

[Time In and Time Out: Two Sides of Discipline](#)

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## Time In and Time Out: Two Sides of Discipline

Counteracting a rueful and supposedly traditional principle that values physical punishment for raising children

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The late, most revered Sri La Sri Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram, near Chennai, once said he was privileged in his decades of extensive travels throughout Bharat on foot to have heard virtually all the human ills, wants, regrets, sufferings and joys. This maybe--just maybe, along with his results obtained by sadhana, extreme tapas and living the life he was born to live--greatly added to his attainment of supreme moksha.

Our experience is parallel. It has been 48 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?"

Before we discuss solutions, perhaps you, the reader, can help me understand something that has eluded us all these many, many years but was revealed in a recent letter I received: There is an old saying in Tamil, a teenager wrote, 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 an edict? Study until midnight to avoid a plastic rod across the back? Obey the teacher or get hit with a strap, then slapped in the face at home for getting beaten in school? Are there more slokas for himsa, violence, in the home--guidelines for corporal punishment? Is it our intention to pass this information from generation to generation? It seems to be. My young Asian monks can recite the above verse from childhood memories. I for one hope the rules will change in this nuclear-family age, for there are more seeming reasons to hit and fewer places 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? Does it enhance the feeling of "I'm in charge here! You are not!?" Maybe there's a lot more for me to see and learn about the "inside" of the Hindu home. Frankly, I hope I know all I need to know, but I'm still open to learn.

In the past 80 years 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.

Is there a covert consciousness that accounts for the fact that for 48 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, 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.

There are new methods and new sutras, if you will, such as this guideline from my book *Living with Siva*: "Siva's followers shall never ever govern their offspring through fear. They are forbidden to spank, slap or hit their children, use harsh or angry words, neglect or abuse them in any way. Cursed are those who do. Aum." 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 Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson calls "punishment power"--scolding, taking away privileges, spanking--do not illicit more desirable behavior in children (or adults). Rather, they produce hostility, resentment and the desire for retaliation.

For parents seeking effective nonviolent alternatives, educators recommend a strategy called "Time Out." Dr. Dodson explains, "Time Out or 'Go to your room' nowadays is one of the more favored punishments....It tells the child that if he cannot behave in a reasonable way, he will be separated from other people." K.F. McCormick, M.D., explains the procedure: "Time Out means moving the child from the problematic situation to a quiet place apart from others. Sitting in a corner at school is also a form of Time Out." He summarizes the rules as follows: "1. Decide which behaviors will result in Time Out. 2. Count how often these behaviors occur in a day. 3. Pick out a boring place where the child will observe Time Out. 4. Explain Time Out to the child.1

"When misbehavior occurs: 5. Place the child in a Time Out quickly with only a brief explanation (explanation having been done prior to the event). 6. Using an egg timer, leave the child in Time Out one minute for each year of age. 7. Remove all

attention from the child while in Time Out. 8. When the bell rings, ask the children why they were placed in Time Out, then remove them."

Dr. Dodson advises Time Out as a remedy for most kinds of misbehavior for children three years and older, but cautions it should never, ever be used as a threat or a punishment: "That's the last straw, young man, now you're going to have a Time Out and see how you like it!" "Time Out should be administered in as cool, calm, collected and prompt a manner as possible....Once you get the child in his room, it matters not in the slightest what he does there. The purpose of the Time Out is to disrupt the undesirable behavior, and simply being in his room does that."

Time Out 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. "When a child can express his feelings in words, they are over and done with and out of his system. When a child cannot express his angry feelings in words, he will most likely engage in some sneaky, antisocial behavior as a substitute for expressing the feelings forthrightly," says Dodson.

What is discipline? The root of the word is the Latin *discipulus*, meaning disciple. Dr. Lawrence Balter, author of *Discipline without Combat*, writes, "That word best expresses the ideal relationship of child to parent. A parent acts as teacher and model, helping his child to develop self-control, character,

orderly conduct, a sense of values, good judgment, empathy for human beings and other creatures and, most important, self-discipline." "The real tragedy," Dodson points out, "is that so many parents simply accept spanking as their main means of discipline.... They do not realize what a vastly different youngster they would have and how enormously more satisfying their relationships with him would be if they used such creative and humanistic discipline techniques as the positive reward system, the Time Out technique and others...." His books and others can counteract the traditional misinformation about raising up Hindu children. Don't take that beating that you received out on your children. Be strong. Anger shows weakness of character. Love them and don't forget: a hug a day keeps violence away. Love is the sum of all laws, more powerful than any lash. It can combat violence in the home, community and country.

TEXTS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

How to Discipline with Love, from Crib to College, Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson, Signet, 342 pages, \$5.95.

Who's in Control, Dr. Balter's Guide to Discipline without Combat, Dr. Lawrence Balter, Simon and Shuster, 187 pages, \$8.95.