The Problem with Taking It Out On the Children
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# The Problem with Taking It Out On the Children

Corporal punishment defeats its own purpose, causing harm that is difficult to forgive... but forgive we must

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

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 one hundred years ago are no longer acceptable. We now comprehend, as never before, the tragedy of a battered wife or an abused or neglected 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 humankind spiritually. As parents and teachers, we must ask, "Who are these souls? What is their destiny to fulfill in this life? How can I help?" Parents love their children, or at least they should, and the principles of ahimsa--nonviolence and nonhurtfulness, physically, mentally

or emotionally--do apply in the parent-child relationship, as well as in the husband-wife relationship. Children must be allowed to develop physically, emotionally and mentally without being hurt in the process. Even professional dog trainers know the importance of bonding with their dog, through kindness and affection, and the folly of abuse or neglect.

We know children are sometimes mischievous and can get on one's nerves, but religious parents and worthy teachers are, in truth, more mature than the children and are able to handle situations as they come up without recourse to pinching or hitting. Only in this way 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. Bhakti, love of God and compassion for all, will awaken in such a person only with great effort. Parents are supposed to lift their offspring into the higher nature of love, forgiveness, friendliness and security, not drive them into the lower nature of hate, mistrust, resentment, offishness and insecurity. Obedience through fear is not a desirable obedience. Conformity through threats does not build a loving family or a strong society. To anger a child at an early age is to place him on the path of retribution toward others later in life. Striking or pinching a child may seem expedient in the confusion of the moment. It may provide a short-term solution. But never forget the long-term price that we pay.

I have been asked, "Should parents never spank a child?" "Should teachers use corporal punishment?" Of course, one

should never spank or beat children, ever. Those who are physically punished are taught to later punish their children. This is a vicious cycle that can only be broken by the child's later, as an adult, facing and forgiving the way he was mistreated and vowing to not do the same to his children.

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 also 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." The beating of a child is a kind of psychological murder, killing creativity, killing love and trust, and awakening fear. A five-foot-ten-inch adult beating on a tiny child--what cowardliness. 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 imprisonment in the criminal's own karma, because they always know that they watched or knew and said nothing. Beating a child destroys his or her faith. It destroys faith in humanity and therefore in religion and in God. If he is beaten by his father and mother, his first gurus, who is he going to trust throughout his whole life? Certainly not another guru or swami, no matter how spiritual.

Beautiful children who see their father beating their mother or their mother scratching their father's body after she emotionally destroyed his manhood by 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.

Those beautiful 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 inspired 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.

The flower penance: 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 the 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 their name written on it.

When it becomes difficult to offer the flower of forgiveness because hurtful memories come up from the subconscious mind, the 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 antagonist--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 performing similar actions at a prior time." If possible, this verbal forgiveness should also occur in person at least once during the 31 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, perhaps looking like one in the painting on this page. Many 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.