

Training the Children

INTRODUCTION

Countless Indians live outside India now. Numerous children of Indian parents are born outside India. Many parents worry about the future of their children born outside India. They feel that the children must get to know their culture and civilization, must get connected to their traditional roots, and must learn from the eternal dharma.

Then there are countless non-Indians who lead exemplary lives following Sanatana Dharma. They are extremely devoted and lead extraordinary lives. They wish that their children must get proper training. They are concerned about their children's future. They want their children to be noble and spiritual by nature.

The world also is worried. It needs leaders who are well-educated, wise, and trained along moral lines. With the present system, that is becoming increasingly difficult.

The System

The schooling, the smart phone, the movies, the video games and so on can never help children develop well and grow spiritually. What will parents do? Will they see their children growing into dry and arrogant educated fools, busy with their friends and technical toys? Or will they train them properly and make them responsible citizens of the world?

Will they leave their children lead the so-called "free" life with all its dangers and horrors? Or, will they train and guide them along the noble path? If they wish to train children properly, give them proper spiritual culture, which is their duty, what should they do? Where should they go?

Absorbing Local Culture

Some words about world culture.

Children must integrate themselves fully with the culture in which they live. They must and should speak the local language, dress and live as the the local people do.

They should be trained in things like karate, judo, swimming, skating, kung fu, golf, gym, running, yachting, camping, or mountaineering —things has to be done as others do. Swami Vivekananda also played golf, and he was a well-known wrestler! This trains the body and they become strong physically.

But, we are not just the body. We are something else. This is the fundamental teaching of Vedanta.

You may train your body as much as you can and make it muscular, but if your mind is not all right, nothing will work. The mind should be all right first. What is the use of a stupid Hercules?

So the mind has to be trained. To train the mind, there are some exercises, which were branded "religion" and kept aside. The mind too needs a gym.

Taking your mind to the mental gym is not religion. It is called mental training, and it is a must. Train your children to make the mental muscles strong. We shall speak about it later.

Secondly, the minds of children should be trained to be global and universal in this global society. All children must absorb the noble things of every race. They must become, not of any particular region of India or America, but global citizens—universal in approach. So they must do everything to become strong physically and mentally.

THE Divine Within

However, it is not religion but a simple fact, as true as the Sun above, that we are not this body and mind but we are the Self, the infinite Atman. We are "wearing" these "clothes" called body and mind. We are infinite, birthless, deathless, divine, and spiritual beings. We are the Atman—the infinitely powerful ones.

We are all-powerful. All potential is hidden within us. We can be anything, we have all capacities, all knowledge, and all glory within us—sleeping—waiting to be awakened.

So, we must think of that aspect also. Rejecting the truth will not eliminate it. If a policeman thinks he is a robber and wants to be in jail, it is his stupidity. If we think we are just the body and be satisfied with it, we are stupid.

So we must do some things about bringing out our infinite potential.

You Have Infinite Potential Within

This is training in higher culture. The world is tired of educated robots—it does not want educated, well-behaved, smiling robots. It wants real people—people who are strong spiritually, mentally, and physically.

Therefore, whether it is children born of Indian parents, mixed parents, or of any race of the world—train your children. Don't let your children waste their time and precious lives. Train them. Give them the opportunity to grow and bring out their inner potential.

That means, they must also be trained in higher culture. The higher and nobler the sentiment of a person, the greater he or she is.

Less Opportunities?

How to train children in the West, when there are not many opportunities? There are countless gyms and schools to train in diverse arts of the body, but almost none for training the mind and Spirit.

Please note that even in India there are not many opportunities. In the rat race for jobs and competition in a struggling economy with suffocating population, in the rat race for imitating stars and being "secular", the traditional culture is not "appreciated" much there also. Of course there are numerous exceptions. But, it is outside India rather that we find greater interest in ancient Indian culture. It is the sincere and noble non-Indian that is more deep into dharma, yoga, Vedanta, and so on.

So, everywhere there is the same problem more or less. Yet, we must train our children. How to do it?

How to Train Children

So, even if parents want their children to be trained properly, where will they go? What should they do?

There are diverse opportunities nowadays for such training: There is the powerful internet with all that the learner wants. There is youtube with whatever you want. Yet, a broad guideline is necessary. Further, with all the gadgets around, there is the need of the human touch.

Swami Vivekananda says: "This quickening impulse cannot be derived from books. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find that we have not developed at all spiritually."

The Best Teachers

Parents are the best teachers.

Children, especially little ones, will learn by seeing. They hear through their eyes. So the first duty of parents is to *be*, and not just *say* what the child must do.

Parents must also lead lives that inspire their children. They must be happy, peace-loving, devoted, strong, honest and truthful. Then the children "listen" to them, meaning, see and copy them.

So parents are the best teachers in every sense.

What should you Teach Children?

We have classified the training into three periods, depending upon the age of the child.

1. Up to the fifth year.
2. between the fifth and the 10th year.
3. between the 10th and 15th year.

We have also classified the training itself into three parts, at three levels: physical, mental, and spiritual. We shall mention nothing about physical training because it depends on tastes and situation and everyone knows better.

AGE GROUP ONE: between the 3rd and the 5th year

MENTAL LEVEL

1. Train the child to be truthful, sincere, brave and good. Instill the idea of the power of truthfulness, bravery, etc constantly.
2. Train the child to bow down before elders.
3. Train the child to sit for some minutes every day in meditation—with closed eyes. This will be like sowing seeds to mental control.
4. Encourage the child to show compassion, to serve, and to help others.
5. Encourage the child to be broadminded.
6. Narrate to the child stories about great heroes of the past, especially child heroes. There are many.

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

1. Teach the child some simple verses (*shlokas*). There are numerous hymns and verses to numerous deities. Which ones to choose? So, Shankaracharya has solved the problem. All the numerous gods can be worshipped through five forms: Guru, Ganesha, Shiva, Vishnu and Durga.
2. Teach the child to repeat, every morning, a verse each to the Guru, Ganesha, Shiva, Vishnu and Durga. This must be done before the family shrine, with folded hands.
3. Whenever possible, narrate stories of spiritual heroes, especially, of young ones like Dhruva, Prahlada, Nachiketa, Upamanyu, and others. These stories live a deep impression on young minds and will help in the future.
4. For the body, we have physical exercises, gymnastics, etc. For the mind, we have mental exercises like concentration. So, teach the child to meditate. There is no better exercise than the attempt at meditation for some minutes. This helps the child concentrate his mind, and will positively help in his studies in the future.
5. Swami Vivekananda has repeatedly said that faith in oneself and faith in God are absolutely essential. Encourage little acts of the child and build up his faith.

AGE GROUP TWO: between the 5th and the 10th year

MENTAL LEVEL

1. Let the children be taught to discipline themselves little by little: obedience, respect for elders, etc.
2. Let the little ones be taught to do little services—washing their cups, watering plants, etc, for instance.
3. Acts of selflessness and helpfulness must be rewarded.

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

1. Encourage the children to read children's Ramayana and Mahabharata. These two epics are not just histories but essence of human culture. Apart from the story value, children will gain tremendous energy.
2. Encourage children to make some verses of the Bhagavadgita by heart.
3. Encourage children to repeat *Medha Suktam* daily. This will awaken the intellect.
4. Invest the male child with the sacred thread at the right age, and encourage him to repeat the Gayatri Mantra daily.
5. Encourage the child to do some form of simple worship every day, apart from meditation.
6. The main problem with children is this: they do not find sufficient opportunities to express their creativity. So, organise some form of musical training—which is also a part of ancient Indian culture.
7. When the children are about 9-10 years old, let them be encouraged to read good books, the lives of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda- Holy Mother, and so on. The more they read, the more they think positive thoughts, the better.

AGE GROUP TWO: between the 10th and the 15th year

MENTAL LEVEL

1. This is the period of growth and development in children. This is the period when parents can contribute immensely by being alert without disturbing the children's freedom.
2. Children of this age must be encouraged to read the history of India from authentic sources. History, according to Vivekananda, is important.
3. Children must be encouraged to read inspiring books—classics—from the past.
4. They must be given training in yogasanas.
5. Sanskrit and culture go together according to Swami Vivekananda. This is the particular period of life when children should be taught Sanskrit. There are various courses online too.

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

1. The mind of the young person between 10 and 15 years is flexible and yet desirous of liberty. Without hurting the sense of liberty, parents can encourage the child to practice repeating the mantra and stotras.
2. Children must be encouraged to meditate daily for some time. Meditation, apart from being the means of spiritual knowledge, is also for concentration and excellence in life.
3. Children must be taught to respect parents and elders by touching their feet.
4. Children must be encouraged to go with parents to pilgrimages instead of wasting money on wasteful trips.
5. Children must be taught the power of physical and mental purity. They must be encouraged to read at least one Upanishad and cultivate love for God.