The First Seven Years

There is an article on the Waldorf Library website (www.waldorflibrary.org) entitled, “Awakening the Spiritual Powers of the Head: Educating the Will” by Christof Wieckert, the head of the Pedagogical Section at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland.

He talks about the experience of looking at a newborn baby and realizing that “how sound the head strikes us as being. All the rest is still much like an appendage.” Have you all ever noticed that with a newborn? How large the head can seem sometimes, and those big eyes? Steiner felt this way as well apparently, but also felt the head was still sleeping, or was being “wholly body” as it says in the article. Because the “head” is not awake yet, the child has a relationship with his or her environment and everything in it. The child imitates. It is NOT that the child is not smart or that the brain is not fully developed or that the child couldn’t be doing all sorts of things, but that the child is not yet fully “awake” and that the child has a completely different consciousness. Many psychologists such as Piaget also agree with this. Have you all ever seen small children attempt to play hide and seek and they hide in plain sight with their head buried in the sofa or something and their whole body is exposed? They feel because they cannot see you, you must not be able to see them! A different consciousness! If you have a look at the work of Piaget, you will see lots of other examples!

Steiner felt the best way to work with a small child was to work from the legs up, so to speak. Work through the limbs, through the soul, he felt and that is what prepares the child in a right way for learning when the head becomes “awake” when the child has a better power of judgment and discernment around the ages of 13-15.

Therefore, in the first seven years we work with the BODY. In this article Christof Wieckert points out that in an anthroposophical view, and this is important, that: “The body has taken on its shape, “hardened” by the formative forces, which have been “poured into the body.” The human figure will grow in size, yet in the wholeness of its shape, it is present in conception. The head is not only the starting-point for nearly all children’s illnesses, it is also the portal through which the formative forces pour into the body.”

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The formative forces he refers to is everything in the child’s environment. All of this comes in without a filter. So, in the Early Years we shape the being of the child through our activities, through our environment. We work outside in, limbs up.

The way we prepare the child for the awakening that will take place in the teenaged years is by doing things to strengthen the BODY. Caroline Von Heydebrand wrote an article entitled, “On the Real Nature of Will of the Child”, published in 1932 in the Anthroposophical Quarterly (which I believe I also found on www.waldorflibrary.org). She talks about something which I have talked about elsewhere on this blog, mainly that the small child up to two and a half, “feels” his way into the world through being upright, through walking and finally through speech.

She writes, “The environment provides him with the forces with which he himself builds himself up and shapes his organism.”

She goes on to say, “And now, if we ask: What is it that works upon the will of the child from the side of the teacher? – we shall realize that if we want to bring the influences of education to bear upon the child, we must approach him with the very greatest discretion, tact, and respect.”

The first thing that emerges within the child is IMPULSE, sensations. This is where rhythm comes in. Regular rhythm is nourishment for the child and for the sensations he or she experiences that are bound up with the BODY. Full consciousness and control are lacking, rhythm helps establish healthy habits for the child to grow into and live by. Caroline Von Heydebrand points out that children react to what is repeated.

Rhythm is the cornerstone of working with the will of the small child. Respect for the child, showing him or her over and over reverence, devotion, and “to allow the child to arrive freely at his view of the world.”

Parents today might take this last sentence to mean offering the child choices, a child must have choices to be free right? However, if you go back and read all of this again, you will see that the way to work with the will is NOT by engaging that head – it is still asleep, remember? - but working with the environment, modeling, your OWN qualities of love, respect, gratitude over and over in front of the child! That is what influences the child’s development of will for the better!
Steiner felt the will of the any human was always looking forward, to the future. Therefore, we must not bring up the past in guiding a child, but look forward. Caroline Von Heydebrand writes, “We must not drive the child back again into what has already happened but rather call up those forces that are striving him towards the future.”

Be a positive mother, work with your child’s body, their movement, their fantasy, through love and respect and warmth and through rhythm in your environment. Remember the fact that the head is still asleep – don’t go there and call that up! Work with protection of the senses, and the right thing at the right time!

Article by Carrie Dentler of http://theparentingpassageway.com/