

Nurturing Your Kids With Compassion

Words of Pujya Pramodaben Chitrabhanu



On 24th April 2008, Pujya Pramodaben Chitrabhanu gave a talk at SCVP school entitled 'Nurturing Your Kids With Love and Compassion'. The article below is an edited and abridged version of her inspirational and practical talk, based on a transcript.

Nurturing Yourself With Compassion

When we talk about nurturing, I feel it is very important that we as parents nurture ourselves. As long as we do not nurture ourselves, it is very hard for us to inculcate those values, that love, that compassion in our children. Nurturing your own self - what does that mean? To take care of ourselves with love, warmth and compassion. Most of the time we are not kind to ourselves. One way or the other we abuse ourselves. So Jain dharma says that first take care of who you are, then you'll be able to understand others. But if we don't know who we are, we won't be able to understand our children. We hurt ourselves with our own emotions and passions and that dents our consciousness and when our consciousness is dented whatever we impart has no effect on others because we ourselves are scarred, hurt. So the healing must start with ourselves. We have to heal ourselves from within and understand that any negative thought, any negative word, any negative action hurts my self.

"To nurture children with love and compassion, it has to start with us."

So when we want to give to our children the first thing we have to do is to be the best role model. When I used to do camps in America with the young children they were aged 16-25. In many of my camps with children I never used to allow the parents to come. The common thing that all of the children said to me was that 'my parents want us to go to *derasar* (temple) or our parents want us to do religious activities. Go to pathshala (Jain classes). But when we ask our parents they don't know anything about it and they are fighting like dogs and cats at home and they want us to be the best when we don't have an example to emulate. How are we going to listen to them and why should we listen to them?' So I really feel this subject is not for the children. To nurture children with love and compassion, it has to start with

us. As long as we don't become a role model, I don't think we have a right to guide our children.

"...set free the imprisoned splendour within."

Someone asked Robert Browning, wonderful poet, 'what is your mission in life?' And he said 'to set free the imprisoned splendour within.' We don't love ourselves. If we love ourselves, we would not get angry. If we love ourselves we would not be jealous. If we love ourselves we are not going to be deceitful or greedy. Nurturing means getting rid of these passions. Don't hurt yourself. Don't be unkind. When we are unkind, we are destroying the beauty within. We are diminishing the splendour that we are holding inside.

Giving Guidance

We want the best for our children and sometimes we drive them to such an extent. We want them to fulfil our desires and that's very unkind. That's not right because each individual comes with their own likings, their own destiny, their own scheme in life. We can be a guide but we cannot impose our desires on them. Don't set goals for them, let them set their own goals. That will give them freedom to make their choices but I feel that Indian parents especially feel they know more than their children. They want to set certain goals for them. Help them make good choice but don't impose your choice on them. Make them understand if the choices are not right but ultimately the decision should be their.

Art of Communication

We have to watch the tone of our voice. How do we communicate? There is the tone of domination and there is the tone of understanding. So when we dominate, they are going to resist. But if there is an understanding, they will not resist. Everything is measured and experienced through the tone of a person. That's why Bhagwan Mahavir says our language should be so sweet, so gentle, that only few words you have to utter and your message is conveyed. You don't need hundreds of words. A few and they penetrate the other person's heart because there is gentleness, sweetness, kindness, caring. When Bhagwan used to give his *deshna* (religious sermon at *samavasarana*) everyone loved to hear. Why was that? He didn't speak a different language, but it was his way of conveying. Not putting anyone down, not judging anyone, not trying to make anyone inferior or

Nurturing Your Kids With Compassion

Words of Pujya Pramodaben Chitrabhanu

superior. He saw the soul, self, consciousness, atma as the same, no difference. He saw that the soul is potentially capable of becoming parmatma. Each soul the same but because of the condition, karmas, everyone of us are different. In the same way our children are different. Every individual's abilities is different, every child is different. They come with their previous karmas so what one child can do the other cannot do so accept them as they are. Behind everything we must ask, is there love in my communication? Is there compassion in my communication?

“Is there compassion in my communication?”

Make Time to Praise and Discipline

Don't praise the child all the time, but catch your child when he is being good. For example the child has done his bed. So you say 'wow', you appreciate that. At the wrong time we keep on appreciating. I have seen mothers who are so busy with their own life they don't have time so when the child is naughty they give them candies, gifts, to quiet down the child but we are really spoiling the children. We don't have time and are so tired so the easiest way is to please the child so we are really hurting the growth of the child and the discipline of the child.

Spend more time with your children. Give them the best. These are the formative years for them to receive from us. Once they have grown up, what you have given them in the basic foundation years, that is going to stay with them for the rest of their lives. The other thing is be consistent with your discipline. Don't be relaxed, we have to be consistent. We tell them something and we don't do it, so they don't trust us or take us seriously so they do whatever they want to. Take lots of time, spend time with the children but everyone complains they don't have time. From morning to evening we are very busy earning bread and butter. I don't think it's earning just bread and butter, we are earning more than that. And still we want more. We have to make a choice. What do we want? Simple living and give best to the children or pursue the material wealth and lose our children? The choice is ours.

Nurturing Self-Esteem

Nurture your child's self-esteem. Many times we dent their self-esteem. We are not aware of it how much we are hurting them by not respecting them. We have to respect them so we have to nurture their self-esteem. I don't think it's only with children, it's everyone - our communication stops because we don't respect the other person. There is no reverence. So have compassion, so much love, that you understand where the person is coming from and treat that child as though you are going to treat someone your age - for self-esteem there is no age.

Striving for Parmatma through Love

I'm talking about love not attachment, because they are both very different. In attachment, there is an illusion: that we are all living right now, that it's my children, my husband, my house, my brother, my mother, my father. That mineness that we have is our illusion. That illusion comes from mo (delusion). If you remove that illusion and there is love then we see the atma as atma. We only come together to fulfil our karmas and when the time comes we depart to God. Many times people say 'it is so difficult to see that way'. If something happens to our family members, it is so difficult. I say, of course it is difficult, that is why you'll get perfection - because it is difficult. I say it is difficult but it is not impossible. Bhagwan said you can become parmatma so Prabhu saw something in us so he is telling us, reminding us you can do that so why do you think it is difficult?

“I stopped preaching to them, I started practicing.”

Final Thoughts

Children look up to mother and father for a different reason. They want warmth inspiration love from the mother and toughness, decision, confidence from the father. If both parents do their bit you I bet you your children will turn out to be the best. Today I am very proud of my children because I stopped preaching to them, I started practicing. I thought if I practice, they are going to learn because they are very open, they notice and see everything. They pick up, and absorb. They are like a sponge. They absorb everything in the surrounding and environment. Show your compassion to them, inculcate the values you have inherited from your parents and guide them on the right path. Before doing anything you have to nurture the child *within* with love, care, warmth, compassion. ■

Transcript and compilation by Jyoti Mehta.
