

# Children and Vedanta

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**Susan:** Hello, Sundari. I have read *How to Attain Enlightenment* many times and listened to the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Atma Bodh* and self-enquiry teachings.

My question is related to my children, five-year-old twins and a three-year-old, all boys.

They are now asking about God and prayer and similar, and while we do talk about *dharma* and *karma* broadly I was wondering if you could point me to a text that could help me to talk about the non-dual nature of the world in a child-appropriate way. Is there a chance to get them clear from the get-go if possible...?

~ Thanks in advance, Susan

**Sundari:** Hello, Susan. How fortunate and blessed your children are to have a parent who knows who they are and can live the truth for them. Vedanta is not about scripture, it is about you, awareness. It is all very well to be well-versed in the scripture (reading James' book is very important) but remember that what is important is living the truth of who you are as the self - as an apparent individual. This individual who goes by the name of Susan is really awareness and plays a number of apparent roles as a *jiva*, one of them being that of "parent." Your children are your *dharma* field; they are also awareness playing the role of children. For awareness appearing as Susan in the role of mother your job is to mirror self-knowledge by living it for "your" children. Children learn most from how the parent lives and what they value, not so much from what they say.

There is no Vedantic scripture that is geared for children per se because Vedanta assumes that the mind that is ready to hear Vedanta is qualified and mature, i.e. has negated the objects and has a burning desire for *moksa* among the other qualifications. It is very difficult for children to do this because they are usually not ready for self-knowledge until much later in life. All the same, children are not children, they are awareness, and awareness responds to awareness. So if you treat them as such their true nature as awareness will respond and the connection between themselves as a *jiva*, or person, and themselves as awareness will be ordinary and natural, which is the ideal. If you want to work with scripture you could start with *Tattva Bodh*; that is the simplest text and explains the basic terminology. Many of the *Puranas*, which are the mythological literature derived from the *Upanishads* and based on the truth of the *Vedas*, are available in comic form in India. Go on the internet to see if you can source them for your children.

When they ask questions about God start with the basics by explaining that God is one of many names that people use to explain how people should behave. I told my daughter that most people think that God is a big person who is much better than them and who rewards good behaviour or punishes bad behaviour but that is not how it really is. I told her that God is not a person but really a name that explains how everything she can see, hear, feel, touch and taste comes to be here, because God is what everything is made up of, which is love. I told her that this is who she is too, that God is not outside but "inside." God is responsible for keeping the world

going because God knows everything, and even though people are made up of God they don't know everything. Sometimes bad or sad things happen but it is not because God wants them to happen.

Find your voice with them and explain in clear language using simple analogies the true nature of reality. It is difficult to explain the impersonal nature of the *dharma* field (or God/*Isvara*), to Western children particularly, but children everywhere are far more intelligent and able to absorb complex ideas than so-called adults give them credit for. If you make straight talking normal in your household that is how their minds will develop. Never forget that you are talking to awareness, not to a "child." Give them knowledge, educate them correctly and teach them how to discriminate when they rub up against the inevitable ignorance that life in *samsara* is run by. If you don't fully know how to answer them be honest and tell them that you are still working some things out and you don't want to give them wrong information. It is okay to let them know you don't have all the answers but you are trying to find them; this builds trust.

The greatest gift you can give "your" children is to know who you are and who they are and so see them, hear them and pay attention to them as awareness. Be totally transparent with them and speak to them as the self. Teach them that they do not need you to be happy or safe because they are already happy and safe, because who they really are is unborn and never dies. No matter what happens, nothing can take this away from them. Never make promises that you cannot keep or pretend that there are any guarantees in life; tell them what they can handle but tell them the truth in every situation. Children need honesty.

If you do not have a devotional practice start one. Make an altar with some pictures of you and your children, place flowers and a candle there and any object that appeals to you that is a symbol of awareness. It can be anything because there isn't anything that is not awareness. Teach your children why you are doing this and why prayer and thanksgiving is very important: because everything is really "a part" of who they are so they are giving back to themselves (and to everyone) when they give thanks and pray. As everything and everyone is made up of love whatever they do to someone else or to any part of the creation they are really doing to themselves. In this way you teach them why non-injury is such an important value; you teach them to love and respect themselves and so-called "others" as well as the environment.

When they want something, ask them why they want it; get them to examine their desires even if you don't necessarily try to divert them. Explain to them that happiness is an inside job; it does not come from "things." It is not easy to do this because children are subject to an intense assault by the collective mindset whose sole intention is to programme them to be dedicated *samsaris*. Much depends on the parent, how they live and what they value. Just get them into the habit of thinking about what they want - and their likes and dislikes. Teach them to observe their thoughts and the body; when they are old enough explain how the *gunas* function to create the conditioning that makes them like or dislike something. Help them to objectify the body and the mind, their emotions and thoughts. Turn the *guna* observation into a game of detection, make it fun. In this way they will learn that it is not what they have that makes them happy but who they are.

Most of all, tell them often, with great love and depth, how wonderful and beautiful and perfect they are! Teach them to trust the veracity of their own inner knowing; build their self-confidence so that they trust themselves. Show your love in every

way you can, build their self-esteem so that no matter what *Isvara* throws at them they will be able to cope with it.

I hope this helps!

~ Much love to you, Sundari