

Nourishment for the Soul of the Child

Bringing the Waldorf Impulse into the Home

By Penelope Youngfeather



During childhood the foundation is formed for one's creativity and sensitivity in adulthood. Children are deeply sensitive and extremely vulnerable to all they encounter, absorbing stimuli with their whole beings.

If a child has to deal with too much stimulus, he or she will, in defense, shut down the more sensitive parts of his or her being. This leads to the development of a hardened adult, cut off from the springs of sensitivity, compassion, imagination, and inspiration—a condition all too prevalent in today's world and increasing tremendously as our culture rushes headlong into advanced technology.

We can offer our children a great gift by extending the Waldorf sensitivity into our homes; by surrounding the children with warmth, rhythm, and simplicity, they are allowed to develop a sensitive center from which to meet the onrushing times.

Warmth

Physical warmth is vital to the healthy development of the organism. If a child is cold, she must draw heat and energy away from her developing organs to warm other parts of the body, thus weakening the vital organs. It is especially critical for the infant to be dressed warmly, in natural fibers that breathe. The baby does not have the ability to adjust its body temperature; the "modern" impulse to toughen the baby does just that: makes the baby TOUGH, losing much precious sensitivity that could be carried into adulthood. The infant needs to wear a hat, indoors and out, especially as long as the fontanelle is open, to protect this most sensitive area from over-exposure to heat, wind, and cold.

The child flourishes when he feels surrounded by an inner warmth, a soul warmth which arises from heart connections with other human beings and from a shared reverence for nature. "What a difference if I sing songs to my child or whether I place him in front of the television set. The gift of warmth that a child receives from a single song will foster what is living and growing in him which the television is barren in its coldness." (Dr. Herbert Kaufmann.)

Simplicity and Beauty

The realm of toys has grown exceedingly complex, often at the expense of the child's imagination. As toys become increasingly "sophisticated," some developed through "modern scientific and psychological methods to increase your baby's intelligence" or to keep the child "busy," the imagination suffers from atrophy, to wilt rather than flourish. The more simple and natural a toy is, the more a child will work with inner feelings and imagination to enliven the toy and game, thus strengthening the child's own faculties. Toys made from wood or wool absorb warmth and moisture from the child's hands and in that way too they become "enlivened." Toys, pictures, even colors, are food for the soul; and like the food we eat we continually need to choose between what is junk and what truly nourishes.

If we extend the Waldorf sensitivity into our homes, we support the child's developing his or her center from which to go out and meet the world. A visit to the Waldorf classrooms and the kindergarten can provide one with inspirations of beauty and simplicity in environment and playthings.

Rhythm

Rhythm is essential to all things which have life. Adults have learned to partially withdraw from natural rhythms, but the child is utterly bound up with organic rhythms. A consistency in the day to day timing of work and play, eating and sleeping leads to a healthy will development. "Nothing makes a child so wild and nervous as capriciousness on the part of grown-ups. Children are full of a deep trust and when they can rely on a wholesome ordering of their daily life the basis is provided upon which the moral life as an adult can freely and quietly unfold." (Caroline von Heydebrand)

In these times of meetings, classes, workshops, etc., it often seems next to impossible to create a rhythmical calm ordering of the day. Bringing candlelight and a verse or prayer to mealtime and bedtime can change these times from being chaotic and draining to being calm, healing and nourishing.

Earth who gives to us this food, Sun who makes it ripe and good, Dear earth, dear sun, by you we live, Our loving thanks to you we give. Blessings.

Penelope Youngfeather raised three sons, taught Waldorf Kindergarten, earned a Master's degree in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education, taught college level child development classes and worked for 20 years as an Optometric Vision Therapist. She is currently retired.