

In the Heart -- the loom of Feeling,
In the Head -- the light of Thinking,
In the Limbs -- the strength of Will.
Weaving of radiant Light,
Strength of the Weaving,
Light of the surging Strength:
Lo, this is Man!

RHYTHM IN THE HOMELIFE
by Andrea Gambardella, Baltimore

(This article appeared in "Leading Forth", a quarterly published by the Waldorf School of Baltimore and is printed here with their permission. Andrea Gambardella was a former kindergarten teacher at the Baltimore school but is now at home caring for her two year old daughter.)

Parents are entrusted with the years of childhood. One important part of this role is attending to the child's need for a regular rhythmic life. Just as in the passing of night and day, the rising and falling of the ocean tides, and the seasons as reflected in the world of plants, every aspect of the human body has a rhythm. Examples which come first to mind are the working of the heart and circulation, the breath and the lungs, a morning's waking and a night's sleep. In addition, each organ has its own rhythm vital to its healthy functioning. These steady contractions and expansions are a large part of what keeps the body in good order. This in turn helps a person remain contented and able to do his/her best free of distractions.

Before birth the child changes rapidly and is given the protective outer structure of the womb and the rhythmic workings of the mother's body. With the young child and the elementary school student this requirement for an outer structure continues to be vital to growth and emotional well-being. Learning that there is "a time for all things" is a life's lesson. Now is a time for you to play and do as you will, now for a meal, now for homework, now to prepare for bed.

"The rhythm then becomes a habit, is accepted as self-evident and will eliminate many difficulties, struggles and arguments about eating and going to bed... Regularity should prevail in as many of the child's daily activities as possible. It is the key to establishing good habits for life."*

In addition, children are always growing and their body rhythms are changing. Having a regular lifestyle helps the body through these changes, and, like the womb, offers a stable environment. Children given this regular life feel confident about their world and are not worried by the uncertainty of when will this or that happen.

The preschool child needs restful or quiet times during a day as a means of being restored for the play that fills the hours. Outdoor play or very active indoor games enable the youngster to test the farthest limits of him/herself: running, shouting, jumping, climbing. A snack or story time, or helping with a household chore will enable the child's body to relax. Focusing the attention on something close at hand will draw the child into himself, balancing the active play which sends the self rocketing out of

his/her fingertips. Becoming quiet or still also makes it possible to listen to oneself: what is your body telling you; what are your thoughts, ideas, etc. The family can use the natural transition points of the day for such focusing. Perhaps a moment before meals of quiet activity, handwashing, gathering toys, or reading a story.

"Regularity and order must not be preached to a child of this tender age, but should be made an integral part of his daily life... A daily bed time story and a little piece of poetry or a prayer before meals helps make the child's life a sequence of events, in which he participates and from which he gains a sense of security."*

Predictability does not leave out the possibility for new and different things to happen -- or a surprise! It is the overall outline of the day, waking and sleeping, meals and restful moments, that give the essential form.

With the elementary school student, parents and children can make a list together of general categories of what must happen in a single day. This list might include household chores, meals, free time, homework, family time, bed time. If you establish a bedtime first, from there you will have the number of hours in weekday mornings and afternoons available to try to accommodate everyone's needs. Each family is different, and it is important to take into consideration that uniqueness. It is not until that student is much older that he/she can fend off distractions and decide when and how long homework is to be done. Parents need to bring encouragement, enthusiasm and assistance to this important link in a child's school day. When the student has this example of "a time for all things," he/she will more readily be able to establish his/her own sense of time and timing.

This rhythmic structure imposed on a young child and imbued with the parents' love is a discipline in the most positive sense of the word. The older child and student will transform this outer structure to an inner self-discipline in the years to come. Freedom is not without form, and one is truly free when one is not hampered by a disorganized life.

* Elizabeth Grunelius, Early Childhood Education and the Waldorf School Plan, pg. 27, Waldorf School Monograph, 1983.

Further Reading and References:

Davy and Voors, Lifeways
Norbert Glas, Conception, Birth and Early Childhood
E. Frommer, Voyage Through Childhood into the Adult World
Rudolf Steiner, Prayers for Mothers and Children

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