

# the art of discipline

by darlene d'arezzo



**S***vadhyaya*, translated as self-inquiry, self-study or reflection on oneself, is the fourth of the five *niyamas* of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. The *niyamas* are personal disciplines, or guidelines, pertaining to our daily activities. They are evident in our actions, words and thoughts. *Svadhyaya*—consciously examining our own nature—opens us to an understanding of ourselves (and others). Classically, sacred texts and spiritual teachers were considered to be the sources for one's self-awakening. To apply *svadhyaya* to the modern context, countless activities can lead us to ourselves — painting, reading, writing, walking and certainly, raising children.

Discipline is an integral part of the parenting process and can be an emotionally charged issue for many. Parents may worry about misbehavior and how it should be dealt with. Some parents may become angry, frustrated, confused and discouraged by ongoing behavior problems.

Effective discipline is a learning process for both parents and children. The word discipline derives its root from a latin verb meaning, *to learn*, as does the word *disciple*, and can be interpreted as the desire to learn or, may be understood as an educational or training process — a process that requires patience, planning and practice, as does *tapas* (self discipline).

Discipline serves to create and maintain a safe and sound environment for children to learn intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Discipline teaches children to exercise self-control, make good choices and take responsibility for their actions. Effective discipline produces confident, considerate, responsible and independent children.

Discipline is not the same as punishment. Punishment intimidates, harms and humiliates children. Punishment focuses on past misbehavior and the idea that pain is part of the learning process. It does not help children behave better nor does it teach children how to account for and be responsible for their actions. Punishment may be physical: hitting, spanking and paddling. It may be psychological as in disapproval, isolation and shaming. It may be verbal as in using harsh words. It may also include withholding rewards and penalization.

Children who are constantly or harshly punished often suffer depression, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness. They are also at risk for emotional and behavioral disorders and exhibit increased levels of aggression and anti-social behavior. Punishment forces submission, whereas discipline encourages and provides children with the tools to self-discipline.

Disciplining our children begins with our own practice of discipline, or *tapas*. *Tapas*, often translated as “fiery discipline” or burning desire for reunion with the Source through will power, purification and austerity, is the third *niyama*. *Tapas* may also be understood as consistency, commitment and great effort — as parents, caregivers and teachers we can be a living teaching example to children by being consistent and dedicated and working hard for their benefit.

*Tapas*, *svadhyaya* and *ishvara pranidhana* (recognition of and devotion to our Source) are all parts of the trifold practice Patanjali calls *kriya yoga* — yoga in the form of action. *Tapas* cannot be practiced separately from *svadhyaya*. Disciplining our children

requires practice of *svadhyaya* alongside *tapas*. Therefore, disciplining our children becomes a vehicle for our own self-inquiry, growth and transformation. That is, we cannot effectively discipline our children without learning something about ourselves. And, it is through discipline that children too begin self-reflection.

While no parent is perfect and the cultivation of discipline is an ongoing process, ongoing presence and a strong intention are the foundation for healthy results. Here are some ideas to reflect on while disciplining children:

- How and why am I responding to my child's misbehavior?
- What does my child see in me? Am I modeling what I would like to see in my child: friendliness, compassion, good will, good eating habits, appropriate ways to share and play, etc.
- What are my choices in this situation? Which choice is the best one?
- What are the consequences of my actions and/or behavior?

Yoga is a discipline of freedom — a freedom that comes through self-awareness. Living with others, cultivating positive, harmonious relationships, begins when we learn to live with ourselves.

Children who are disciplined come to understand their own behavior, respect themselves and others. Even when a parent is not present, well-disciplined children can reflect on their actions and choices and act in a compassionate, mutually respectful manner.

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