Keeping Secrets, the First Step in Leaving Home
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Keeping Secrets, the First Step in Leaving Home

Hindu Dharma values family togetherness as a central virtue. By growing together, we avoid drifting apart.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

How to strengthen family ties is a very important question these days. It is said that Jawaharlal Nehru was instrumental in breaking up the extended family structure in his attempt to industrialize India. After that, once-tightly-knit families really suffered as age-old family ties became loosened. The wealth of extended families dispersed in many directions as nuclear families formed and money was unnecessarily spent to maintain the ever-increasing needs of a multiplicity of households.

Let us explore what a family actually is. People seem to have forgotten. In America before the First World War there were wonderful, well-established, large joint families, with twenty, thirty or more people all living in one home. Everyone had chores. And they all knew their place within the family structure. They loved and cared for each other, and mother was always in the home. We may be a long time in rebuilding family togetherness to the point when the extended family is back in vogue, but meanwhile we are still faced with maintaining family unity. The Hindu Students' Council, whom we feature in this issue, are working hard to rediscover their roots and strengthen family values. Our staff had many inspiring interviews with bright young Hindus in America who are working in their communities to make a difference and reestablish the old culture of caring for one another. We congratulate and welcome their efforts, for they are the leaders of the tomorrow.

I tell parents who seek my advice that one way to keep a family together is to show all members that you want to be with them, that you need them in your life. Not, "Get out of my life, you are bothering me. I have other things to do. I have goals in life that don't include you." This hurtful attitude is based on the belief that when children reach age 18 they should leave home and support themselves. This pattern is the result of two world wars, when every able-bodied young man left home to join the army. This callousness on the part of parents leads to alienation from their children, who then begin leading independent lives. That leads to the first step in leaving home: keeping secrets from the parents.

With each secret kept, a small distance is created. A large distance is created when five or ten secrets accumulate and deception becomes a habit. When too many secrets mount up, parents and their children don't talk to each other much anymore. Why do secrets create a distance? Because every secret must be protected. This requires cleverness, sneaking around to keep the matter hidden, even lying. Secrets give rise to angry outbursts to keep others away, such as "I'm insulted that you would even suspect me of that!" Arguments erupt that go unresolved, and an impenetrable barrier is established.

Mom and Dad are heard saying to one another, "They're so different now. I can't reach them anymore." Of course, the children have been taught to be cautious, in a sense forced into keeping secrets, lest unloving parents curse them or beat them without mercy for transgressions large and small. Many are afraid of the wrath of mothers and fathers who rule their family by fear. In today's world it is so easy to leave home. It is so easy for the family to break up. It's even expected. Husbands' and wives' keeping secrets from each other creates a similar distance. The final divorce decree started with the first secret.

In an ideal family, children should be able to tell their mother and father anything and everything. The parents should want to understand and realize that if they don't understand but misunderstand, they participate in the break-up of their own family. Of course, it might be hard for them to deal with certain experiences their children are having, but all they have to do is look back in their own life, actions and private thoughts to know that their children

are living out the same fantasies. The children repeat the still-active karmas of their parents. Children are born into families with karmic patterns that are compatible with their own. I can predict what young people are going to do in their future, and the temptations that will come up, if I know the karmic patterns of their parents. With this knowledge, it is easy to guide them through life, helping them avoid temptations and experiences that their parents lived through.

All of these experiences are set into motion by the individual himself, by his own past actions. Every experience, no matter how difficult or embarrassing, is a good experience, providing the lesson to be learned is extracted from it. Experiences that are unresolved and repressed can be very burdensome for the individual. Living Hindu Dharma makes us our own psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor and problem-solver. This is because one slowly becomes the watcher of his mind thinking, the watcher of his emotions feeling, acting and reacting.

Holding the family together can be summed up in one word: love. Love is understanding. Love is acceptance. Love is making somebody feel good about his experience, whether the experience is a good one or not. Love is giving the assurance that there is no need to keep secrets, no matter what has happened. Love is wanting to be with members of the family. A father who wants to hold his family together rushes home from work. He doesn't think to himself, "Why should I go home to all their problems when I can continue working at the clinic for awhile longer." Loving parents, father or mother, want to be with their children, and they let them know this in so many ways. They face up to problems with love, trust and understanding. They know that problems are only problems because of lack of understanding. They also know, through living Hindu Dharma, that love and trust bring understanding and acceptance of the lessons of the experiences, which are natural manifestations of individual birth karmas and collective family karmas. This approach keeps the family strong and cohesive. In a home where Hindu Dharma is lived, no one has a private life. No one has a secret life.

When harmony persists in the home, harmony is in the community, and harmony is in the country. When love and trust is in the family, love and trust

extend to the local community, and the country becomes stronger and more secure. Making strong distinctions between good and bad does not help youths understand their desires and temptations. The only path through their lives is one experience after another. They evolve into better people through understanding their experiences.

Children and young adults who have been holding secrets and now feel that it is time to become close to their family again should tell their parents they want to be completely open and disclose what they have been hiding. Then give parents a few days to adjust and prepare to listen. Once reconciliation takes place, hugging and talking will begin again, and the warm, loving feeling of family will take over the home. Something magical happens when secrets are brought out in the open among loved ones. Many youths have told me their parents were surprisingly understanding. Secrets are psychic burdens, and releasing them, youths tell me, gives a great sense of upliftment, like a balloon dropping its counterweight and soaring skyward. They feel instantly closer to their parents, free of guilt, happier, less stressful, no longer defensive and more interested in helping others.

One of the biggest areas of secrecy is sex. It is important that parents give their children an education in sexual behavior early on. This will also bring and keep the family togetherness. Many parents find it difficult to talk about sex, drugs and the various kinds of temptations that the world offers today. If this is the case, it is best to seek community or professional help. Not talking leaves children unprepared. Parents force their children into secrecy by showing these are areas that cannot or will not be faced in the light of day. The home then becomes like an empty house. All begin wishing that conditions will improve, but they never do.

We can now see that the first secret is the issue, for it leads to many, many more, be it on the part of the children keeping secrets from their parents, wives from husbands, husbands from wives, student from guru, and on and on. The solution is to follow the yamas and niyamas , the do's and do not's of Hindu Dharma. These are the natural laws of Sanatana Dharma. These are the human ethics that hold families together, marriages together, communities together, countries together. These eternal Vedic precepts are for everyone, no matter who they are.