

## Some Hints on the Theosophical Training of Children

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"Ye open the Eastern windows,  
That look towards the sun."

IN these two lines a great poet expresses one of his thoughts about children, and the idea is full of suggestion to anyone who has come in contact with the fresh and natural mind of a child, who has watched its intuitive powers, and its simple faith that accepts truth without question, — nay, not only without question, but with clear understanding, as if, indeed, it still retained some glow from those "trailing clouds of glory" which so soon grow dim and "fade into the light of common day". These little ones do, indeed, "open the Eastern windows" for us, letting in sunlight and air on our shadowed and stifled lives; and by our very love for them they draw us into a higher life, and often do more to educate us than we do to train them.

We see in the natural child the unconsciousness of self that we have lost — the simple regard for things as they are stripped of the world's opinion of them — the frank, outspoken word and revealment of their thought, which puts to shame our use of language to conceal thought, the natural modesty and refinement which is as far as possible removed from our grown-up propriety, which is measured only by what other people say. All these contrasts between ourselves and them bring before us many thoughts.

And two specially prominent questions occur to us: (1) Why do we not make ourselves more child-like? (2) Why do we not endeavour to keep our children child-like? If we are earnest Theosophists — that is, if we are earnestly trying to live up to the spiritual truths in our own form of religious belief, which it is one of the great aims of Theosophy to show us — we have already answered the first question by trying to cultivate the teachable mind, the open heart and clear spirit, without which very little growth can go on; we are trying to make thought and life harmonious, to put aside shams and selfishness, prejudice and pride, and in very truth to "become as little children". And our efforts with ourselves, our struggles in our own growth, bring forcibly home to us the need for looking seriously into the defects in modern methods of educating children. Seeing the hard task of uprooting so much that has become ingrained in our characters, the difficult warfare against habits, mental and bodily, which we have only just begun to try and conquer — seeing all this, we must ask ourselves, Can we not save our children the same long, hard struggle, or, at any rate, mitigate it by equipping them at the outset with proper weapons, and teaching them how to use them?

Whilst we are striving to become more child-like, we see the children growing rapidly into old men and women, becoming hard and materialistic, [Page 18] almost before they can speak plainly, and losing that lovely freshness and clearness of soul so valuable to the aftergrowth, so necessary to spiritual

development.

To acknowledge the evil is the first step, to remedy it, a harder task, but one that as earnest Theosophists we must not shirk. For, as each one of us has to find the truth *within* himself — and only so can it be perceived and known — so it behoves us to help our children to keep the clear mirror of the soul untainted, and free from everything that can distort the Divine images reflected on its surface.

Our first aim should be to promote the harmonious development of all the faculties; to strive after bodily, mental, and spiritual perfection, and to endeavour to make the advance equal in each. If we strain the mind and starve the body, we warp and destroy both. To starve the mind and soul produces equally disastrous results; but perhaps our worst error nowadays is the excessive stimulation of the mind, especially the lower critical faculty, and the almost total disregard and stunting of the imagination.

The senses should be cultivated; indeed, they are not trained sufficiently, but, at the same time, they should not be regarded as the only avenues to knowledge. To train a child to see — really to see an object on which its eye rests — not only quickens and sharpens the sense of sight, but gives it a power of creating and holding mind pictures which stand out clear and strong, and also develops higher powers and greater capacity for abstract thought than we can have any idea of until we have tried the experiment upon ourselves; so with all the senses. We do not want our brains burdened with confused masses of facts and images, and half-blurred memories, a kaleidoscopic tangle of colours and forms and ideas coming and going whether we wish it or not. How much more, then, should we try to train the young growing brain of a child, to give it few ideas, and those clear ones — few images, and those distinct — to nourish its mind with a small quantity of easily digested food, instead of pouring a perpetual stream of miscellaneous knowledge into its brain, the very amount alone preventing its being of any use. Pouring in — not drawing out — such is modern education to a very great extent. Together with this cultivation of the senses should the reasoning faculties grow, but kept in subjection as half-developed powers, not dragged into prominence, otherwise conceit and self-confidence shut out further knowledge. In children, and in uneducated people, the intuitive powers are strong; but as the logical faculty develops, the intuition becomes less prominent, and, if resolutely set aside, disregarded, and unused, will wither and lie entirely dormant; and as an unused limb hampers and warps the body, so will this dormant faculty hamper and warp the soul. The logical powers, trained side by side with the intuitional, will produce the highest form of intellect — the intellect that may be more rightly named genius. A natural child is humble and anxious to learn, ready to reverence and respect [Page 19] what is higher and wiser than itself, and this reverence should be fostered and carefully guarded, not by parents and others in authority setting themselves up on a pedestal, and all the time allowing the child to see weaknesses and want of dignity that destroy the authority and respect at once, but by influencing and commanding their obedience and regard by showing them that we are fallible as they are, struggling against temptation and faults, doing wrong and getting punished for it like themselves, but still trying to follow a high ideal, and reverencing all that is wiser than ourselves. If we show them ourselves thus striving, we step down and take them by the hand and draw them upwards with us, instead of landing on what is to a child an unreachable level of supposed goodness, with the chance of the child losing all faith in that goodness by seeing we are but human after all.

First, then, train the senses in due order and with full knowledge of their limitations, letting the child see that where these stop short, faith begins — that side by side with the visible, tangible world, lies that larger and more real invisible world, to be believed in first, and afterwards to be apprehended and known

as the child grows and develops. So we lay a groundwork on which to build *self-knowledge*, and together with this must be built its inseparable companion, *self-control*.

From the very beginning a child should be taught this, and the little efforts at self-command and the conquest of uncontrolled impulses give a child a sense of power, strength and reliance that cannot be given by any outward authority. Let it see that faults and tendencies to wrong-doing are not to be excused on the ground of natural defect or bad example of others, but as so many difficulties to be overcome, so many opportunities for self-conquest, so many lessons set for us to learn, for our final good and well-being. Never let a child say, "I cannot do this". Put in its way only such tasks as are within its power, and see that the required effort is made, or better leave it unattempted. For successful effort braces and inspirits the whole being, and gives confidence, whilst nothing so deteriorates the character as half-done work. Unquestioning obedience is another most necessary factor in education. But commands should be few and certain. Wavering indecision in issuing commands is fatal to authority. No child should be irritated with a host of petty orders and rules, but the habit of instant obedience, when once the word of command has gone forth, should be established early. No one can rule till he has learned to obey.

It is difficult in a short space to touch on the wide and important question of punishment, but a few general remarks may be made.

Theosophists should bear in mind the law of Karma, and carry it out in their training.

Punishments should rather be called *consequences* — the inevitable result of a cause. A child should be made to see that certain effects follow certain of its [Page 20] actions as surely as night follows day. And due warning of the effect should be given. If you do such or such an action, this or that penalty will follow! Parents should never punish in anger, never lose temper with a child; but calmly administer the previously threatened payment for breach of law. Children are very quick to perceive, and the *certainty* of the effect is the only deterrent to the act in future.

Punishments depriving children of food or play, or any of the necessities of life, should be avoided, likewise long tasks that try the brain or nerves; and, of course, all threats of unknown bogies or other methods of working on their fears are as wicked as they are useless.

Too many people punish offences against custom and manners as heavily, if not more so, than moral delinquencies. This gives a child a very false idea of the relative proportion of human and Divine law.

In all our action and attitude towards children, love, and love alone, should be apparent as our motive power. Discipline and teaching alike prompted by our desire for their final welfare. Pain and sorrow, pleasure and happiness, given in the same loving spirit, for the same wise and good end; and the more we realize that our own education goes on in the same way, the more will our children see and understand the use of our discipline.

And here we touch on the root of the whole subject. It is *our* growth, *our* education, that affects them. It is what we think and what we believe that has most effect on them. When we realize, as all students of Occultism must realize, that our unspoken word, our most secret thought, is given out by us unconsciously, and either taints or purifies the subtle atmosphere around us, and takes effect for good or evil on those with whom we come in contact, then, and then only, do we wake up to our terrible responsibilities, and the need for the most searching cleansing of those thoughts, the need for high and lofty ideals for perpetually dwelling in thought on all that is good and beautiful, that no inward taint of ours may sully their purity, nor infect them with evil. They can in this way imbibe our faith, our deepest religious beliefs, our love of and trust in the Divine, just as they will no less surely catch our want of faith, our doubt and cynical discontent with life.

Let us, then, as children too, members of the one great family, by our striving, our own growth in goodness, our own sense of the unity and harmony of all things, make an atmosphere of sunshine and purity for our children to live in, and from the very beginning of their young lives inculcate those larger lessons of universal Brotherhood which Theosophists are endeavouring to teach, so shall we no less than they open windows towards the East for them and for ourselves.

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