



Harmonious Homes

———— Human Values Parenting ————

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**"All are Children of God"¹:
Human Values Parenting Extends
Beyond Traditional Parenting**



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The guiding principles of parenting as explained by Sri Sathya Sai Baba is thought provoking and goes beyond the realms of traditional parenting. As doting parents we dream, plan and act to the best of our intentions. We want our children to succeed and excel in all they do. Think back to all the dreams you had as you saw your baby growing up - they are innumerable. Swami shifts our thinking of ourselves as parents from a worldly to a spiritual dimension and redefines our role as parents and the child's role.

In this month's guide, we will be seeking insight into Sri Sathya Sai Baba's notions of parenting and reflecting on how they impact our personal outlook as parents.





During a conversation with Swami in 2001, a devotee asked, *“How can I be a good parent?”* Swami immediately responded to the devotee, *“Are you a good person?”* He then remained silent for a while to let the magnitude of the question sink into devotee, then smiled and carried on, *“If you are a good person, you are a good parent. Only when you are good, will your children be good. Children watch and learn from parents. So, parents must set good examples for their children.”* He paused for a moment and then continued, *“If parents are persons of good character and exemplary conduct, the children will become persons of good character and develop good habits.”*

This conversation provides a clear insight into Swami’s vision of parenting - *“Parenting is more for parents than children. It is a sadhana for their spiritual transformation and self-growth. Children are the direct beneficiary of this transformation.”*

This vision of Sai forms the very basis of Human Values Parenting. It differs from and extends beyond Traditional Parenting in three fundamental ways which are discussed in the following sections.

Fundamental Focus of Parenting

The notion that parenting is more for parents than children is the first fundamental difference between Human Values parenting and traditional parenting.

In traditional parenting, the emphasis is centered around the responsibility of parents guiding the physical, mental and social development of children, taking care of their needs and helping them succeed in life.



In contrast, the focus of Human Values Parenting is on the spiritual growth of parents, their efforts to set right examples and create a harmonious home for children to grow, manifest their innate human values, and become responsible citizens of the community.



“Embodiments of the Divine Atma! If children are to be persons of good character, adhering to good practices, the parents should be of good character and exemplary conduct. The great teacher, Adi Sankaracharya, was the child of parents who were highly virtuous and noble in their conduct. For the great name attained by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda, the credit goes to their parents. Many great men achieved name and fame by following in the footsteps of their parents.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 25, Ch #11, 1992

“If you are truthful, just be calm under provocation and full of love in all your dealings with others, these children too will grow up in sathya (truth), dharma (righteousness), shanthi (peace) and prema (love). If you tell your son, when you are actually at home, to speak through the telephone, when someone is calling, to reply that father is not at home, you are sowing a poisonous seed, which will become a huge tree.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. 13, #3, 1975

To help us understand this, Swami explains in a private conversation with a devotee: *“Children learn from their parents through observation, especially during the first five years of their life. So, parents must always be good, do good and act as role models for their children. Child’s body, health and mind depend on their parent’s lifestyle. Whatever the parents do, the children will do. Blossoming of a child’s mind and behavior depends on their home. Parents play a critical role in creating the right home for their children. A harmonious home creates happy children.”*

Ownership of children

The second fundamental difference of Human Values Parenting relates to the “ownership” of children. In traditional parenting, parents consider children as their possessions and do whatever they feel is right for their well-being.

Parents usually tend to steer children in the direction that is consistent with their own beliefs, experiences, perceptions and aspirations in life.

However, in Human Values parenting, Sri Sathya Sai Baba explains, again in a private conversation with a devotee: *“Children do not come to you, but only through you. Children are gifts of God – parents should raise them as representatives of God. They are not your possession, nor are they an extension of your ego. Children are innocent and pure, ready to be molded into an image of God, a bud to be helped to blossom in all its Divine Glory.”*

“Parents must feel that they are servants appointed by the Lord to tend the little souls that are born in their households, as the gardener tends to the trees in the garden of the Master. Above all, realize children are precious treasures. Yours is the great task of helping them up to become servants of God and sincere aspirants of the spiritual path.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol. I, Ch #11, 1958

“All are gifts of God. You must treat all possessions in that spirit. You must take good care of them as long as you have the responsibility for their proper use and maintenance. That is your duty. As long as you live in the world, you have the responsibility to take care of your wife, children and possessions. But you must regard this as an obligation imposed by God. You must not get attached to them as your possessions. Most people in the world, however, are deeply attached to kinsfolk and properties. How lasting are these possessions? You can never know when you may have to leave all of them behind. Hence, the proper attitude for men is to recognise one's duty towards others and consider everything as a gift from God.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 30, Ch #19, 1997

As we start to comprehend and embrace the wisdom of Sai, we slowly begin to understand and accept the reality that every child is a divine gift given to parents to foster and love as a service to God. Parents must feel that they are appointed by God to nurture and mold this child into a good human being in the image of God in His Divine Glory. When parenting is viewed from this perspective, it offers parents a unique opportunity to serve God and provides a beautiful pathway for spiritual progress.



Duty and Standards of Parenting



The third fundamental difference between traditional parenting and Human Values Parenting involves duty and standards established for measuring parenting success. In traditional parenting, parents believe it is their duty to raise productive children and provide them with what is needed to make them successful in life. Success is always measured in terms of material value and extent of individual accumulations. The physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development of children is constrained by the physical world they live in.

In Human Values Parenting, the duty of parents is to always remain a good person and an ideal role model for their children and focus on nurturing the child's spiritual values for the good of the community. Success is defined in terms of the goodness of the child and the intensity of their service to humanity. The physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development is continuously evolving and unconstrained by the environment.

“Today's children aspire for wealth, power and friendship but not for character. What is the use of wealth, power and friendship bereft of character? Money comes and goes but one must teach them morality and righteousness. Earlier, children were taught such sacred values. Today parents want their children to pursue higher studies and become great, whereas earlier, parents preferred their children to be good rather than becoming great. Since those parents wanted their children to be good, Bharat stood as an ideal to all nations of the world.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol 34, Ch #19, 2001



“It is the parents who lead children to the highest levels or cause their fall to the lowest depths. Parents are concerned solely about the material welfare of their children and have no concern for their moral and spiritual well-being. When a child is born, the parents desire that he should be educated, sent abroad, encouraged to make as much money as possible there by whatever means. This is all that they teach their children. People today earn money in so many different ways, from begging to dacoity. It is not wealth that is important. Character is primary. Parents do not teach their children to cultivate good qualities. They do not control children who go astray. They condone the lapses of the children and often encourage them in their bad habits. They are encouraged in their wrong ways even as Duryodhana was encouraged by his father, Dhritrashtra. It is because of such parents that the children today take the wrong courses.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 25, #II, 1992

“Verily, they alone are fit to be called parents who bring up such virtuous children. Prahlada declared, 'He alone is a father who tells his son: Child, realize God. He is a true Guru who leads the disciple to God.'”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 25, #11, 1992



Swami explained this further in a private interview with a devotee: *“The primary duty of a parent is to over-see their child’s spiritual development, to awaken in them the Divine knowledge to connect with God, namely, that they are God, that they are no different from God. Good parenting does not stop until a child fully embraces the five human values and serves the community to its full potential.”*

And always, whether children or parents,
Swami reminds us who we really are:

“You are amrutaputras (children of immortality)...you are verily the embodiments of the changeless, eternal principle.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol. 38, Ch #4, 2005

“YOU, children of the Eternal! You are not lumps of flesh. You are embodiments of the Eternal. You are repositories of Bliss. Your hearts are shrines of the Divine. The boys and girls of today should realize this basic truth. They represent the future of humanity. They are the guardians of the nation's culture. The greatness and prosperity of the country depend on them. The nation's future will be determined by how the lives of the young children are shaped.”

- Sri Sathya Sai Speaks Vol 16, Ch #31, 1983



Discussion Questions

1. Can you give two examples of how your children have helped your spiritual evolution?
2. Is Swami's vision of parenting surprising to you? If so, how?
3. Does this vision differ from your current parenting style? If so, how? Does it differ from the goals you had while growing up?
4. If Swami were to ask you the question, "Are you a good parent?" - what would your answer be? Reflect on your spiritual beliefs, approach to parenting, and the outcomes you have experienced to answer this question.

References of pictures and Illustrations

- freepik.com
- "Home" drawing by Pavithra Krishnan