



Chinmaya Mission Peoria Peoria, IL Bala Vihar Program

Why Children need to attend Bala Vihar?

- Bala Vihar program imparts knowledge of our ancient culture, and *inspires* them to *live up to it* with *correct understanding*
- Children learn *timeless values*
- Children learn *how to make value-based choices*
- Children learn *how to think and act*

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Children in the US find it challenging to answer the fundamental question “What makes us a Hindu?” Aside from being born into a Hindu family, understanding the philosophical basis of what makes us unique as a Hindu is an elusive goal. With out the guidance of a guru, understanding our scriptures and religion is a hard task. This is where Chinmaya Mission Bala Vihar plays a crucial role of educating our children on *Sanaatana Dharma*.

The breadth and wealth of Sanaatana Dharma can offer important perspectives upon our lives and aspirations. Bala Vihar’s goal is to impart the Vedantic values of Sanaatana Dharma to our children. Sanaatana Dharma is unique in its unequivocal approach to Truth. Through Chinmaya Bala Vihar, children appreciate Sanaatana Dharma’s core concepts – (1) Truth is one and (2) The primary goal of life is to see the divinity within us and divinity around us. As parents, we give our children material gifts, but is there any greater gift than empowering them with the knowledge about their own unlimited potential?

“...It takes a village to raise a child...” Because of our ethnic differences, many children may develop an “identity crisis.” Bala Vihar boosts the confidence of our children to feel completely comfortable with their heritage, and recognize that out of diversity comes unity and strength.

Children learn to make value based choices

Decisions, decisions, decisions! Life of is full of choices. Between the time we get out of bed in the morning and until we go back to sleep at night, we make thousands of choices. In life one cannot possibly know the right decision unless one knows what ones duty is and one cannot know what one’s duty is unless one knows who one is. Identity - that is the root of it all. But then what is my identity. Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?

Do you not wonder about these questions? Based on the thousands of choices that we make, we seem to have different identities in life. How we manage our relationships through these different identities will totally determine how happy and successful or miserable and unsuccessful we are. If we view our identity as how others see us or as how we want others to see us, then we are merely succumbing to peer pressure and risk going down the wrong path. And that is where Bala Vihar comes in for the Children.

Bala Vihar helps children to discover and understand our heritage, our roots and in the process build ourselves a strong identity. In Bala Vihar, children learn about our rich cultural and spiritual heritage. Children learn the moral values and the fundamentals of the Hindu dharma through stories, drama, arts and discussion.

Children learn about core values such as speaking truth, moderation and self-control, and non-injury. Children learn that our religion encompasses the highest philosophical thoughts known to mankind and contrary to popular misconception Sanaatana Dharma or Hindu Dharma is not a religion of polytheist idol worshippers. In Bala Vihar children study great role models for inspiration. With such values children can explain why they do not eat meat or consider smoking, drinking or why they make other such choices.

Children learn that character is more important than personality. They learn that to worry is to waste time and energy and they can substitute worry and anxiety with prayer and action. Through good company (satsang) and discrimination (viveka) they gain the confidence to take the risk of being unpopular and saying no to those who want them to follow the *path of the pleasant* instead of the *path of the good*.

We all recognize that every choice has consequences. Bala Vihar provides the value-based education for children to make the right choices as they grow into responsible individuals who support the family, community and society.

Children learn Timeless Values

Chinmaya Mission Bala Vihar is a program designed to teach timeless values that allow us to truly enjoy life. Chinmaya Mission not only teaches people of all ages about the ultimate goal in life, but also on values and traits that will help everyone in everyday life.

At Bala Vihar, one learns to be kind, generous, loving, and a consummate role model. Children are taught the importance of courage, duty, and fairness; children are taught the definition of what is right, fair, and correct according to a given situation. At the end of the class, we meditate, to calm our minds. These qualities are essential in the real world and Bala Vihar reinforces them.

All of the morals above can be summed up in the Sanaatana Dharma values: values that are essential in today's world. These values include:

- *Dhrti: firmness or fortitude*. This ability is something all people should aspire for, to stick to your path is important.

- *Kshama: forgiveness.* As Swami Chinmayananda said "To forgive is to be forgiven".
- *Dama: self-control.* One must be controlled and content with what they have.
- *Asteya: non-stealing.* Such a trait is one of the basics of being a righteous person.
- *Shaucham: cleanliness or purity.* One has to remain clean and pure, and not engage in wrong acts, and keep one's mind/body/soul pure.
- *Indriya Nigrah: control of the sense organs.* One has to make sure they are not led astray by their sense organs. Bala Vihar helps gain mastery over senses through practice of japa/meditation and directing mind towards the Lord.
- *Dhi: discrimination between what is right and wrong.* One must know what one should do in a situation, and also what not to do.
- *Vidya: true spiritual knowledge of the lord.* We are constantly reminded of Vidya by reading holy books such as The Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata. These help us learn of the Lord clearly.
- *Satyam: truth and honesty.* Truth helps keep our integrity and is an important part of our moral character.
- *Akrodha: non-anger.* If we lose ourselves to anger, we will be unhappy after committing some rash and foolish act. Bala Vihar helps stop this by meditation, which calms your mind, by talking peacefully and calmly at all times, and by treating all others with respect.

Children learn how to Think and Act

Everybody face some obstacle or the other. There are people who may criticize and discourage us. Children are taught how to face obstacles without getting discouraged. When there are obstacles, one tends to blame on their parents, complain, find excuses or blame it on fate. Children are taught how to face the obstacles instead of getting discouraged. For many, fear of failure comes as an obstacle in the pursuit of their goals. Children are taught how to go beyond the fear of failure and take charge of their life.

Children and youth are taught

- Vision of Life,
- Vision of Action
- How to develop their intellect
- How to face obstacles
- How to face Success and failure
- How to gain Happiness
- How to serve
- How to take charge of their life.

Imagine... Your mind is at rest... You are always happy... Everything is perfect! Bala Vihar gives the children the means by which their imagination can become reality.