lot of character building, morals, helpful illustrations and traditional cultural references, not to mention many verses from the Vedasand other holy scripture. All seven books are in their final editing stages. We have been working very hard to publish the book for Fiji's auspicious event. We commend the Ikiya Sangam for taking the international lead in making this happen. Since they came forward, we have had requests to print in English, French, Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Russian, German, Malay and more. Most all of the translations are already done or nearly finished.

There is a great energy within these seven children books guiding a Hindu child from age 5 through 15. This we owe to the grace of our loving Lord Ganesha and powerfully ever-giving Lord Murugan. It all happened at and after the dedication of the new temple of the Hindus of Fiji Islands. It has been quite a year. We are happy to let you know that you can now obtain a copy of the first book of the course (within it is a parents' and teachers' guide) for us$12.95. With these tools, your child's mind, during the early, impressionable years, will learn the Vedic path your grandparents experienced at the time families in their totality were "all right, right now."