

Rudolf Steiner speaks about how the little child is wiser than the adult, and how much, if we were to look carefully at the child, we would learn from the spirit:

*“For one who is initiated into the mysteries of the spirit there is nothing that can fill him with such wonder and delight as to observe a little child. In so doing, one learns not of the earth, but of heaven.”* (Torquay, 1924)

I hope everybody has had the experience of being in front of a newborn child: this very tender body, almost transparent, lying helpless in his cradle, seems to be surrounded by a delicate sheath whose nature we cannot really grasp. But the child opens an enigma in our hearts, and moves strong feelings of reverence in us, and inner quietness, and also an immediate will to protect it.

Rudolf Steiner describes in many lectures all the steps we take between death and new birth, how we live in the spiritual world, and what we take from this world into our earthly existence.

One of the main spiritual qualities we obtain from our pre-birth existence is imitation. Rudolf Steiner tells us how prior to birth we relate with one another in such an intimate way that it is hard for us to imagine. He says for us to understand it, it could only be comparable with love or compassion.

From this experience of being in such togetherness, the child brings his first spiritual gift: imitation, which is the capacity of surrendering to the world, to us, in what we do, in what we are, up to the very finest movements, not only of our bodies, but also

of our souls, the morality that lies behind each of our movements and gestures.

The spirit of the child struggles through imitation to conquer his body with such perseverance, from the very tender movements at the beginning, to the more clumsy ones, and little by little to the very fine ones, until he is able to stand, and to walk. Have you ever been able to see a child walk for the first time? I hope you have. To be able to experience the immense joy on the face of the child is an unforgettable experience!



Then comes speech. Rudolf Steiner describes how, in a phase before birth, the earlier way of perceiving other spiritual beings blurs, and we begin to receive a perception of the substance of the spirit, as we gain a deeper perception of our own I.

For those who work with very small children, the experience of seeing how the child learns to speak is one of the more fascinating you could ever have. I have a little two-year-old in my group, Ainara. She has a strong will to communicate with others, but only makes sounds, and one word: mami. So she makes long sounding sentences and then “mami”. And “mami” is everything: if she is hungry, if

she is thirsty, if she needs help, if she is happy... only one all-encompassing word to express all her humanity!

The spiritual substance, the Logos that we experienced before birth pours slowly into matter, and again with the help of imitation, the child slowly learns to speak.

And finally thinking arrives, that Rudolf Steiner describes as the image of all the movements we accomplish to create our etheric bodies, to be able to unite our body of intentions to our earthly physical body.

So there is a lot of wisdom in the little child. We, as adults, strive for years to find the spirit, or at least to come closer and closer to it, and we don't realize very often that we have a wise teacher very close to us, who without knowing, without consciousness, is showing us the way. The child shows us quietness: a sort of active inner waiting, as the senses start to wake up. A deep non-rational concentration. Contemplating: looking out to the world from the temple.



I worked first with children in kindergarten, with 20 children from 3 to 6, running around, with colorful play and talking and singing: very lively ... and very noisy! But when I began working with the little ones, I was amazed how quiet they were! They were not outwardly very active; they would just follow me when washing, when cooking, when

sweeping the floor, with big eyes, and their hands moving beside them like little wings. But I could see that inside they were so attentive, so present, so active! And then, very slowly, they started to become more and more visibly active.



We have the idea that children are very noisy, but the very little child is very silent; all his senses are being opened in a very delicate way, creating first the inner relation toward us through his look, through his smile, and then showing up little by little. All the senses are awakening slowly to the world around him. Children open themselves with trust to us, to what they don't know, to the very many possibilities of life: this open, welcoming, trusting attitude can also be a good learning for us.

And they show us perseverance: no urgency, just trying and trying again, standing and falling down thousands of times, overcoming pain, overcoming fear.

Today we very often see adults pick children up off the ground when they fall, and then every single little fall becomes a little tragedy, with a lot of crying and anxiety. But if we just observe, and stand next to the child without anxiety, and if we trust in him and in his inner strength, we will see how much children can learn by falling and standing up again by themselves, or even not standing up immediately but just finding a new idea, an ant, a little stone... and they are so joyful

when they strive and overcome by themselves the little hindrances in their lives.

So: quietness, perseverance, trust, openness, joy - aren't these qualities we need to develop in our inner striving towards spiritual life? I think we can learn a lot from the little child and this learning is amazing. Rudolf Steiner said, *"the teacher should look to the child with the deepest reverence, knowing that here a being whose nature is God and spirit has descended to earth. The essential thing is that we should know this, that we should fill our hearts with this knowledge, and from this starting point, undertake our work as educators."* (Torquay, 1924).

I would like to close with a sentence of a very dear universal poet, Federico García Lorca:

*"Far from us, the child has full creative faith and does not have the seed of destructive reason. He is innocent and therefore wise."*

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