Zero Tolerance For Child Battering
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MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Zero Tolerance For Child Battering

Swami Bhavaharananda and Swami Shivapremananda

I personally feel that punishment and fear are natural outcomes of the insufficiency and failures on the side of both parents and their wards. There should not be any kind of oppressing domination, physical or otherwise, by either parents or children. Such domination only proves that we are still at the instinctual level only--animal or human. It shows that we have not yet been able to rise above such reactions and situations.

Imaginative pro-action as well as creative planning for a higher life through a cool and impassionate approach will bring out from within us more patience, sympathy, love and affection. All that is cruel, ugly and revengeful is best avoided while dealing with human relationships. An aesthetic, objective approach will bring forth better results, no doubt.

Corporal punishment does not always bring the desired result. I personally experienced this while once in charge of a school for boys. A strong well-built senior pushed a junior from a height, resulting in a head injury to the junior and profuse bleeding. There was no hostility between them. He just pushed

playfully, not realizing the outcome. I, being witness to the suffering of the victim, wanted to punish the wrongdoer (according to me) so that he, too, would feel at least some of the pain which he had inflicted on a junior. I wanted to cane him twice or thrice and asked him to put out his hand to cane him on the palms. The boy, who had come from a stock which had seen much fight, blood and suffering refused to obey me despite my asking him three times. I just wanted to make him understand the pain and the consequent events he had inflicted on an innocent boy younger and weaker than himself. I even explained to him patiently that only by suffering pain would he realize the consequence of his irresponsible act. But nothing worked, so in desperation I caned him twice on his thighs and once on his buttocks. Being a very fair complexioned, chubby boy, the cane left angry red marks on his body. But, strangest of all, the boy neither cried in pain nor requested me to excuse him. But I was in tears, since I felt defeated in front of a child. Feeling sorry, I took him to my room, applied ointment on his welts and gave him some cool drinks which he took with the same stoic attitude. Children are made of such stern stuff. This made me think, "Maybe I had a feeling of defeatism which I unconsciously imposed on this boy physically. Maybe an affectionate gesture would have made the boy realize the pain he had caused the younger boy!" Punishment with love at the most can be tolerated, but need not be encouraged at all. The danger of corporal punishment lies in that it will produce an attitude of challenge, to defy and to oppose any kind of punishment, however beneficial it may be to the punished. Before resorting to punishment, especially corporal, one should think and act wisely.

SWAMI BHAVAHARANANDA

Any kind of physical violence has a brutalizing influence on the

perpetrator and the perpetrated against. A widespread occurrence upon defenseless children in most societies, it speaks of a highly uncivilized form of behavior. It is an expression of the brutish instinct of physical might. Provoked by a weaker person, sheer bodily strength gives vent to intolerance in the form of violence, such as in wife-beating, which is also widespread nearly everywhere.

Considering that most children are inclined to resist being disciplined as they grow up, it is understandable that parents become irritated, lose patience and, thus, take recourse to violence on the spur of the moment. But violence inevitably marks the psyche of a child, especially when it occurs repeatedly. If children are sure of the security of the love of their parents, as adults they will forgive their ill-tempered violence, but if not, their grudge will be permanent and unforgiving. In such a case, no parents could expect their children to respect the injunction from our scriptures, the Vedas, matri devo bhavah, pitri devo bhavah, "May your mother be a Goddess, May your father be a God." Awesome is the power of the parents over their children who are totally dependent on them and also totally defenseless. Thus, it is morally imperative to all parents that such a power should never be abused.

Nowhere in any Hindu scripture is violence against children enjoined. Ahimsa pararno dharmah, (nonviolence is a supreme religious injunction) is a basic teaching of Hinduism. Nonviolence is the first restraint (the first yama) in raja yoga. In the Hindu tradition, the mother sings to her child the lullaby: shuddosi, buddhosi, niranjanosi (You are a pure one, intelligent one, innocent are you.) All parents should learn from the Hindu

scriptures how to raise their children: first of all, by personal example, with clear-cut guidance, with firmness and understanding, love and consideration, patience and tolerance, never failing to explain the reason why of any discipline required. They may complain, but if they know their parents mean well, do not have double standards, and unselfishly love them, they will obey and grow up reasonably well.

SWAMI SHIVAPREMANANDA

SWAMI BHAVAHARANANDA, 69, is head of the Ramakrishna Mission in Mumbai and author (under the pen name Ananda) of spiritual works, most recently Myth, Symbol and Language.

SWAMI SHIVAPREMANANDA, 72,former private secretary to Swami Sivananda, taught Yoga-Vedanta in Rishikesh and now directs large centers in South America in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile.