Award-winning book from Sentient Publications

Marcy Axness's efforts to educate our world are vital to our evolution! I'm so glad she's telling the growth-or-protection story because simple fundamentals are where the truth is. – **Bruce H. Lipton**, author, *Biology of Belief* and *Spontaneous Evolution*

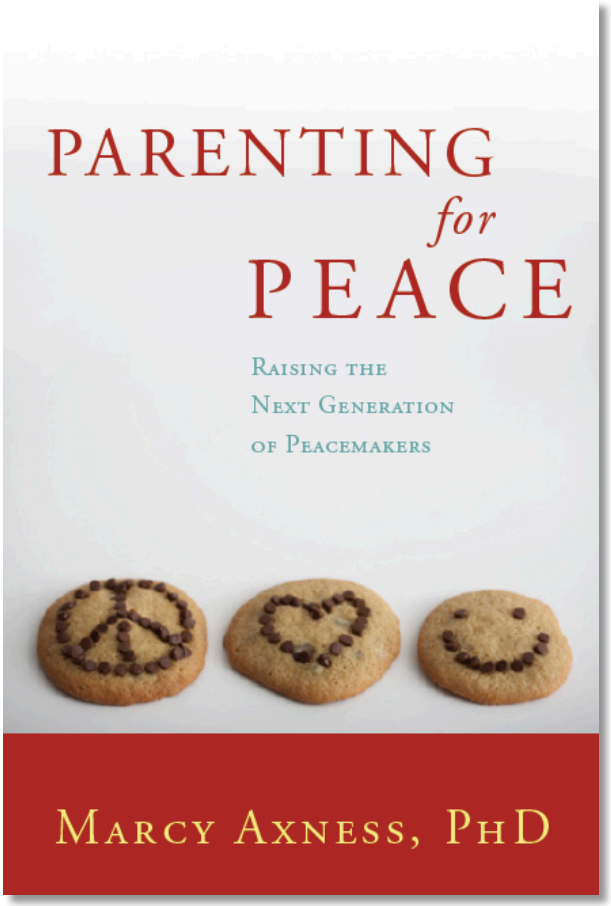
I know of no one so well equipped educationally, intellectually, emotionally and intuitively as Marcy to speak to our times. – **Joseph Chilton Pearce**, author, *The Biology of Transcendence* and *Magical Child*, and many others

Dr. Axness has distilled compelling evidence from the fields of attachment parenting, preconception, and consciousness research into a readable, inspiring and hopeful book about what we really want to do as parents: raise peaceful people. Parenting For Peace gives us a roadmap. – **Peggy O'Mara**, *Mothering* editor-in-chief

Do yourself, your children, and our human family the service of reading and applying Marcy Axness's wisdom. As a pediatrician, I've watched her put her vision into action over two decades. I heartily endorse the sound, simple yet revolutionary guidance she offers. – **Jay N. Gordon**, MD

Marcy Axness lays down the simple but profound principles and practices required to raise generations comfortable in their hearts and happy with themselves. A tranquil revolution of the soul and of the home that would benefit all humanity. – **Gabor Maté**, author, *Scattered*

Passionate and intelligent yet also profoundly simple, Parenting for Peace *provides parents with the tools and support they need to create peace and participation in their families, their communities and the world. Highly recommended.* – **Sarah J. Buckley**, MD, author, *Gentle Birth, Gentle Mothering: A Doctor's Guide to Natural Childbirth*



I applaud Marcy for calling attention to the importance of protecting the sanctity of the embryonic universe. World peace will only ensue from womb peace. – **Thomas R. Verny** MD, author, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*

Parenting for Peace *is the ultimate thinking person's guide to nurturing a compassionate child from conception through adolescence.* – **Scott Blum**, author, *Waiting for Autumn* and Winter *Moon Rises*

A significant aggregate of knowledge and wisdom woven into a very understandable story. It is well organized and clear, and could be considered "A Manifesto for Humanity," rather than a parenting book. – **Patrick Houser**, author of *Fathers-To-Be Handbook*

Dr. Axness brings a clear voice to the number one task for families and societies: to raise citizens committed to cultures of peace through the gift of knowing peace right from the start. And we can do so by "raising ourselves," in consciousness.
– **Raffi Cavoukian**, children's entertainer, and editor, *Child Honouring: How to Turn This World Around*

In the midst of our global human, economic and environmental crises, we have been overlooking a powerful—perhaps the *most* powerful—means of fostering peace and prosperity: the consciousness with which we bring our children to life and shepherd them into adulthood. If we really want to change the world, we need to raise a generation "built for peace" from their earliest beginnings. *Parenting for Peace* is a scientific roadmap for how to hardwire kids with the brain circuitry for such essential peacemaker capacities as empathy, trust, self-regulation and imagination. The win-win is that a child wired in this vibrantly healthy way is a joy to parent, and later he or she will go out into our world equipped to creatively and confidently innovate solutions, and take pleasure in doing so!

Marcy is a soul guide in a world in need of her vision. – Kim John Payne, author of *Simplicity Parenting*

[The following are three chapters *of Parenting for Peace: Raising the Next Generation of Peacemakers*, solely for informational, promotional, or courtesy purposes, and not for distribution or publication.]

Introduction

Do You Know How Powerful You Really Are?

A towering question lives today in the minds and hearts of young people, perhaps more strongly than ever before in human history, as they feel the growing shadow of our global human and environmental crises: "Is there *anything* I can do to change the world?"

A few years from now, these same young folks may ask another question: "Do I really want to bring a child into today's world?" Each generation's challenges seem more daunting than anything that has come before, but indeed, any thoughtful person contemplating parenthood in the 21st century has many stark and vivid reasons to ask this question. Our world today presents more complex challenges than ever before, with imbalance and complications seeming to grow at an exponential speed. The real question on the minds of future parents is, "Will my child survive in today's world? And in tomorrow's?"

What if there were a handful of uncomplicated—and amazingly little known—principles that would assure you that the answer to all of these questions can be a resounding *Yes?* What if you could feel confident that with these principles at work in your life and in your future parenting, you and your child will not only survive but *thrive* in a world of ever-changing complexities and challenges? And that a young generation—of parents and children—living with these principles will have what it takes to make sure our world itself also survives, and thrives?

The status quo of today's culture exerts tremendous pressure on well-meaning parents to make choices that simply aren't good for kids, or for our future as a human family. But knowledge is empowering: Heartened by the promise of simple principles backed by leading-edge research, parents (and future parents) can feel confident in their ability to raise children who are "hardwired for peace."

I have a proposition for you: If you're deeply concerned about today's world and where it's going... if you feel like something more is needed to heal our social and

environmental issues... if you feel like you want to participate in a "solution revolution" but don't quite know how... then as Gandhi so famously urged, be the change you want to see in the world, and raise children whose very beings are woven from that change. Raise the generation who has what it takes to turn this world around. The principles in this book will help you do just that. (To be honest, it's more about *not*-doing—entering into a potent collaboration with Nature, learning how to finally stop impeding her rather perfect plan for the kind of evolutionary leap we're talking about.)

How in the world can I claim to offer you such empowerment? And why would such revolutionary information be contained in this little book but not on the front pages of every newspaper on Earth? That's a great question, and indeed why I wrote this book! These principles do indeed exist out there in the world, and some of them are even written about, one at a time, here and there. But they have never been put all together in quite this way to empower a new generation. (For example, just because you may have flour, eggs, sugar, and chocolate in your kitchen, years or decades could pass before you put them together and make a cake.) Think of this book as a cake—or better, a lasagna—made largely from ingredients available to everyone: I've combined frontier scientific research in such fields as brain science, cell biology, epigenetics, psychology and mind-body science, folded in some perennial philosophy, layered it with timeless spiritual principles, and have seasoned it with understandings gleaned from my own experiences.

I grew up the daughter of five parents, and have mothered a son and daughter to the cusp of adulthood; I share the parenting journey with a husband of twenty-seven years; I have studied meditation with devoted masters, and early development with renowned researchers; I've delved deeply into personal psychology and honor its strengths and its limitations, together with the fundamental importance of a transpersonal ("beyond the personal") perspective; I am an early development specialist who teaches graduate students and counsels parents, and am an active research junkie. I am, above all, a student and lover of Life.

The result of this recipe, which you hold in your hands, belongs not to me but to Life, and to you, and so I can dare to suggest that it offers us one kind of chance—perhaps the best kind of chance—to heal our global family. This is an invitation to a new way of thinking about children and ourselves, about how we develop to be the people we are, and how we choose daily to become who we will be tomorrow. This is a book that can be read at any point in your parenting journey, even long before you embark upon parenthood, since it is intended to seed your mind with ideas that over time will take root and grow within your own relationship with Life.

The idea for this book itself was seeded by a column I wrote during my three-year stint with the *Wet Set Gazette*, a small Los Angeles parenting publication. I titled it "From Presence to Simplicity: Cliff Notes for P-A-R-E-N-T-S," and in it I explained that in my twenty years of being a parent, a student of human development, a human *in* constant development, an impassioned researcher of the human sciences, and a parent counselor engaged with the challenges and triumphs of real moms and dads, I have gathered a superabundance of excellent information. But I had come to recognize that one of the greatest gifts in this era of information overload is to arrive at the *other* side of a gazillion helpful facts to essential nuggets that are simplified without being simplistic. So I distilled seven solid-gold nuggets, informed by research in fields ranging from

neurodevelopment to theology—foundational principles for effective, healthy and joyful parenting.

Wary of "systems," "techniques," or even "instructions" for parents, I realized that a handful of *principles* was something I could get behind. Principles encompass individual differences in temperament, sensibilities, pacing, and cultural orientation. Principles give room to breathe, to discover, to inhabit. Principles offer an endless palette of application. Principles are timeless yet practical, like a handy, pocket-sized toolkit—at the ready anytime, anywhere. Equally wary of gimmicks—and a big fan of Boggle—I found myself whimsically realizing that the seven enduring principles I wanted to convey were considerate enough to begin with letters that spelled out PARENTS: Presence, Awareness, Rhythm, Example, Nurturance, Trust and Simplicity. My readers may not need the mnemonic assist, but I do! At the end of each step are examples—"Principles to Practice"—of ways you might apply the principles during that step; these are not meant as a definitive list, nor as a prescription, but are offered as ideas for you to try out, experience and improvise upon.

Presence – Being fully engaged "right here, right now" with your body, your thoughts, your feelings
Awareness – The knowledge you need to be effective
Rhythm – A fundamental human pacing need, often forgotten in our techno-automated world
Example – The ultimate mode of teaching, and learning
Nurturance – The practical demonstration of love
Trust – Calm reliance upon processes outside of your immediate perception & control; cousin to humility
Simplicity – The absence of complication and excess

If my "Cliff Notes" column was the seed of this book, its seminal agent was a segment I saw on a network morning show entitled "How to Raise A CEO." It featured a mother sharing insights into how she had raised three children who all had the qualities needed to become successful corporate executives. It occurred to me that people might be interested in what capacities a person needs to be a successful agent of peace and innovation, and how *those* are fostered. Since I know that such a process optimally begins before other parenting books begin—prior to conception—the idea of a timeline came to me. Thus was conceived the idea of a book featuring seven steps—from pre-conception through adolescence—and seven principles to be applied at each of the seven steps in a fluid, friendly, yet revolutionary way. A book about parenting as social action. A book about parenting for peace.

Everything in existence first begins as an idea—this book, the chair you sit in, the utensils you use to eat your food. Before moving to where you live now, you most likely gave a lot of thought to it, developing an increasingly vivid idea of *home*. We usually do weeks of research before buying a particular car, envisioning ourselves driving various models, imagining how each would feel. Of all the things we might ever pursue, bringing children to life is undoubtedly the most monumental in its impact—upon us, certainly upon our children, and ultimately upon the world. It merits devoting time and care to

envision the "model" of parenting approach we choose to embrace. Hopefully the model you choose is equipped to channel the awesome power—and responsibility—that comes with raising children.

Why We Must Re-Think Our Parenting—And Our World

Most of us would subscribe to the goal of a peaceful, ecologically sustainable world where our great-grandchildren can thrive, but that goal seems far out of reach. Staggering evidence of human and planetary strife is scattered across the globe. U.S. foreign policy ostensibly seeks to export America's high quality of enlightened democratic life, but just how high is that quality of life? Depression is our leading cause of disability![1] A joint 2004 study by Harvard and the World Health Organization found that the U.S. suffers the highest rate of depression (9.6%, meaning more than 9 out of every 100 people) of the 14 surveyed countries, including war-torn Lebanon (6.6%) and poverty-stricken Nigeria (0.8%).[2] While the actual truth is not quite as straightforward—in countries where mental illness is still shrouded in shame and secrecy, depression is bound to be under-reported—the troubling fact remains that many people are suffering in a country with the world's greatest material wealth.

Much of our advanced technology and scientific muscle is geared toward finding more effective drugs to *treat* depression, rather than ways to understand it more meaningfully and thus have more success at preventing it. The use of anti-depressants and other psychotropic drugs for school-aged children (and even preschoolers!) has risen steadily over the past decades.[3] Youth suicide has become the third leading cause of death in American 15-24 year-olds,[4] and has doubled in the 5-14 year-old age group over the last twenty years.[5] Along with our late-model cars and flat-screen TVs, the U.S. also has more violence and higher murder rates than any Western European country, and by far the highest incarceration rate in the world.[6] As Princeton's Daniel Kahneman points out, "Standard of living has increased dramatically and happiness has increased not at all, and in some cases has diminished slightly."[7] And, for the first time in recorded history, children in the U.S. today are the first generation to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents![8]

What happened to the shining vision held dear to your great-grandparents and their kin, that through hard work they could get ahead, make good money, and have a better life than their parents? Well, ironically, it seems that perhaps a good deal of our everyday suffering—represented in those bleak statistics above—is because, as Melissa Etheridge sings, we "never woke up from the American Dream." Keeping up with the Joneses has led to anxiety disorders at home, military bullying abroad, and environmental crises everywhere. What if we were to conceive a new dream, suited to today's world? A dream we can embrace with confidence that it will bring riches in the moment and dividends in the future, of the deeply human sort that money cannot buy, and yet abundance tends to pursue?

Many countries are asking just such questions, as they have come to realize that Gross Domestic Product—the historical yardstick for progress—is grossly insufficient for measuring a society's wellbeing. Economist Ronald Colman points out, "Our growth statistics were never meant to be used as a measure of progress as they are today, when activities that degrade our quality of life, like crime, pollution, and addictive gambling, all make the economy grow. The more fish we sell and the more trees we cut down, the

more the economy grows. Working longer hours makes the economy grow. And the economy can grow even if inequality and poverty increase. For decades, we have made a tragic error—confusing economic growth with wellbeing."[9]

In an attempt to remedy this limited view, many nations now participate in the Global Project on "Measuring the Progress of Societies"; for example, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) calculates data from a rich array of criteria to assess its country's overall health and progress. Standard of living, health, quality of the environment, education and skill levels, how people use their time, the vitality of their communities and cultural pursuits, their participation in the democratic process—these measures as well as the interactions amongst them paint a picture of a richer kind of national dream.

It's great news that countries around the world are moving away from the strictly industrial context within which they assess their success and wellbeing. Unfortunately, individuals and families—at least here in the U.S.—continue to slog their way through the mire of the industrialist worldview. You might not be aware of even having a *worldview*—it sounds so pretentious—but we all do. We've all been raised in the context of a particular worldview, an overarching context for life that is made up of a largely unquestioned, inherited, subliminal set of beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and assumptions through which we filter our understanding of the world and our place in it. I'll discuss more about the process of the kind of invisible learning that shapes a worldview in Step One.

Several basic assumptions inherent in the industrialist worldview—that economic wealth is the truest sign of progress; that more is better and we live in a world of scarcity; that successful achievement requires competition—work like an invisible pumice to erode the potential for confidence, ease, and joy in the experience of parenting and family life. When we judge ourselves according to the values of this linear, predictable worldview, while pursuing the mysterious, ever-changing, sometimes-chaotic process of parenting, we're doomed to disappointment. We become so busy *doing* and *going* and *acquiring* and *achieving*—and also evaluating—that we miss out on the supposed "greatest experience ever" that parenting is romantically cracked up to be. To add ironic salt to that wound, we then add our missing enjoyment to the long list of perceived daily failures that accrue within the industrialist worldview from which most of us operate.

As the co-founder of Families for Conscious Living, Lisa Reagan has worked over many years with hundreds of families faced with the challenge of making wellness choices in a culture whose worldview doesn't value wellness. She highlights the importance of *paradigm shifting*: a process of becoming aware of your personal lens—your filters—and whether they line up with the values of the "beat-yourself-up-with-a-yardstick" industrialist worldview or with the values of a more compassionate, empowering, holistic worldview. Most of us were weaned on the former.

Reagan says, "As the internet has helped foster awareness of and interest in healthy lifestyles, parents trying to do the best for their children decide they're going to be 'holistic' or 'natural.' If you make this choice without being aware of your personal lens on life—and the fact that you most likely need to begin to adjust that lens—you end up with an even longer yardstick to beat yourself up with: 'Did I buy all organic food? Unbleached diapers? The right sling?' The joy of parenting for peace can get squashed by the whirl of production and evaluation."[10]

So before we can change the world (or even just how we parent in the world), it is helpful to begin noticing our worldview. Reagan sees that paradigm shifting, like parenting for peace, asks us to embark on a hero's journey—that mythic process in which seekers heed a call to adventure, a call that asks them to leave their familiar world behind, perhaps gradually, to venture into new, unfamiliar territory. Unlike our sanitized image of the Teflon hero who doesn't flinch at danger, the true hero has mixed feelings or is even downright scared. But with the help of wise mentors and magical guides, they navigate the many challenges and their fears—and return matured, transformed and possessed of a radiant new body of knowledge. In all cases, the hero's task is to bring renewed life to an ailing culture—oneself, one's family, one's kingdom, one's world.

But embracing that new worldview requires a leap of faith—or rather, many small hops of faith, on an hourly basis! As Richard Rohr points out, we don't *think* our way into new ways of living, but instead, we *live* our way into new ways of thinking. Like letting go of your plan of what was supposed to happen later this afternoon, in favor of giving in to the tug of now—the delight of your three-year-old's fascination with finger paints… leaping for process over product—which may feel so unfamiliar as to be uncomfortable. Journey. Hero.

Worldviews change step by step, principle by principle, choice by choice, belief by belief. Little by little, sometimes over and over again, until it holds. Because of how fundamentally important this "attitude evolution" is, the Institute for Noetic Sciences IONS is fostering the paradigm shifting process through its Worldview Literacy Project. In their 2008 Shift Report, *Changing the Story of Our Future*, IONS suggests how we might rewrite our own stories, and that of our shared human family:

> Voting is good, but changing one's mind and heart is better. Our fundamental position is that reality follows the quality of our thoughts and beliefs, both conscious and unconscious, because these are what drive the choices that cumulatively result in the world we live in. By changing those beliefs, we can change the future.[11]

Perhaps you, like many people today, have already embraced an alternative worldview, one that recognizes the fundamental power of individual consciousness, and the need for balance between material and soul abundance. This would put you at the leading edge of the future's hope! But that enlightenment wave won't automatically roll forward through your children unless you understand a few basic principles about what they need as they unfold their potential. We lose ground every generation because even the most conscious people have a tendency to fall back upon old programming once they become parents, because nothing can "push our (old) buttons" like a crying baby, a tantruming toddler or a defiant teen!

In 2000 the National Research Council and the National Academy's Institutes of Medicine published *From Neurons To Neighborhoods,* a synthesis of current scientific understandings of how children develop from birth through age five (many of which appear in this book). It called for many federal policy changes like more funding devoted to the social and emotional needs of young children, and many "early intervention" childhood and parenting programs. That's fantastic, but the gap between such expert theory and actual reality is usually huge. Indeed, the focus for even the youngest children in schools today is on academics rather than their social and emotional wellbeing, the foundation of their healthy development and our peaceful society.

In his book *Parenting for a Peaceful World*, Robin Grille charts the fascinating—and sobering—historical connection between a society's parenting style and its propensity toward war, injustice and environmental destructiveness, pointing out that "violence is a learned response passed down from generation to generation." *What??* This sounds ridiculous in 21st century America; surely your parents didn't teach you violence, and neither did mine! Certainly not intentionally, but what becomes clear in Grille's meticulous research is that even our current parenting styles rely upon certain culturally sanctioned yet "invisible" dynamics of power and subtle violence that don't foster a child's vital, authentic, integrated self—the foundations for true adult maturity and the qualities necessary to experience and create peace. As he points out, "When we parent a child, we are parenting the world and its future."[12]

Raffi Cavoukian, beloved children's troubadour turned global restoration activist, urges that

> …we need to create a culture of deep compassion, one in which the primacy of the early years guides public policy, the admired life blends material sufficiency with more noble aims, and our children learn to become responsible global citizens. …A culture in which 'the good life' speaks not to purchasing power but to the quality of our existence—our relationships with one another, between cultures, and with Nature. A culture that puts self-confidence ahead of consumer confidence and affirms developmental health as the true wealth of nations.[13]

If you look at fundamental shifts or trends within societies, they have all happened through the force of *individual citizens changing their minds about what they want*. As visionary pollster Mark Penn points out in his book *Microtrends* (and backs up with many examples), "In today's mass societies, it takes only one percent of people making a dedicated choice—contrary to the mainstream's choice—to create a movement that can change the world."[14] Look at the rise in popularity of alternative medical modalities such as acupuncture. This didn't happen because expert panels announced research on its effectiveness; this happened because average, everyday people increasingly sought it out and discovered on their own that it worked, which created consumer demand and drove further research. Now acupuncture is far more "normal" than it was even ten years ago, much more available, and covered by many insurance companies.

I propose the same can happen with the values around how we perceive ourselves and how we bring children to life and to maturity. Now, the idea that parents wield the most fundamental, lasting influence on the socio-emotional health of their children is not very politically correct. The notion that there is an *ideal* toward which we might strive in any human endeavor is also un-PC, for it runs the risk of making people feel guilty. But our politically correct, responsibility-free mentality creates disempowerment and hopelessness instead! This book is about hope and empowerment.

As author Dotty Coplen suggests, "The more we understand about the future consequences of what we are doing, and the intent that goes with the action, the more successful we will be in caring for our children with our own purposes and goals of parenting in mind. Parents need to decide together what they believe to be a healthy human being."[15]

The "Generation Peace" Profile

Our world has evolved radically, and so must our understanding of psychosocial health. Today we know through scientific research that a socially healthy human being has a brain wired with the capacity for self-regulation, self-reflection, trust, and empathy. And, the peace I refer to is not simply the absence of violence or strife, and neither is it the stereotypical soft-focused dream scene of doves and olive branches. This peace is a state of being vibrantly at-ease, from cell to soul, steeped in the tranquil conviction *I'm a worthy participant in life… fit to meet any challenge*. Vitally engaged in both inner and outer life, imbued with comprehensive social intelligence, minimal psychological or physiological defense patterns, with an array of readily deployable capacities for manifesting in the outer world the inner experience of joy.

These key qualities include intellectual and emotional flexibility, robust imagination and the ability to devise innovative solutions to complex puzzles. Also very important, the quality of *resilience*: how does the person handle daily stresses? A child who learns to readily regain internal balance after a frustrating moment becomes an adult capable of embracing peace instead of conflict. All of these capacities rely on well-developed brain centers that govern self-regulation, sensory integration and social intelligence. Someone with a well-wired brain doesn't get overwhelmed with stress hormones, at least not for very long. They bounce back.

Peace also suggests a condition of feeling *safe*. It presumes a fundamental posture of security, wellbeing, and an orientation toward growth, exploration and connectedness, with self and with others. We know from the new field of interpersonal neurobiology that this experience of safety, of peace at the level of biochemistry, is something that can become woven into the very fabric of our neurophysiology.

This is the purpose of these seven steps and principles: they foster the optimal development of those brain centers and support the flourishing of the whole child—body and mind. As I mentioned earlier, it is less about *doing* than it is about *not doing*—not getting in the way of Nature's elegant blueprint for socially adept, relationally astute humans. This is not about us making children our "projects"; our children want to be received, seen, and enjoyed for who they are in the moment. But they also count on us to help them fully blossom! And since they primarily learn from who we are, it is *ourselves* who become our project. But here's the amazing paradox: you can only teach your child based on what you are—*and* there's an aspect of your child that will be more than you. The fact is, Nature not only allows us but dearly asks of us to have children much better than who we are!

At this point in human history, I guess I would dare to ask, "Why be a parent if *not* to try and bring a peacemaker on earth?" It might be peace through embroidery or engineering or being a CEO. Ultimately, our consciously enacted wish for our children becomes that they unfold as individuals with the heart to embrace and exemplify peacefulness, the psyche to experience joy and intimacy, the mind to innovate solutions to social and ecological challenges, and the will to enact such innovations. Such a human is never a genetically predetermined given, but the result of dynamic interactions between genetics and environment—with parents being the most influential environmental variable.

Spreading Compassion, Not Blame

I want to make something clear right up front: even though I focus here on the fundamental importance of parents for their children's development, this is not about placing blame on, or provoking guilt in, parents who did, or who are doing, their best. *Parenting for Peace* outlines a proposed *ideal*—a revolutionary and radical departure from "how it's always been done"—and is not meant to bring guilt, anguish or dejection upon parents (or adult children of parents) who did not practice these principles, nor to suggest that children not conceived, born and raised along these principles have forever missed the peacemaker boat. One of the most exciting discoveries of new brain research is *neuroplasticity*, the capacity of our social brains to change, adapt and revise when presented with more optimal conditions. This has huge implications for growth, healing and our shared evolution. But one of the primary features of the parenting for peace approach is to leverage its principles *from the very beginning*, so children won't have to devote their energy to "intra-psychic" activity—first for defensive adaptation and protection, and later for remediation & healing—and instead have an abundance of available energy to live fully, to revise and revitalize our world.

This is about compassionate awareness, about understanding ourselves and our own stories: we have all been babies, toddlers and children! Those of us who had less-than-ideal experiences of being parented find that raising children offers precious opportunities for healing our own past, which is intimately entwined with our children's future. This is about the mysteries of our own becoming.

I explore here our personal roles in evolving our species forward, given what science knows about the influence we have over our own cells and our own destinies. This is about the 21st century implications of the old notion of "survival of the fittest," and recognizing how "fittest" must change to meet the challenges of today, and coming decades.

This is about the unprecedented understanding of our creative power as human beings, our participation in our own evolution.

This is about the mysteries of the human adventure.

A Note on Scientific and Gender References

I put many years and countless reams of research through a fine press to extract the principles contained here. This book is meant to be a doorway to a mansion rather than the mansion itself—which ultimately emerges within each of us—and I have included resources for further exploration of the ideas presented. Also included are references for major concepts, provocative notions, and those researchers whose shoulders I'm standing on, whose noodles are in this lasagna. I alternate the use of masculine and feminine references when referring to children. And while I typically use the terms *mother* and *father*, these steps and principles are applicable in almost all cases to more fluidly gendered (e.g., gay and lesbian) family constellations. Frequently *mother* and *father* note individuals of a specific sex, but also relate to archetypal feminine and masculine principles expressed by those of both sexes. These steps and principles can also be embraced in family-building journeys featuring more biological and procedural complexity, such as IVF, adoption and surrogacy.

And now, to the doorway...

The Invisible Power Within You

"... cuz I'm bigger than my body gives me credit for..."
--John Mayer

I love speaking to young people about these ideas, because they're almost always willing to reconsider what they know. Their foundations of knowledge are still coalescing and nothing is yet etched in stone. Thus, they greet me from the position of true scientists, willing to let new information and experience modify their beliefs about the world. I can see the "ah hahs" light up in their eyes, and feel the excitement brew as they begin to realize just how much power they have to shape their own futures and the future of this challenged world they will soon inherit.

My favorite teaching opportunity is as a guest lecturer each spring at a local high school's 11th-grade cell biology class. By then the students have already learned about the functioning of our most fundamental human ingredient, the cell. I devote some time to discussing two particular kinds of cells, eggs and sperm, and about how circumstances as early as pregnancy—and even conception—can fundamentally influence the wellbeing of that new individual. We talk about the implications of this, both for children they might have in the future and for themselves in terms of their own childhood stories. They are amazed and inspired to learn how much of an influence their choices, attitudes and behaviors will have upon a child they create, and thus upon the world.

The Nature/Nurture Embrace

Technological advances of the past few decades have revealed amazing things about what really makes us humans tick, and what makes us, period. For example, after a few hundred years of the nature-nurture debate ("Which is the more powerful shaping force, our genes or our experiences?") it has become clear that the question itself was flawed. Nature/Nurture isn't a debate but a dance, an interactive collaboration that takes place throughout the lifespan. There are windows of development when Nature leads, and others when Nurture leads, but most of the time they dance together in unison, taking cues from one another and elaborating on what each calls forth in the individual.

The Human Genome Project was expected to revolutionize our self-knowledge by counting and coding the genes that make up this amazing complexity we call a human being—and indeed it did revolutionize our understanding, but not in the way the scientists had expected. To account for all of the proteins and regulatory processes in the body, researchers expected to find at least 140,000 genes (some estimated up to two million), but instead they have found only 24,000[16]—half the genes in a grain of white rice! As it happens, *Homo sapiens* has a similar number of genes as *Caenorhabditis elegans*, a one millimeter-long roundworm. So the looming question becomes *What is it, if not DNA, that accounts for the human being's amazingly more complex repertoire than that of a grain of rice or a roundworm??*

The answer to that question, and the empowerment within its answer, is what the 21st century consciousness revolution is about: how the most microscopic centers of biological intelligence—your cells—interact with and respond to the vast intelligence of the cosmos, with your mind as the intermediary, to shape who you are and the world in which you live.[17] This mind-as-intermediary holds the keys to the palace. The nature of our thoughts, attitudes, and feelings shapes those keys. And amazingly, how we are

conceived, carried, and nurtured has a huge impact on the nature of those thoughts, attitudes and feelings! It turns out that these early experiences, beginning in the womb, largely determine the potential capacities of our minds to open life's doors to us, and, which doors they will open—those to the cramped mudrooms or to the vast and limitless spaces of the great rooms.

Fascinating secrets about things that have puzzled us for centuries are being revealed by two frontier fields: *consciousness studies* and *epigenetics*. Epigenetics is the study of heritable changes in gene expression and function that occur without a change in the actual DNA code. Epigenetics recognizes that DNA is not the grand "Destiny Maker" of life after all, and identifies the mechanisms by which environmental signals (including diet, thoughts and behavior) can change the action of our genes—an unthinkable concept even just a generation ago.[18] Epigenetics findings flow together elegantly with the Human Genome Project's discovery of so few genes, and the realization that there must be some other fundamental ingredient involved in creating the breathtaking array of diverse human genetic expression. To an extent greater than ever before realized, we tell our DNA what we want it to do![19] Cell biologist and epigenetics pioneer Bruce Lipton sums up the paradigm shift succinctly: "DNA is controlled by signals from outside the cell, including the energetic messages emanating from our positive and negative thoughts."[20] (Have you seen *that* on any front pages or television news programs lately, alongside the ads for prescription drugs?)

A Consciousness Revolution

> *Do you remember how electrical currents and "unseen waves" were laughed at? The knowledge about man is still in its infancy.* - *Albert Einstein*
>
> *All great truths start out as blasphemies.* - *George Bernard Shaw*

This brings us to the other field making amazing discoveries about human possibilities: the untamed frontier of quantum consciousness research, which explores the nature of human thought and how it affects the physical world around us—including our own brains, bodies and experience. This is not a realm to be ventured into by those easily put off by wild possibilities and intense scientific controversy. Like all watershed discoveries through history that have struck a death-blow to the prevailing worldview, the idea that our humble thoughts can wield such power stirs up quite a dust-cloud of skepticism and debate. It will have to endure, like all revolutionary knowledge that has come before it—think, "round not flat world" or "sun, not earth, as center of universe"—ridicule and violent opposition before it is finally accepted. Quantum physicist Max Planck famously observed that a new truth doesn't ultimately triumph by convincing its opponents, but rather by waiting for those opponents to die, leaving a new generation that has been raised to be familiar with that truth. And here you are!

In today's world of ever-accelerating change, the time it takes for innovations of all kinds to evolve has shrunk so exponentially that information revolutions that once took centuries may take only twenty years. So you may very well be the first generation to witness the entire process of ridicule/challenge/acceptance of a major paradigm shift—the consciousness revolution—within your lifetime. Indeed, there is an almost-invisible transformation happening worldwide, as more and more people are coming to recognize the powerful influence their thoughts, attitudes and feelings have upon the quality and

direction of their lives and those around them. Scientific research is informing spiritual matters in unprecedented ways and the results have come straight to the people.

By "spiritual" I don't mean necessarily religious, but related to the deep inner life and its experience of what exists as "something more" than the sum of our physical, mental and emotional being. One writer friend of mine sees the spiritual in "the catch of the breath, the sob in the throat, the shining in the eye when we feel or witness something that inspires us, moves us or heals us." Others define spiritual simply as a personal experience of the numinous, which is that mysterious, enlivening "something more." For some, this is God (by any of myriad names for a Higher Power), for others the numinous is in the transpersonal or quantum realm, such as the "collective unconscious," the "unified field of intelligence," or the "Infinite Absolute." And for those whose faith remains focused upon the here-and-now human being—the secular humanists—it is the redeeming but unmysterious values like truth, beauty, goodness, justice, reason.

Can You Get Your Head Around This Idea About... Your Head?

The seven principles that serve as the pillars for parenting for peace are designed to inspire, and to elevate the consciousness with which we parent. Defining "consciousness" is a bit like looking into a bathroom mirror that is reflected in a second mirror, and trying to pinpoint, "Which of these infinite reflections is really me?" The most basic definition of *consciousness* is "the state of being awake and aware." (As opposed to asleep, unconscious, in a coma, etc.) But as human consciousness evolved in its varied dimensions beyond the consciousness of various other levels of animal life—with the advent of tools, and later, language, for example—new tiers of definitions emerged. My use of the term throughout this book refers to a couple of upper tier meanings. One has to do with *what that state of awareness focuses upon*: the *direction* and *contents* of consciousness. And the other, one tier above that, it is *a conscious awareness of where one's consciousness is focused*. This ability to think about one's thinking is unique to the human species; it's the ability to ask, "Where's my head at?" Don't feel bad if you don't quite get it. "The problem of consciousness" persists as one of the big conundrums of science, philosophy, and psychology, meaning that it's one of those fundamental human phenomena—like sleep—that scientists cannot truly explain.

Mind Moves Matter

Hundreds of scientific studies exist to demonstrate that focused thought, or *intentionality*, can have a measurable effect on matter—humans, animals, plants, and even machines[21]—a fact that has particularly direct implications for healthy fertility and conception in the early steps of your parenting journey. I have included a handful of titles and links in case you wish to explore the research, and meanwhile I'll share a couple of examples here that first grabbed me about this whole idea.

Cleve Backster is a polygraph scientist and former CIA interrogator, best known for having developed the Backster Zone Comparison Test, a worldwide standard for lie detection. On a somewhat playful impulse—the kind of impulse true scientists follow, and which precedes many revolutionary discoveries, a "playing with reality"—Backster placed some galvanic skin response electrodes on the leaf of a dracaena plant that his secretary had bought to spruce up the lab. He had just given the plant a thorough watering and was curious about how long it would take the water to make the trip from the roots

up the tall cane trunk and out to the ends of the long leaves. When water permeates a leaf, the natural electrical conductivity present in all living things is enhanced, and Backster figured that the electrodes would register this change. Instead, they registered something he didn't see coming.

"The contour of the pen tracing was not what I would expect from water entering a leaf, but instead what I would expect from a person taking a lie-detector test... Lie detectors work on the principle that when people perceive a threat to their wellbeing, they physiologically respond in predictable ways. ...So I began to think about how I could threaten the well-being of the plant."[22]

The idea came to him to burn one of the leaves with a match. "I didn't verbalize, I didn't touch the plant, I didn't touch the equipment. The only new thing that could have been a stimulus for the plant was the mental image. Yet the plant went wild. The pen jumped right off the top of the chart."

Cleve Backster says his own consciousness changed irrevocably that day, and he devoted himself to studying this phenomenon that he came to call *primary perception*. He went on to study interspecies biocommunication with other forms of life such as bacteria, eggs, and most notably for our purposes here, human cells. White blood cells taken by scraping the inside of someone's cheek and put into a sterilized test tube with sterilized gold electrodes, responded in step with their donor's activities and emotions regardless of how far removed from them the person was. (The furthest distance tested was three hundred miles.)[23] Although Backster and his discoveries got some fleeting popular attention in the 70s, featured in the book and documentary *The Secret Life of Plants,* he suffered the kind of professional ridicule and exile typically delivered upon scientists who venture too audaciously into frontier territory. But the evolution in his own consciousness was worth it to him: the recognition that even one single human is more influential, and more interconnected with the rest of the world, than ever suspected.

What dawned upon one of my 11th-grade students was the realization that her thoughts and feelings aren't just hers: how she feels, thinks and acts carries an impact that extends beyond her own self and into her wider world. Our consciousness can even have an impact on things we don't normally consider as being "alive," such as water, and even machines! Bernard Grad at McGill University had patients suffering varying severities of depression hold vials of water for thirty minutes. That water was then used to water carefully monitored houseplants, and there was a measurable difference in plant growth that correlated with the various mental and mood states of the vial holders.[24] Human intention can also influence machines: For the past thirty years, scientists at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research labs have conducted rigorous studies showing that we can affect both mechanical and digital machines through our thoughts. For example, a random number generator (RNG) left unattended will produce a roughly equal distribution of 0s and 1s, consistent with the statistical expectation. However, when a person is asked to "intend" for the RNG to produce either more 0s or more 1s, this results in a small but tangible effect on the stream of digital information.[25]

Psychologist William Braud has done extensive studies of this kind within the human realm, in which subjects influence various physiological systems of distant individuals (for example, their heart rate or blood pressure) through mental intention.[26] Although this entire area of mind-matter research is continually dismissed by skeptics as "pseudo-science," the sheer volume of serious studies seems to challenge not only the

skeptics, but also our culturally accepted framework of how our world works, and how we fit into that world.

We Are The MVPs in Our Own Evolution!

As revolutionary as it is, the idea that each of us has a powerful say *today* in how we and our children evolve *tomorrow* isn't a brand new idea. It has been researched and expressed in many previous centuries by progressive thinkers whose ideas have simply been waiting for us to recognize their brilliant relevance. Notable among them is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist whose life spanned the 19th and 20th centuries, and who was present at the discovery of the famous bones of Peking Man. He was also a Jesuit priest and a philosopher—a man whose life and work embodied the science-meets-spirit movement so popular today. Teilhard's writings expressed a view of evolution not as the series of random mutations that characterizes what we know of Darwin's model, but as both a scientific and a holy process steeped in what he called *orthogenesis*—the divine, collaborative, upward drive of all things, living and not, toward increased complexity and consciousness.[27]

Teilhard's explanation of human evolution is compelling in its correlation with actual events, many of which have happened in the decades after his death. He saw two stages of what he called the "planetization" of humans. The first is the *expanding* stage, when humans spread and populated far-flung regions across the earth, when they multiplied and diversified into races and cultures that were very different and isolated from one another. The second (which began in the 20th century) is the *contracting* stage: once most of the earth has been occupied, the races and cultures begin to converge, with all of the challenges and opportunities that brings. Information, commodities, wars and dreams, are no longer confined to single races or regions, but are shared amongst diverse peoples of Earth. Teilhard also saw this as a unifying stage, and envisioned something wild and amazing as the primary evolutionary leap of this stage.

Keeping in mind that Teilhard wrote about this at a time when the concept of personal computers was still science fiction, let alone the internet, he pictured the earth encircled by an interdependent system of collective thought that he called the *noosphere*, which is up the evolutionary ladder from the earlier-established interrelating system of physical life known as the *biosphere*. He saw "the Earth not only covered by myriads of grains of thought, but enclosed in a single thinking envelope so as to form a single vast grain of thought..." with many "individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection."[28] Can you imagine a more prophetic (or lyrical) description of the World Wide Web? Or a more inspiring image than his description of the noosphere as the "very soul of the earth," a "...living membrane which is stretched like a film over the lustrous surface of the star which holds us"? Think about *that* the next time you log on!

From this perspective, we are in a transition—always a time of crisis—between the expanding stage and the contracting, or unifying, stage. This is when all the rules seem to change, particularly the famed "survival of the fittest" slogan of popular Darwin theory. Like many of today's futurists, Teilhard saw that humanity will only survive—and indeed thrive—by embracing and cultivating the abilities needed for interdependence and unification, suggesting instead, as Bruce Lipton puts it, "survival of the most loving." Indeed, Teilhard wrote, "Someday, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides

and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of Love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

This brings us back to the power of this moment for evolution within each of us right now, and as we bring our children into the world and raise them. Post-Darwinian biologists recognize the significant role in evolution played by a living being's own efforts. One such biologist sees the "psychic life" of the organism as a "most powerful creative element in evolution."[29]

Many fields of research tend to affirm that we humans are indeed at a crucial moment in our evolution, and our survival is going to depend upon our realizing, deeply, that our true security is rooted in connectedness, in our relationships, in healthy interdependence with our fellow humans and with our natural environment.

It is a moment that requires thoughtfulness, fortitude and faith.

It is a moment for us to embrace, together.

It is a moment that is here now.

Let us gather our courage, our Cliff Notes, our hero's grit… and embark on the transformative adventure of parenting for peace.

RESOURCES

Inclusive Psychology, http://inclusivepsychology.com/

Kurzweil, R. *The Singularity Is Near*. New York: Penguin, 2005.

Cleve Backster and Biocommunication: http://primaryperception.com/

Mayer, Elizabeth Lloyd. *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind*. New York: Bantam, 2007.

Step Six

The Enchanted Years – *Toddlers thru Kindergarten: Playing, Puttering and Peace*

> *If a child has been able in his play to give up his whole loving being to the world around him, he will be able, in the serious tasks of later life, to devote himself with confidence and power to the service of the world.*
> *–Rudolf Steiner*

The Rubber Hits the Road

Your child is on the move, and parenting has taken on a different pace, more physical than ever now that you're also on the move—after him! In this past year you have accomplished a rainbow of transformations: the baby proofing you've done around your house in some ways is a metaphor for the many inner adjustments and remodeling that have taken place within your psyche—simplifying the landscape, deciding what's precious. For some, this has included reprioritizing your financial values—choosing to live less grandly, with fewer luxuries, in order that one of you can stay home with your child.

Regardless of whether you have returned to work or opted for full-time parenting, you have navigated a minefield of difficult, sometimes painful, choices. It is disheartening that a country with our technological and military prowess has made so little progress, in the forty years since the advent of the feminist movement, in attenuating the agony involved in the at-home v. working dilemma. The U.S. lags behind many other Western countries in prioritizing innovative social policy measures that support the needs of parents to work, as well as the needs of children for their parents (and parents for their children!). Our versions of parental leave and workplace innovations such as flex-time and job sharing have a long way to go to bridge the disconnect between the needs of our families and the demands of our employment.

It is also dispiriting that a country founded on diversity tolerance cannot seem to dig out of its entrenched polarization of stay-at-home motherhood and working motherhood. One need not have a psychology degree to realize that one strand of this eternal tug-of-war is woven from the divergent feelings and experiences of these two classes (and make no mistake—they are indeed social classes): the working mother wrestles with brands of guilt and stress the at-home mother is largely spared, while the mother at home often suffers isolation, a dearth of adult stimulation, and a sense that her work is not valid or valued according to our cultural clout-o-meter.

Burton White, director of Harvard's Preschool Project and author of the classic *The First Three Years of Life*, has held to his highly unpopular position about day care for over thirty years. "Controversy notwithstanding, I remain totally convinced that, to get off to the best start in life, babies need to spend a great deal of their waking time during the first three years of life with

older people who are deeply in love with them. Although this ideal circumstance does not always prevail in families, it much more often found there than in any substitute-care arrangement."[1]

While of course there are mothers for whom working is a given and not a choice, research reveals something that came as a surprise to me, and yet not: a significant portion of women choose full-time work over caring for their children not because of economic pressures, but rather, writes Mary Eberstadt, "because they prefer to arrange their lives that way,"[2] and that the higher up the socioeconomic ladder one goes, the *more* likely are mothers with young children to leave home:

> Faced with the endemic uncertainties and boundless chores of domestic life, many adults, male and female, end up preferring what Hochschild calls the "managed cheer" of work. Modern office life, she argues, not only competes with the home as "haven in a heartless world," in the phrase popularized by Christopher Lasch; for many women (and men), it partially or fully *supplants* the hearth, offering simpler emotional involvements, more solvable tasks, and often a more companionable and appreciative class of people than those waiting at home.[3]

If you indeed choose to return to work, or have no choice but to do so, keep in mind the central implication of attachment neurobiology: your child's social brain is going to wire up to echo that of the person with whom she spends the bulk of her time, so let that guide you in choosing substitute care. White's extensive research led him to recommend that the best kind of substitute care is individual care in your own home, followed by individual care in the home of the caregiver. Next is family daycare, followed by nonprofit center-based care (such as at a church, temple, or other such organization). At the bottom of the list is for-profit center-based care. Keep in mind White's overarching guideline for the person with whom your young child spends the bulk of his day: someone "deeply in love with" him.

In her wonderful manual *You Are Your Child's First Teacher,* Rahima Baldwin Dancy acknowledges, "To expect a thirty-seven-year-old PhD candidate, or a woman who has had an exciting career, to be fulfilled spending her days in an apartment with a two-year-old is idyllic but hard to find in reality."[4] It is my hope that the insights in this book help you recognize not only the supreme importance of your ongoing presence in your child's daily life, but also some interesting facets of what can, admittedly, be the tedious job of day-in-day-out parenting. And, you can rest assured that following attuned conception, resplendent pregnancy, and empowered birth, parenting is far easier than conventional reports warn. You are teed up for some really joyous adventures—and yes, continued avenues of challenging discovery and growth.

Full-time mothering can bump us up against our own most tender, unresolved material—memories we carry within us of how we were received and mothered—and I believe that along with a love of our careers, there is often an element of avoidance: we don't want to go there. But these very memories, our stories, contain the power to heal us and in turn, heal the world. The 21st century consciousness revolution unfolds within each of us, and with exquisite intensity when we become parents. If we can bear it, mother-child communion reveals to us ourselves.

And sometimes it's hard to watch—all that imperfection so vividly spotlighted. But as Nancy Jewel Poer reminds us, it is not our perfection but our *striving* that teaches our children. And if we have been able to continually re-shift our worldview to one of wholism and sustainability, our entire parenting landscape is transformed: ongoing striving and growth is the whole point, not merely a pesky obstacle. If we can see our children's development in layers and dimensions that include physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual, we begin, writes Dancy, "to perceive the whole child and how he or she unfolds." Then things make eminently more sense and our choices "will begin to have coherence. No longer wanting a cookbook of 'how to's,' we

will trust our own decisions, based on our understanding of the developing child and observation of the resultant flowering of our children."[5]

You Are Your Child's First Teacher

In an understandable desire to help assure our children's success, we try to give them a head start by beginning earlier and earlier to teach them the alphabet, numbers, maybe a little pre-algebra. (I'm just kidding—I think! I'm keeping a close eye on that *Yo Gabba Gabba* robot for surreptitious math tutoring.) Intellectual work at this age actually undermines the young child's development by diverting energy from critical organ growth, and enlisting areas of the brain that are not yet meant to be "on line." The latest science of brain development supports what Waldorf education founder Rudolf Steiner taught almost one hundred years ago: early academics does not strengthen the young child's development, but instead undermines it! And it is in the social-emotional realm—in other words, his peacemaker potential—that we most seriously derail a child's development by pressing him into cerebral, rational pursuits during these early years.

How A Young Child Really Learns

Since it is the sensory-motor areas of her brain that are most active in the early years, the young child—up until around the age of seven—relates to the world primarily through her *senses* and her *body.* Her primary modes of perception, therefore, are through sensing (seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching—indeed, lots of touching!) and doing, through the most active mode of learning, which is *imitation.* Understanding this basic fact about their child should help parents with two very important issues:

- knowing that for a child to *touch* something, or to *do* with her body, is similar to an adult *thinking* about that same thing.
- recognizing that activities which engage these two aspects—sensing and doing—are the richest, healthiest, and most effective learning environments for the young child.

It also raises a third issue: the adults in a young child's life have a responsibility to create an environment—including themselves, their speech and actions—that is worthy of his *unquestioning imitation.*

What is the learning activity that most powerfully engages the child's two primary modes of taking in and processing her world? And that quickens her imitation-driving learning? Play! Play is the all-important world of the child until around seven—or should be. But in our hyper-accelerated culture we've lost an understanding and appreciation for just how critically important play is in the healthy development of our children. We tend to see it as a waste of time. A toy cannot simply be a toy—it has to be educational. Play cannot be for its own sake, it needs to be organized, improved upon, and packaged as "enrichment."

When a child engages in open-ended play (that is, *un*-organized, *un*-"improved upon," and *un*-packaged), he engages the all-important *senses* and he cultivates perhaps the most important peacemaking capacity of all, *imagination*. As he imagines the wooden crate as his pirate ship, he *sees* the tall mast, *hears* the crashing waves, *feels* the salt sea spray. As he climbs in and hoists the sail (Mom's favorite guest towel), his body and brain are engaged in a stunningly intricate series of sensory-motor interactions and important "pre-logical mental frolic." In an hour of such play, he is stimulating robust growth of important new neural connections. This play-centric activity not only cultivates his greatest peacemaker potential by

fostering creative imagination, social intelligence and a healthy will, but also serves as an important foundation for later academics.

A recent study compared four- and five-year-olds enrolled in a play-based school to those in a more typical preschool ("typical" meaning it emphasizes academics). The students in the play-based school scored better on cognitive flexibility, self-control, and working memory—all aspects of the executive function mastered by the prefrontal lobes—which have been consistently linked to academic achievement. (The results were so compelling that the study was ended early so that all of the children could be moved into the play-based curriculum!)[6] Child psychologist David Elkind has devoted his professional life at Tufts University to studying the costs of "hurrying" children. On a visit to Stanford University, he noticed that bright young architecture students had to play with erector sets in class, because they hadn't had enough hands-on play as children, As a result, the sophisticated computer drafting technologies weren't serving them because these play-deprived young adults didn't have a real-world, three-dimensional frame of reference for the two-dimensional images on the screen.[7]

The same problem arises when we introduce abstract intellectual concepts to young children—like the alphabet. Letters are symbols, and the areas of the brain that process and make sense of symbols are not yet available in an integral way in the young child. Children live in the realm of the concrete world of the brain's right hemisphere—what they can sense (see, hear, feel, taste, smell, etc.). Symbolic thinking is governed by the brain's left hemisphere, so if introduced too early it is "learned" in a rote, mechanical way. It has little depth of meaning for a child, and leads to a more superficial interaction with words, ideas, and concepts. As Elkind points out, "The language of things must precede the language of words, or else the words don't mean anything." Not the best way to begin a child's lifelong learning, and certainly not conducive to the flexibly innovative, layered thinking capacities needed to forge peace, innovation, and prosperous sustainability.

Decades of learning research has consistently turned up the same result—that the strongest predictor of school achievement is the frequency with which parents read to and share stories with their child during the preschool years, not the early age at which the child masters reading. Because the most important element of early reading skills is *comprehension*, which is developed through the child's imaginative, whole-brain engagement in stories, not through rote, superficial flashcard "learning" of letters and phonics.[8] It is mostly English-speaking countries that have become intent on starting children on reading while they're still in this naturally dreamy, pre-logical stage of life; studies of international data don't suggest an advantage for earlier reading, and it may make stressful demands on a brain not yet properly wired for it.*

Then the child gets slapped with a label—ADD/ADHD, for example—with which he is saddled in perpetuity; shame, discouragement, and insecurity can then drain him of his innate affinities toward learning to read. Indeed, the professionals who work with children—occupational therapists, development specialists and neuropsychologists—see early academics as directly related to the growing incidence of attention and visual processing disorder diagnoses. Developmental pediatrician Susan Johnson says there are behavioral clues parents can look for to see if their child has developed the hemispheric integration signaling true reading readiness. One

* I'm referring to coaxing, coaching, and flashcarding; in the unusual instance in which a child spontaneously begins reading on his own at, say, three or four or five, that is different. In that case it is important for parents not to seize on this exciting development and fast-track him into Hemingway and the local school's GATE program, but to continue fostering rich play, imagination, story time and a matter-of-fact enjoyment of his precocious ability.

is the ability to easily (without intently concentrating on "doing it right") do a cross-lateral skip, in which one arm swings forward with the opposite leg.[9]

Brand new longitudinal data—the first of its kind—has found that readers who start at age five and readers who start at age seven show no differences in reading ability by age eleven.[10] Researcher Sebastian Suggate says that this finding "emphasizes to me the importance of early language and learning, while de-emphasizing the importance of early reading. In fact, language development is, in many cases, a better predictor of later reading than early reading is."[11] Having credibly disproved the widely presumed advantage of early reading, Suggate is now researching whether it might actually incur developmental costs.

Despite this new research and the virtual absence of data supporting the advantages of early reading, it is still cultural blasphemy to suggest that the hundreds-of-millions-of-dollar programs to teach reading skills to three-to-five year olds might possibly be missing the intended mark. We would do better by enriching the daily lives of at-risk youth with one or two reliably attuned, interested adults in whose orbit they could engage in meaningful hands-on activities, play, conversations and storytelling. I believe that Head Start's success is largely a result of the epiphenomenon of this kind of relational enhancement in the lives of at-risk youth—a circumstance that naturally co-occurred with its stated objective of "teaching."

Elkind makes the point that true reading readiness only emerges once a child has attained the neuro-cognitive milestone of syllogistic reasoning ("All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; thus Socrates is mortal"), which dawns during the *concrete operational* stage of cognitive development. This "con-op leap" happens around age seven, and is a *biologically based* milestone, just like the shedding of baby teeth or the onset of puberty. How many parents fret if their son hasn't managed to lose his first tooth as soon as his friend did… or if their daughter is thirteen and "still just has not been able to get her period"? We wisely recognize that biology has its own internal timeline, but where *neuro*biology is concerned, well, that's a different animal. We get anxious. We want to get in there and… tinker and tweak… optimize… accelerate… give them a head start.

One reason for the widespread presumption that early reading predicts higher academic achievement is also a knotty problem parents face as they contemplate schooling choices: early reading is simply assumed within and central to our conventional educational system. As homeschooling mother Beth Clarkson articulates it, this precludes any latitude for the naturally idiosyncratic developmental timelines of children. She suggests that beginning as early as kindergarten, "so much of the curriculum is designed assuming a certain level of reading ability, if a child is behind in reading ability, they will fall behind in all other subjects. With homeschooled children, if a child is not reading, the parents simply help them learn in other ways and thus, they need not fall behind in other subjects."[12]

Clarkson astutely points out that research which finds that students suffer long-term as a result of late reading, is an indication of "the inability of the school system to adequately adjust to the individual needs of the children rather than an indication that it is supremely important for every child to be reading by a certain age."

Play researcher Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, author of *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, sees our cultural devaluation of play—shoving it aside in favor of academics for preschoolers, the extinction of recess through the grades, the erosion of unstructured time in kids' lives—as a crisis whose consequences may take years to be recognized. If, as the new research suggests, our conventional preschools with their low-play, prematurely academic focus are turning out children who struggle executive function, then "we may be raising a generation of kids with less

self-control, shorter attention spans, and poorer memory skills."[13] Crisis, indeed—of the peacemaker kind.

How Parents Can Build Their Child's Brain

There is one very important area of the child's brain that does need parents' active participation for optimal healthy development—the *orbitofrontal cortex,* or OFC. It isn't just the first year that is a critical window for OFC development, but the first *three* years, during which time its circuitry in the toddler's brain wires up in *direct response to the nature of his or her primary attachment relationships*. The watchword for these essential early years is relationship, relationship, relationship. Empathy, connection, presence are OFC nourishment; they reciprocally cultivate the capacities for empathy, connection and presence in the child.

Because of its essential functions, the OFC is what I call the "Human Being Success Center" of the brain. If you forget every other function carried out by the OFC, remember this one: self-regulation. The implications of a child's self-regulation brain circuitry are immense and enduring: it lays the foundation for the very sense of self—so much so that one of the godfathers of the field of attachment neurobiology titled his landmark textbook on the subject *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self*.[14] Bottom line is, optimally developed circuitry in the brain's OFC is paramount to personality development, peacemaker potential, and lifelong success.

According to Steiner, the life-giving forces that support the optimal unfolding of a child's innate intelligence is a phenomenon of human development, and these newest findings about the importance of developing a child's healthy orbitofrontal cortex are amazingly consistent with what Steiner taught a hundred years ago about how the mind develops. He referred to these inner organizing forces as the *will energies* of a child. A robustly healthy will—which correlates directly with robustly healthy OFC circuitry—is the foundation for success in every dimension of a person's life, and certainly to their capacities for peace, pleasure and innovation.

Learning Peace by Living Peace: Nourishing A Child's Will

Child psychiatrist Bruce Perry points out that the young child's healthiest early brain development is nurtured by consistency and predictability in her daily life. I have a poem on my wall that says "children learn what they live"—and this is especially true in the early years at the basic, unconscious level of brain organization. When a child *lives* regulation, consistency and stability, the child's will energies are fostered, and his brain is wired to *be* regulated, consistent and stable. This is the foundation for peace in the home and in the world, for achievement in school, and success in life!

In the midst of our speedy, complicated world, how do we create an atmosphere of regulation, consistency and stability? How best can we nurture our children's capacities for peace, creativity, ingenuity? The answer is quite simple, actually, but not always easy: we do it by supporting their life-building will energies, which in turn foster optimal brain development. As with a rose, we ensure the unfolding of a beautiful mind and body when, during these first seven years, we enrich the child's soil—her home, her days, her parents—with the four elements most important to the young child: nourishing diet; physical and emotional warmth; consistent rhythms; and an atmosphere of reverence, awe and beauty.

Diet: It seems to go without saying that during these critical years when the child's body and brain are undergoing such intense, rapid growth, he needs a wholesome, nutritious diet—including plenty of protein, fresh vegetables and whole grains, ideally locally/organically

grown—to provide the "construction materials." But many parents don't realize which nutrient is *most* essential to the life-giving forces at work now: fat. Children need a variety of high quality fats and oils, from both animal and vegetable sources. Myelin, the protective sheath that covers communicating neurons and facilitates optimal functioning of the nervous system, is being created and laid down at a tremendous rate in the young child's brain. Myelin is composed of thirty percent protein and seventy percent fat. Indeed, optimal formation of the brain—the organ of utmost importance to a child's future success and peacemaker potential—relies on an abundance of essential fatty acids (EFAs). In today's excessively anti-fat diet culture, children are at risk for not getting enough. Care must be taken by vegetarians and meat-eaters alike to provide their young children quality sources of EFAs.

Warmth: As mothers through the ages can attest, children rarely feel cold (and thus are not inclined to "Put on a sweater!"). This is because of their accelerated metabolic rate: there is so much new growth going on inside of them—organs, bones, blood, brain cells—it's like a little furnace in there. A young child or infant may not even feel cold until she's on the verge of hypothermia. Like so many other mothers living in warm climates, I let my summer baby sport nothing but a diaper on many occasions, but I have since learned it would have been far healthier for him to have on a couple of thin layers of cotton or even lightweight wool, especially over the center of his body, where organs were developing. (This is why little vests are wonderful—they warm the center while leaving the playful arms free.) Advises developmental pediatrician Susan Johnson,

> If we don't provide them with the layers of cotton and wool to insulate their bodies, then they must use some of their potential "growth" energy to heat their bodies. This same energy would be better utilized in further developing
> their brain, heart, liver, lungs etc. In addition, being cold decreases our immunity. We are all more susceptible to the germs and viruses that are always around us when we are wet and cold. When our body has to expend extra energy to keep warm then less energy is available to "fight" off infections.[15]

So the question becomes, how do we get our children to wear jackets? Well, we can develop the habit of always having a child put on a hat and coat when they go outside during cool weather, and we can also tell the child that they will actually run faster and have much more energy to play if they wear a coat. If they don't wear a coat then their body has to expend a lot of energy just warming up, and they will have less energy to build muscles and less energy to play.[16]

The warmth of a fever is also important for a child's healthy development; it's one of her immune system's key tools for the ongoing remodeling of her body throughout childhood. Fever is the body's wise way to get hot enough to digest and expel layers of what needs to go—so wise parents won't automatically reduce it with children's Tylenol or Advil. Once they determine—with the help of a doctor, especially in a child younger than two years—that the child doesn't have a serious illness (e.g., strep throat, pneumonia, meningitis), it's important that they consider supporting the fever process in various ways, such as properly breathable yet insulating clothing and even such unexpected yet effective approaches as lemon wraps.[17]

As author Melissa Block points out, "Each fever and acute inflammation is like a labor pain. While it's hard to welcome and embrace the intense discomfort of a contraction, each one brings you closer to holding your baby in your arms. Each fever and inflammation is trying to bring to birth a new balance in your child, helping her to make a new step in her development."[18] Many parents notice that their child takes a big developmental leap directly following an acute illness.

Besides physical warmth, the young child needs to be surrounded by emotional warmth. This may seem obvious, but it's actually not such a given: if you were the proverbial fly on the wall looking in on how people are living in today's sped-up, must-go-faster world, you'd find that many homes of even the youngest children echo with the chill of cool, expedient efficiency. We've become a hyper-practical, results-focused culture too often too busy to slow down to child time, which is inherently more molasses-paced. To kneel down to our child's level to listen to her story, to put our arms around our son and look at that bug he just caught, doesn't often jibe with our lockstep schedule.

One of the biggest obstacles to joy and tranquility in the home of young children is adult agendas of what must get done. As everyone who has ever raced with the clock knows—whether it's in the workplace, out in the world doing errands, or at home—one of the first casualties of time pressure is simple *kindness*, in our demeanor and speech. It's bad enough when this happens with our peers and fellow adults, but in the life of a child the evaporation of kindness is incalculably risky: it erodes the bedrock of all development and also, remember, they are watching, imprinting, and will soon be imitating it all. *Social Intelligence* author Daniel Goleman highlights genetic research demonstrating that "small, caring acts of parenthood can matter in lasting ways—and that relationships have a hand in guiding the brain's continuing redesign."[19]

I vividly remember that one of the most blissful weeks I ever spent with my two children when they were very young—six and three—was when their dad was out of the country on business and I had cleared my schedule, resigned to getting nothing done… except remaining sane! Once my own agenda was dropped, I was able to be present for my kids in a way that my habitual, hyper-efficient approach usually didn't allow for. To this day, almost twenty years later, I remember the extended game of Pirate Ship we played together… the feeling of Eve's breath in my face… the sound of Ian's giddy laughter… the intimate connection we shared and the sense of infinite expansiveness in those moments. That taught me the value of being flexible regarding my own thoughts of what I needed to accomplish on any given day.

If parents were to consider *every* day with young children as such an "extenuating circumstance"… and just as temporary… as I considered that unusual week when my husband was away, they might lean more naturally into modes that nourish their children's healthy will (and bring themselves more tranquility). And when you think about it from a big-picture perspective, these early years truly *are* extenuating and temporary—a relatively fleeting, unspeakably precious window of time in which to accomplish perhaps the most important work you'll ever do—weave a core of peace and joy within your child(ren).

Part of where we've veered off course in our collective approach to parenting is a rarely considered facet of our tendency toward over-permissiveness: a sense that we must instill the lesson early on in our children that they can do it themselves. Whether it's prompted by anxiety that they'll remain helpless forever, or our uniquely American value of rugged individualism, all this nudging and cajoling we do in order that our kids get on with the business of growing up doesn't serve anyone. It was a huge "ah hah" when I learned that the best way to foster true independence in a child is to allow her to be *dependent* for as long as she needs to be. The parenting strategy by which parents either distractedly leave children largely to their own devices or consciously choose not to indulge their "childish" needs in an attempt to cultivate self-sufficiency, actually backfires and results in what therapists call *unmet dependency needs*. These get expressed in all kinds of unconstructive, self-defeating behaviors later in life, part of a constellation labeled narcissism.[20]

The common perception of a narcissist as someone who is overly confident and in love with themselves is a *mis*perception: the narcissist[†] masks the fact that he (usually unconsciously) feels deeply insecure and unworthy, and does all the wrong things and looks in all the wrong places to find the mirroring—the adoration reflected back to him in his mother's "eyes of delight"—that he missed when he *should* have received it in copious amounts. Meaning, in his first three to five years. And thus the irony: many parents' well-meaning attempts to raise a person who *isn't* self-centered and "narcissistic" can actually result in exactly that!

Aside from the missing experience of being significant and cherished, the chronic experience of insecurity and fear experienced by a child who doesn't feel allowed to be "needy" or "weak" or "a baby" leads her to construct an inner emotional fortress and an outer brave face: *I don't need anyone.* This insular, protection-rather-than-growth orientation toward the world—which becomes part of her neural circuitry—is the antithesis of the constellation of personality traits that mark a person of peace and enlightened, innovative action. Most importantly, it snuffs out empathy.

Carolyn Zahn-Wexler, a psychologist specializing in the development of empathy, antisocial behavior, and depression, writes, "In adverse environments (such as a chaotic family life, child maltreatment, parental mental illness) children may become frightened, threatened, or angry and lash out or turn away from others in distress. In steeling themselves against their own pain, they may also become inured to the pain of those around them, which can adversely affect later social relationships, and the ability to discover peaceful solutions to conflicts."[21] Indeed, children aged three to four who display fearless behavior show less empathy and more aggression toward their peers.[22] They are also "emotionally shallow" and have a hard time identifying (i.e., relating to) facial expressions of fear.

Also of particular interest to the central growth-versus-protection theme of parenting for peace, the preschoolers were studied according to the "approach and withdrawal dimension" of their neurological functioning—the tendency to approach new stimuli (to gain information and acquire new skills) and withdraw from unfamiliar stimuli (to avoid danger). Ideally a child strikes a balance of exploration and caution—i.e., a healthy integration of growth *and* protection impulses. Fearless children fall at the caution-free end of the spectrum, which the researcher says involves neurological and genetic predisposition—but predisposition is not predestination: a child who is closely nurtured in the attuned way described in these pages is unlikely to have his or her normal fear response as dampened as was found the children in this study.[23] The researcher suggests, "As a society, we must discern the optimal stimulation that can be provided in the child's natural surroundings, in order to awaken those emotions that are necessary for the development of empathy toward another and for refraining from aggressive behavior."

This means enveloping the child in the emotional warmth he needs—which includes mirroring, kindness and the security of being supported and nurtured with all of his individual needs, fears and dependence. And then as if by magic, usually imperceptibly but sometimes overnight, he will organically outgrow the childish expressions of those needs, fears and dependencies—not because he had to repress or deny them, but because he will have internalized the healthy capacities for regulating them within his own being. (Once again, the magic of *projection of function outside until the capacity is built inside*.)

[†] I dislike this pejorative term for someone struggling with a developmental imbalance that results in a certain kind of vulnerability; while I understand that narcissism can result in behavior that is hurtful to themselves or others, it would be like labeling someone with diabetes a *diabeticist*!

We Americans feel the need to begin training our children from the very beginning that "the world does not revolve around you." But the fact is, the world (the little world of home and family) *should* rightly revolve, to a great degree, around the young child's needs (not necessarily *wants*—an important distinction). This is the age when she is internalizing the experience that she has an impact on her world, that her needs matter, that the world and the people in it are responsive and she can thus feel confident rather than on guard. These are fundamental templates through which all her future experiences and relationships will be filtered. It is not possible to "spoil" a child of this age with too much love, attention or cuddling!

This does not mean we become doormats, doormen, servants, or sacrificial offerings to the unbridled whims and wants of our children. Which brings us to the next of the four basic elements needed by the young child:

Rhythm – "As biologists have learned in the past decade," writes author Jennifer Ackerman, "time permeates the flesh of all living things—and for one powerful reason: We evolved on a rotating planet."[24] She observes the many ways in which we carry inside us a model of the cosmos. It is thus no wonder that we find rhythmicity so nourishing. The young child most especially thrives on rhythmic routine, consistency and predictability. It weaves a sense of security into the fiber of his very cells as they are busy building brain and organ tissue. Rhythm should permeate the child's daily, weekly and even seasonal life. Meals and bedtimes are consistent and regular. Activities at home as well as outings take on the predictability of ritual, which the child can count on and keep a sort of internal beat to: *today we wash the sheets, then we go to the market, now we go to the post office, now I turn the dial on the box, now I am bored at the bank.*

We have become so frightened today of subjecting our children to—dare I even utter the word?—*boredom,* that we pack their lives full of extraneous, "exciting," new adventures that will "stimulate" their imaginations. Ironically, it is sameness and routine, the steady rhythm internalized by the child and embodied in well-mapped brain circuitry, that frees him to engage his imagination, creativity and, later, intellect.

Will energies are embedded in the body, experienced in the body, and are most nourished by the experience of *doing.* The child who is developing a healthy will helps fold the laundry, stirs the soup, sweeps the floor. She stacks blocks and bangs pots. She putters, she plays, she dabbles, she peeks at her mom from behind the door, all in the course of a day that has a comforting, secure structure and rhythm, which helps her brain hardwire for regulation and stability. It is through the doing of these simple activities that the child's will forces take shape and are strengthened. The regular recurrence of the daily rhythm in which one element flows smoothly into the next is calming, and offers children a sense of security through which their forces of will, expressed particularly in their play, can be nourished and their imagination take shape. Such rhythm used to occur naturally when work was home-based in pre-industrial America; today it requires dedicated effort and ingenuity to meet these developmental needs of the young human, needs that have not changed to keep pace with the technological revolution.

Common "anti-rhythmic" activities that adults take for granted but which can overtax the child's life-building will energies are visiting new places in "tourist mode"; time spent in the car; participation in competitive sports; crowded places like supermarkets, sporting events, or malls; literature meant for older children (e.g., *Harry Potter*); and rock and roll, jazz and other music meant for adults. All of these influences—like the rock music which when played in a greenhouse causes plants to wither—will weaken and dissipate a child's life forces. (We'll

discuss TV in its own section a bit later.) The very pace at which we tend to live is itself a taxing influence on the child's development.

A Peaceful Parenting Conundrum

- Technology has careened forward and changed our world dramatically, even in just the past fifty years.
- Human beings haven't much changed—in how we're built or how we function—in thousands of years!

Reconciling these two somewhat incompatible realities is a big part of the peaceful parenting challenge. Sitting in a parent's lap while he or she is riveted to a computer screen is antithetical to these needs of the child for activities done by hand—routinely, repetitively, and in joy. The child needs to see real work modeled by his parents. Here is where the conundrum really shows itself clearly: so much of what we adults consider meaningful activity happens in the abstract, virtual world of computers, screens, "connective technologies" and the like. You will rarely hear me romanticizing the past (as in "We've got to return to the old ways of…" or "…back when things were simpler…"), because we have never lived in an era with less brutality, more freedom, or greater opportunity as we do now. There are, however, certain aspects of earlier, less-sophisticated life that we would do well to embrace for these few years when our children are young, for the simple reason that it will best help you harness and leverage Nature's innate plan for their most vibrant flourishing.

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The child's need for a worthy example brings us to a central feature of this need for rhythm—the solid bass line of that rhythm: the parent as a calm, loving authority figure who is grounded in his or her life, which is not balanced on the child as its fulcrum. So many power struggles and discipline issues begin to arise in toddlerhood, and as Jean Liedloff explains, it is often because in their devotion to being good parents who respect and honor their children, have "gone overboard in the other direction" in which they center their attention and activities on the child, rather than engaging in "adult activities that the children can watch, follow, imitate, and assist in as is their natural tendency."

> In other words, because a toddler wants to learn what his people do, he expects to be able to center his attention on an adult who is centered on her own business. An adult who stops whatever she is doing and tries to ascertain what her child wants her to do is short-circuiting this expectation. Just as significantly, she appears to the tot not to know how to behave, to be lacking in confidence and, even more alarmingly, looking for guidance from him, a two or three year old who is relying on her to be calm, competent, and sure of herself. A toddler's fairly predictable reaction to parental uncertainty is to push his parents even further off-balance, testing for a place where they will stand firm and thus allay his anxiety about who is in charge.[25]

I would invite you to see if you can incorporate a sense of life oriented around some basic, hands-on activities that your child can watch, then imitate and help with. And to also cultivate an inner, abiding confidence in your authority; unlike in so many of today's families, in

which parents seem to have developed an aversive allergy to their children's unhappiness or upset, your child needs to know that you will not be shaken by her crying, whining, or protests.

The Challenge: Cultivating Calm, Loving Authority

We all know the feeling of being in a situation—a new class, a new job, a new city—in which we're not quite sure what's what. Where do we go, what do we do, who do we talk to? In those cases, it's always a relief when someone on the scene confidently and reliably knows the score and kindly lends us authoritative guidance. It helps us relax and experience the new situation more fully, rather than being in the "on alert" state that tends to come over us when we're unsure of things. For the toddler and young child, all of life is a new situation!

An important function of both the predictable routine and a dependable authority figure is that they provide a secure form that allows children to live in "dream consciousness," a hallmark of the first seven years. The slower brainwaves of the young child do in fact resemble that of a dreaming adult.[26] Children need to be able to unselfconsciously and wholeheartedly participate in the day's experiences without worrying about what comes next or what they need to be ready for. But these days it seems that even very young kids are savvy and alert and in-the-know about everything that is going on in the household.

It is best if we don't awaken the young child from her "dream"; therefore, we shouldn't offer a stream of choices, involve her in "democratic family policy-making," and we should definitely not *over-explain*. In my practice, and in observing families out in the world, I've come to see this as an epidemic—young children having too many choices and too much say in what takes place in the family. Now I myself will admit to once believing that having many choices in the course of the day (*Which pants would you like to wear, the blue ones or the brown ones? Do you want bananas or blueberries on your cereal, and do you want oatmeal or corn flakes? Yellow bowl or red?*) imparted a sense of empowerment in the young child, helped him feel a bit more involved in his own daily destiny, and built self-esteem. As with so many of our parenting missteps, giving a child this opportunity for autonomy errs not in its noble intention or even in its content, but in its time-frame: these are choices and freedoms that are not yet age-appropriate. My term to describe the myriad ways in which we perceive or treat young children as older children or even grown-ups is *adultifying*.

When we offer endless choices to the child… or engage in extended explanations, justifications or negotiations… or phrase our language in equivocal terms ("How about getting your PJs on?") we undermine our standing with him. If you were to listen in on many a parent's conversations with their young one, it wouldn't take long to hear what is in my opinion a most damaging (when used with a question mark) four-letter words for a child: *Okay*. As in, "It's time to get ready for bed now, okay?" And then there's the friendly, four-word discipline-disaster-in-the-making, "Do you want to…" As in "Do you want to get your sweater so we can go to school?" Talking to a young child in this way essentially enlists him as a co-decision-maker, with a level of influence and responsibility that makes him extremely anxious—though he doesn't know why. This anxiety and insecurity ("Mom doesn't really know what should happen now…") reorients his biochemistry and neurophysiology toward protection rather than growth. Also, the young child learns first and foremost through imitation, so if you negotiate and debate with her, she will soon get better at it than you!

This is a vicious cycle: the more the child perceives that you are looking to her to participate in important decisions (and to a young child even the basics seem very important), the less trust she'll have in you, the more insecure she will feel, and the more controlling (i.e.,

"difficult") she will become. Before long, she won't do anything without opening and closing arguments, along with exhibits A, B and C. And it shouldn't be regarded as "cute" when a child repeatedly corrects a parent; it is the basis for his loss of respect and turning away from the parent later on.

Another effect of having too many choices and discussion is a prematurely awakened sense of her own self (self-consciousness) and a premature focus on what she likes and doesn't like. (So here we have another irony: we all want our children to grow up generous, considerate of others, and not so materialistic, but all this mental activity focused on preferences tends to foster quite the opposite! We parents can also serve as models in this area; let's not make an issue of everything we feel and want. When parents show restraint—in eating, in buying, in sex—and demonstrate *joy in what we already have*, this is a great lesson for the child.)

The sad thing is, children naturally want to please the adults to whom they feel connected, and the child who has become controlling and demanding due to this kind of insidious insecurity desperately (though unconsciously) *does not want to act like that.* She fervently wants you, her parent, to be the calm, loving authoritative figure she can look up to, rely upon, and joyfully follow! Indeed, the word "discipline" is related to the word "disciple," a "joyful follower." If you can stand centered as the calm, loving authority figure, your child will relax and take joy in following you; discipline will not be nearly the issue it is for most families. But what I find so often in my practice is that parents bump up against tremendous inner resistance and insecurity in trying to step into that place of calm authority. This is when *their* own templates from when they were young children kick in and suddenly they're being driven (unconsciously) by such guiding convictions as "I'm not worthy of being listened to," and "I have no impact upon my world." Thus, they feel little confidence in their own ability to lead, and fall back on cultural parenting conventions based on coercion, manipulation, placating, shaming, etc.—none of which allows for optimal growth mode in their children.[27]

Over-explaining almost always covers up a lack of truth or conviction in the exchange. We need to always check the reason why we want to say something to a child: Is it based on our wisdom or our anxiety? Does it come from a place of real knowing, or a place of fear? If it comes from a place of real knowing and complete conviction within you that it is correct, the child will usually behave in harmony with it. (A good example is that children almost never fuss over putting on seat belts, largely because within the mind of the parent there is 100% conviction: seat belts are an utter non-negotiable and the child picks up on this conviction.) If it's coming from worry or insecurity, we best refrain from speaking. Yes, we're still feeling the fear, but it is your self-discipline in *containing the feeling* the child picks up on.

One of the newer findings from attachment neurobiology is that *what we say* is far less important than *who we are*, and this is one of the reasons: The way in which we manage the ebb and flow of our own feelings and impulses, our mastery of the currents of our inner lives, is what makes the greatest impression on the child, rather than the content of the currents themselves. This is good news: again, it is not our perfection but our striving that influences our children!

The most precious commodity we have in our ongoing relationships with our children is *trust*. The young child's trust is staggeringly complete: he will reach for the hand of his mother to cross the street and not even look to see if a car is coming. This is the level of trust that later we are meant to have for God; indeed, parents are the young child's first model of a higher power. Trust, however, erodes little by little when we engage in standard parenting techniques that are not rooted in our authenticity. This insidious evaporation of trust underlies many of the conflicts and power struggles between parents and children as they get older.

I have found it remarkably helpful—sometimes downright transformative—for a parent to envision, in great detail, herself in a typical discipline situation with her child that doesn't tend to go well… and then to "revise the scene"—see herself responding as the calm, loving, and self-assured mother she would choose to be. Ditto father. We know from sports psychology how powerful such visualizing can be, as well as following the basic tenet of "Fake it till you can make it." Think of a parenting figure you admire, even a character from a book or movie, and adopt him or her as your own role model, to emulate and help you elevate yourself to the level of confidence, inner poise and perspicacity (a great word with no good synonym) that your child dearly hopes to find in you.

Reverence, Awe, and Beauty – Another fundamental need of the young child is an atmosphere in harmony with his natural impulse to celebrate beauty and feel reverence and awe about almost everything. But what does our culture do in this techno-materialist age? We foist upon even the youngest child a flat world of facts and commentary. At a time when the child most needs wonder and reverence, we explain away all sense of the miraculous with our cold, adult intellect, with the good intention of "helping prepare them for the real world." ("Daddy, look at that bright star!" "Oh yes, Esmerelda—do you know that a star is just a very dense concentration of gases—just air!—that burns very, very hot… thousands of light-years away…"). Mystery eradicated, poof!

Sheltering your child's natural sense of wonder—and indeed, cultivating your own if it has atrophied over the years—is a gift of lasting wellbeing. That sense of "Wow—water out of the tap! or "Wow—text sent over phone lines through squeaky little noises!" is a route to vast inner horizons. When we lose that, we need ever more stimulation—more shopping, more drama, more drugs and alcohol, more thrillers (which feeds the collective propensity toward societal violence), more sexual excess, and so on—to fill the void of disenchantment.

We dress babies in black T-shirts with hiply ironic slogans that make us adults laugh—at the expense of respect for "the kingdom of childhood" as Steiner called it. Kim John Payne suggests that we're living in an "undeclared war on childhood," in which sarcasm and cynicism—poison to the young child's soul—are primary forms of entertainment and humor, especially in so-called "children's entertainment"![28] So speaking of that, we can put it off no longer, the issue of TV—a hugely important topic for parents and children.

Staring Into The Void

There are several excellent books entirely devoted to the thorny issue of children and television (and screens of all kinds), and, so I'm going to "nuggetize"—from the standpoint of its known effects specifically relevant to a child's developmental orientation toward optimal growth rather than defensive protection. I venture into this knowing full well that television addiction—I *mean* it, addiction!—is not only culturally sanctioned but encouraged and cultivated. Hi, my name is Marcy, and I'm a tube-aholic. I'm not proud of it, but I am. And chances are, you are too. Unless you're that rare specimen (like people who don't care for chocolate—*what???*) for whom TV is a take-it-or-leave-it proposition, the whole television situation will likely present an ongoing challenge you'll negotiate throughout the childhood and teen years. I know it did for our family. If it's not a big thing for you, then consider yourself freed of a considerable parenting hurdle—for now. (Just wait till your sweet one starts going to sleepovers…)

In 1999, a year after *Teletubbies* landed on U.S. television screens from Britain, the normally reticent American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement that said children under two should not watch television, and that no child of any age should have a television in his or

her room. They added, "Maybe it should be phrased more positively, that children do best with the maximum free play, the maximum interaction and maximum face time with their parents."

These early years feature some of the most vigorous brain growth your child will undergo, particularly in the orbitofrontal cortex—the command center of capacities for intellectual flexibility, innovation and peace that we want to encourage. The maturing of the young brain is experience-dependent, meaning that the wiring of enduring neural circuitry happens in direct response to what the child encounters in his or her daily life. Put another way, how a child uses her brain during these early years determines to a great extent how her brain—particularly her *social* brain, but also her intellectual capacities—will develop and function lifelong. The scientific research is unequivocal: the healthiest psychosocial development of the young brain is achieved through close and near-constant human relationship, hands-on interaction with the world through imaginative play, and connection with nature.

Sitting in front of a television runs counter to all of those brain-nurturing pursuits, and is in fact a highly unnatural activity for a young child: sitting motionless for thirty, sixty, ninety minutes at a time, watching the flicker of electronic signals play across a backlit screen was never part of Nature's plan for the unfolding of social or cognitive intelligence. Rather than nurturing rich neural connections in the social brain through human interactions, and building "structures of knowledge" through imagination-igniting engagement with three-dimensional elements of the real world, the child watching TV passively receives pre-formed images, slogans, goals and values while his unique human powers of consideration, comparison, and imagination "go to sleep." (Very often a child—or for that matter, an adult—is unable to tell you in much detail at all about what he just watched for thirty minutes, because a lot of the content slips in beneath the radar of conscious processing. Advertisers have been leveraging that fact for decades.)[29] This is starkly evident from looking at scans comparing the suppression of higher brain wave activity during television viewing as compared to drawing or other pursuits.

When presenting a talk to an audience, Joseph Chilton Pearce gets particularly animated when scribbling out a rough schematic on the overhead projector, of what happens in the higher centers (neocortex) of a child's brain when listening to a story about a dog: a blitzkrieg of synaptic connections lights up as the words stimulate her neural structures to create images, then more connections to connect images as the story unfolds. With each new story are woven new interconnections between separate neural fields in the child's brain. During this process the child seems almost catatonic, but it's drastically different than the classic "flickering blue glow" catatonia conjured by TV: the child engaged in a story is deploying all the energy of all her online brain centers. Her creative brain is *hard at work*, in contrast to the inertness of the creative brain centers watching television.

Ten years ago Waldorf teacher Carol Toole raised another concern with electronic playmates for children—ironically, years before the massive proliferation of screen-based "learn to read" programs for even the youngest of children. She points out how it undermines the central need of children to learn in the context of relationship and imitation.

> The budding orator needs to hear speech that bears the undivided attention, enthusiasm, and interest of the speaker. Studies reveal that language experienced via television or other electronic media does little to increase a child's vocabulary. Such disembodied speech does not nourish the child in his learning to speak. Even the speech of real and present people, when it is curt and clipped and seeks only to convey information, does not truly nourish.[30]

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Most of the solid research on television's effect on children has centered on physical health and behavior, and such consequences as obesity, increased aggression, desensitization to violence, gender stereotyping, warping of reality perception, increased materialist drive and susceptibility to commercialism. While these together with television's known negative impact upon a child's cognitive and intellectual skills[31] are bound to be of concern to parents, and obviously have implications for our discussion, I want to zero in on effects that strike at the brain's developing capacities for peace, joy and innovation. How might television undermine a blossoming generation of peacemakers? How might TV viewing redirect a child's developmental orientation toward defensive protection rather than fully elaborated growth?

The cuts, pans and zooms that happen every few seconds on a television show elicit our brain's instinctive reactivity to novelty, movement, and sudden changes in vision or sound. This *orienting response* is part of our mammalian heritage, designed to help us survive predators and other lurking threats. Recalling my first tenet above, the television age marked the beginning of a vast neuropsychological experiment whose subjects are innumerable and who are us—from every race, country, culture, and socioeconomic group: What happens to people when for the first time in human experience they spend hours at a time having their orienting response subliminally triggered repeatedly every few seconds?

At the level of the brain's automatic systems, the countless incidents of novelty programmed into a TV show—specifically engineered to keep the viewer's attention from veering away from the tube[32]—are double-edged swords that swipe Zorro-style at neural pathways so quickly as to be imperceptible: the lower brain centers are snapped to attention for possible danger (with the attendant neurochemicals to prepare the body for fight, flight or freeze) and then are immediately relieved of the threat as the brain calculates at light-speed that there's in fact no danger. This triggers the dopamine system, the brain's pleasure center that evolved to reward us with a heady sense of euphoria when we escape harm or engage in other activities that promote survival of the individual and thus the species (think eating, drinking, sex).

The result is a brain that is alert, but not focused. Placated but not engaged. One effect of this alert/relief dialectic inside the brain is that television viewing has a numbing action, with a reaction in the body sometimes like that of a tranquilizer. Also, the repetitive dosing of the dopamine receptors can dampen the receptors in the brain's pleasure center, making joy harder to come by through simple, human, non-technological means. When regarded this way—the actual *process* of television and not so much the *content*—it's not hard to understand the growing body of research linking television with such neural regulatory problems as depression and attention deficit disorders.[33]

(I have long suspected that many cases of ADD or ADHD are actually children in the grips of chronic inarticulable anxiety, such as happens in the wake of trauma—or possibly in the wake of sitting through dozens or hundreds of novelty events on TV. The child cannot focus on any one thing for a length of time because she is having to continually reorient in search of the threatening stimuli; it's just that the stimuli aren't out there in the world, but rather, internalized imprints on the brain, irritable neural pathways that are hyper-sensitive due to being continually triggered.)

Numbing Them Down

Apart from background anxiety disrupting attention, we see in brain scans that the level of gamma waves—the highest frequency brainwave, associated with perception and higher brain activity, which is present when we're actively focused in on something—drops to almost a

flatline during TV viewing. Is this what we want to train the young child's brain to do? I understand the common complaint from frustrated parents that sometimes television is the only time an active child will sit still and "pay attention"; the problem is, the child isn't really *paying* attention but rather having his attention *involuntarily stolen*!

And all the while, the child's own nascent powers of voluntary, conscious attention—the capacity to *attend* and be present, a central feature of the Generation Peace profile—languish and atrophy. Remember, the way a child uses his brain largely dictates how his brain develops. The brain regions meant to be engaged and bustling with activity at this age for optimally healthy psychosocial development, essentially go to sleep when a child watches TV—establishing what Jane Healy in her book *Endangered Minds* refers to the kinds of "habits of mind" that put them at a disadvantage at school.[34] Do we want to routinely flatline the higher brain centers responsible for perception, engagement and attention?

Does this mean that an occasional episode of *Sesame Street* will undermine a child's trajectory toward unfolding into a person of peaceful innovation? Of course not—especially if she shares in that episode with one of her close adults. But because of that pesky trick it plays on the pleasure center of the brain, television is a slippery seductress: one episode a week so easily and insidiously becomes two, then a few, and then a daily dose, and so on. Power struggles ensue. It's not a path I recommend starting down; it's like tossing a handful of landmines onto your own road ahead.

I realize that *Sesame Street* is a sacrosanct institution, but even with a show that features engaging characters, socially conscious story lines and attention-grabbing formats, we have to constantly ask ourselves, Is this hitting the sweet spot of what I want to nurture *at this time* in my child's life? (If pressed, I'd rather children who are older than the two-to-five-year-old target audience view *Sesame Street*; seven or eight is when letters, numbers and stories of social mores become more developmentally appropriate.)

Aside from the neuro-erosive aspects of television, another troubling issue with children's programming (as well as children's literature) is that the message and values conveyed become unguardedly accepted as valid and true. This has implications across a range of dimensions, from tot consumerism to the veiled depiction of aggression and violence. And there is also the issue of the young child's need for reverence and beauty. Research tells us quite precisely what physical properties in a creature we innately find compelling and attractive, having to do with the proportions and symmetry of eyes, nose, and mouth, as related to the size of the head. The fact that all of this is such meaningful data for us humans brings a concern regarding a reverence for beauty in form and expression. Everything from *Rugrats* to *Simpsons* to *Sesame Street* to *Yo Gabba Gabba* features gross distortions of human anatomy, calling it funny, cool, or, most insidious of all, "cute." Many of the caricature traits are designed to tap into our hardwired receptivity to the baby of any species, often featuring large eyes, large foreheads, and almost no nose. These are then distorted through a mélange of other features—like that card puzzle game in which you put one person's eyes with another's chin, etc.

And there's often a high-pitched voice. The hallmark of our human species is our articulated speech, an aspect that places us at the pinnacle of the animal kingdom, but television insists on regaling children with voices that are unmelodious and whiny. As any actor knows, when we want to convey superficiality, awkwardness or even mental disability, we speak with a nasal voice. It is universal, our human perception about this vocal "less-than"; children know at a deep level they're being talked to as second-class citizens—citizens whose brand loyalty can be wooed as early as two. Meanwhile, their humanity is subtly demoted by the grotesquely formed

yet amusing characters, and wisdom is trivialized when it is announced by a big bird with eyes that cross. (And that *voice!*) When raising peacemakers, do we really want to subliminally train them in the devaluation of wisdom and humanity? (And as one dad astutely points out, the wisdom conveyed by a big bird in half an hour of "educational television" could be taught in three minutes by a parent, leaving twenty-seven minutes to go outside and jump in puddles.)

So what's a mom or dad to do, at the end of a trying day, when everyone's tired—when all they want is a few free minutes to prepare dinner without juggling junior at the same time? Before resorting to the electronic babysitter, try:

- a sink of soapy water and unbreakable items for him to wash
- a floor-sized puzzle
- bubbles
- a basketful of a few treasured items she enjoys that only appear at this time of day
- ditto a sand tray
- ditto a pot of clay or play dough and cookie cutters
- a clothesline with kitchen towels clipped to it to make a peek-a-boo fort
- a solo game of Twister he plays with your rousing encouragement
- giving her a heavy piece of moistened art paper with two harmoniously matching colors of gouache and a thick paint brush and letting her go to town

Ever a pragmatist, and wanting to keep an eye on what works while still supporting a child's inner connectedness and imagination, I sometimes suggest parents in my practice consider introducing their young children to the joys of audio stories and music. If you begin early with the notion that these are a special treat, you will have a win-win resource for your family: audio stories (such as the treasures my kids used to listen to from Rabbit Ears Radio) or a child's favorite CD of songs can hold a child rapt for the twenty or thirty minutes of solitude you might crave, while still engaging her active imagination as she sings or dances along, or envisions the scenes in the tales—maybe even drawing or acting them out with her dolls or wooden figures. These are also a boon for long car trips.

Wondering about the DVD screens currently embedded in the backs of car seats? Here's the thing: car rides come with many naturally occurring sensory stimuli as standard equipment (everything passing by outside the windows, not to mention the conversation inside). If we distract and essentially hypnotize a child away from possible *boredom* (the dirtiest word in our current parenting culture) by plugging her into video entertainment, we deprive her of a regularly-occurring, ideal opportunity to practice the important developmental task of learning to soothe and regulate her own fluctuating internal states of attention, interest, distress, etc. *This could not be more essential to her growing Gen Peace capacities!*

Next best after audio recordings, if you're really desperate to occupy your child with programming, is to lay in a small supply of those rare videos that feature gentle visual formatting, unsophisticated production values, and no rapid cuts or special effects. When our son was young we had a video that was simply a twenty-minute walk around a farm, with no editing and only the natural sounds of the environment—quite a novelty for a city boy. He also enjoyed an occasional episode of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, and we all loved the two volumes of *Mother Goose Treasury of Sing-Along Nursery Rhymes*. (The latter was born in 1987, just like our Ian—and it held extra appeal for him since "Mother Goose" was actually a friend of ours!)

Just keep in mind not only the slippery pleasure center slope of any kind of video entertainment, but that the more we offer children appealing pre-fab scenarios, even the most seemingly benign or enchanting, we *un*invite their own unique creativity that might have sparked

a brand new little crop of peace-buds within. Many Waldorf early education teachers can recognize "media children" in their classrooms by observing the nature of their play, which is more chaotic and mechanical, in imitation of what they have seen on television. The flexibility of their play is impaired, as they tend to get stuck replaying a story line over and over, or become obsessed with one particular character from a show.

In their book *Magical Parent, Magical Child*, Michael Mendizza and Joseph Chilton Pearce point out that the kinds of qualities essential to an innovative peacemaker—curiosity, playfulness, willingness to experiment, flexibility, humor, receptiveness to new ideas, eagerness to learn—all rely upon imagination. Just as chips and candy are junk food for the child's developing body, so are television and computer images junk food for her developing imagination. Stories, conversation, and meaningful hands-on activities feature descriptive words, symbols, and metaphors that the authors say "act as nutrients. They challenge and feed the developing brain, growing and expanding the capacity for imagination." Their primary criticism of screened media, especially for the young child, "has to do with the way these technologies create counterfeit images for processes the developing brain is designed to create itself." The implications could not be more sobering when we're envisioning a peacemaker generation:

> The creative play of these images results in the discovery of new patterns and possibilities that we then use to change our environment. The inner affects the outer, which affects the inner in an unending reciprocal, creative dynamic. Fail to develop imagination and this expansive creative cycle ends. We literally can't imagine new forms and possibilities. We are stuck in a reflexive, mechanical, cause-and-effect world over which we have little control. Hope, the passionate vision of a new alternative, a better future, has no meaning whatsoever without imagination.[35]

Television and media in general tends to fall into the "adultifying" category: not only does its very process undermine healthy development in anything beyond the smallest doses, but its content tends to be inappropriate for young children—even so-called children's programming. And the effects feed back into the most fundamental substrates of a child's blossoming personality. I'll leave this topic for the moment with one last fascinating word on the adultifying effects of media, stated eloquently by the late social critic Neil Postman:

> To a certain extent curiosity comes naturally to the young, but its development depends upon a growing awareness of the power of well-ordered questions to expose secrets. The world of the known and the not yet known is bridged by wonderment. But wonderment happens largely in a situation where the child's world is separate from the adult world, where children must seek entry, through their questions, into the adult world. As media merge the two worlds, as the tension created by secrets to be unraveled is diminished, the calculus of wonderment changes. Curiosity is replaced by cynicism or, even worse, arrogance. We are left with children who rely not on authoritative adults but on news from nowhere. We are left with children who are given answers to questions they never asked. We are left, in short, without children.[36]

TMTS (Too Much Too Soon)

Television and other media—as well as media-saturated technologies like computers and cell phones—are just some of many ways in which our culture seems hell-bent on saddling children's lives with adult things. (I'm reminded of an old Six Flags commercial in which a father and his young daughter sit side by side on their front steps, both frantically noodling away on their individual Palm-Pilots trying to schedule some time together. It would be amusing if it weren't so sadly realistic.) I believe that we do it out of genuinely good intentions—to prepare our children for all of the things they will face in the world. But if we keep in mind how

differently a child's brain and psyche work from those of an adult, and the purposes for those differences, it's clear that the "helpful information" we adults offer young children is often counterproductive to our goals of raising responsible, informed adults.

Here's an example: in our efforts to instill in children a sustainable sense of money, we begin at the earliest ages to make sure they know that "money doesn't grow on trees," and the like. Requests for toys or treats at the store are often answered with "We can't afford that," and so on. But it is central to remember that during these early years are being shaped generalized *lifelong templates* for who the child is, how the world works, and his or her relationship to that world. Until the age of five, the child needs to see, experience, believe and know that *Life is abundance.* So we don't teach nor demonstrate the lack of money or anything else.

This doesn't mean you buy everything she wants; on the contrary, giving a child everything she wants, or letting her do everything she wishes, is a perfect recipe for a cruel human being later on. Instead you respond in a way that is consistent with abundance at every level—including abundance of respect for her request, and abundance of inner tranquility: "Yes, it's a beautiful doll,"—find something about it you can admire with the child, as a way of having connection her at her level of wanting—"but we're not going to buy her today." The power of saying "no" with complete tranquility is the key.

It's important to never demean what a child wants ("Oh, that's a silly thing, and you already have one like it"), or the wanting itself ("You want everything you see!"); to do so is to bleed off some of the essential will forces that are developing and that will later contribute to her abilities to carry out her noble goals and visions. And if she cries you can empathize: "Yes, I know that you are suffering with this 'no,' my love." Hopefully in this particular moment she has the resources of having eaten recently, has had enough water to drink, enough sleep the night before, a pleasant breakfast time—and also, you are not in a stressed or resentful place as her parent. You get the idea: nothing happens in a vacuum.

Even in homes where media and other popular culture is curbed, one way children often suffer from TMTS is through being inadvertently overexposed to adult life in general. Having worked with children suffering post-traumatic stress disorder in southeast Asian refugee camps and such war-torn areas as northern Ireland and Israel, Kim John Payne was struck by the similarities between those young PTSD patients and the students he was treating years later in his private counseling practice near London. Nervous, easily startled, controlling in their behaviors, attention-challenged, difficulty dealing with novelty or transitions, explosive in their outbursts of anger—these children from a relatively affluent, stable Western country were displaying symptoms of PTSD, Payne finally admitted to himself despite all counter-intuitive reasoning. He came to realize that underlying these children's similar suffering, despite their extremely different living circumstances, ran a common, caustic thread: "…for both groups the sanctity of childhood had been breached. Adult life was flooding in unchecked. Privy to their parents' fears, drives, ambitions, and the very fast pace of their lives, the children were busy trying to construct their own boundaries, their own level of safety in behaviors that ultimately weren't helpful."[37]

Parents need to buffer their children, not from the normal vagaries of childhood—the daily frustrations inherent in being a child, the disappointments with parental restrictions, the spats with friends, the famous skinned knees, all of which are essential for their budding resilience—but from the vagaries of *adulthood*, one of which is simply a flood of too much information: CNN, NPR, World News Tonight, *Modern Family,* family politics, political intrigue, intriguing reality shows, community gossip, environmental crises and the like. (I still

vividly remember a conversation between my mother and step-father about whether, in the course of their daily lives, they were frightened of the Mafia!) And it isn't just about the quality of information (such as "too adult," although that is often an issue), it is about the sheer quantity of sensory input with which children, like everyone, are bombarded by virtue of living in this information-revolution era. They feel the world is "coming at them," which shifts them into protection mode.

This is one of the many good reasons for an early bedtime for your child: to preserve enough adult-only time during which you can engage in data-rich discussions to your mind's content!

Discipline, or, Being A Leader of Joyful Followers

This is the age when discipline first becomes an issue and often brings discord, but when you understand and embody a few key principles you'll parent more effectively and joyfully. As we begin to discuss discipline, it's helpful to have a long view of the territory. Payne points out how our culture along the way has gotten the timeline of our discipline styles utterly flipped 'round: we give way too much autonomy and too many choices to the young child, and then tighten the reins with too much limitation and scrutiny during adolescence! He sees the discipline focus of the first seven years as "the will, and creative compliance," during which children are trained to accept limits and adult direction, and to comply with rules.[38] It's within the sturdy form traced by the child's boundaries that his or her healthy will forces can fully expand.

First and most central, the young child learns primarily through imitation, taking our cues about everything, and becoming our most exquisite mirrors—so always ask yourself, *Am I worthy of my child's unquestioning imitation?* If you can answer *Yes*, then you have resolved ninety-five percent of your discipline issues before they even materialize. All true discipline is ultimately *self*-discipline, and the more mastery we develop of our own inner being, the more harmonious family life will be. Writes psychologist Gordon Neufeld, "Our ability to manage a child effectively is very much an outcome of our capacity to manage ourselves."[39]

Indeed, when you marshal your inner resources in striving to be the calm, loving, authority figure your children will take joy in following, peace emerges in your home and in the very fiber of your children. But ah, this so much easier said than done! A toddler who is practicing his newly discovered autonomy by "defying" you can push your buttons of powerlessness like nothing else—buttons that were installed when you were his age, possibly when you weren't listened to or respected in the way you're devoted to doing with your child. I still vividly remember the one and only time I swatted our son's behind: he was six or seven and was stubbornly, defiantly ignoring me right to my face. Something primitive inside me uncoiled and I whacked him. I regretted it immediately and ever since, not just for the obvious reason of having been violent with him, but also for the modicum of his respect I lost in that unbridled moment.

We lose the admiration of our children when we "lose it." It's a mammalian thing: all animal behaviorists know that our ability to have authority over—and thus the ability to train—a dog or a horse is severely eroded if the animal sees or feels us get angry. Credible leaders don't lose their composure, it's as simple as that. Of course children aren't dogs, but we can learn so much from understanding the mammalian similarities! When it's necessary to reprimand your child, strive to not do it with a raised voice or the look of disgust or cruelty in your eyes. Aside from the corrosive effects of shaming, the child will lose trust in you over time, and will look towards others as models. "He doesn't respect me" will be your (accurate) complaint later,

especially at an age when he most needs to be able to learn from his parents, such as during his teen years.

And while we don't speak of training a child, it is in fact what we need to be doing with a young one. This flies in the face of many so-called progressive, child-centered approaches that are based on the notion that the child left to his or her own devices will blossom perfectly well without the impingement of our adult meddling. If we do not guide and direct, we abdicate our sacred responsibility as a parent. Prenatal specialist Laura Uplinger, also a mother and a lifelong researcher of esoteric principles, clarifies this little-understood distinction between the perfection of a child's *essence* and the need to guide a child in the *expression* of that essence:

> We would be cruel to not provide guidance. To let empathy flow, grandeur of soul, magnanimity, and intelligence that isn't oriented to destroying things, children need pedagogy. They need to be given a model. A garden is different from a forest because someone went there and did something. We're so afraid of managing life too much, but we never refer to the "woods of Eden" or "a prairie of paradise"; we refer to paradise as a garden. That is the image for parents as the true meaning of parenthood: respecting the child's essence while bringing your own experience to help the structure of the child blossom. (And you don't remain neutral—your own structure changes too!) This is the great invitation—to collaborate with Life in a great adventure.
>
> It's politically incorrect, but true: for the young child, there should be no freedom! Nature has sent children to parents precisely because they're not meant to be free, they're meant to be governed, to learn *how to become free one day*. Freedom is a very serious thing; it isn't a right, it is something you earn through self-mastery. The more you obey the natural and higher laws, the more you are free. An example is someone who has self-discipline regarding food or exercise: they are so much freer in these realms than those who are constantly abusing or struggling with their physical organism. We easily fall slave to our lower tendencies, so our apprenticeship toward freedom is a long one.[40]

My favorite non-violent interpretation of the oft-mistaken-for-biblical discipline slogan "Spare the rod, spoil the child" is one in which the shepherd's rod is used not to hit but to guide errant sheep in the right direction when they stray off the path. Just as sheep aren't plotting to annoy the shepherd when they stray, the young child's brain simply isn't equipped to marshal the kind of complex planning and detailed motivational linkages that would enable her to systematically drive you crazy (much as it may sometimes seem like it). Children need guidance and instruction, not punishment. And it is often far more effective to simply use a gentle, redirecting arm around the shoulder of a young one heading towards trouble—while perhaps also singing a soothing little melody, like the Pied Piper—than to deploy a string of words to reason with or explain ("…for the umpteenth time!") the prohibition to the errant child.

As I've said, a central goal in parenting for peace is to cultivate an atmosphere in which our children are able to live as much as possible in growth/flourishing mode rather than protection/defending mode. It ensures the correct wiring of their social and cognitive brain circuitry, as well as their optimally healthy bodies. This doesn't mean insulating them from every possible stressor; preventing them from experiencing life's daily ups and downs would be counter-productive to the developing vitality of the critical self-regulating capacities of the orbitofrontal cortex. But heavens, just *being* a two-, four- or six-year-old is inherently steeped in near-constant frustration: each of the emotional, motor and cognitive skills that lies tantalizingly, maddeningly out of their each at each stage is enough to give their nascent stress-management systems all the strengthening workouts they need. One of our huge jobs as parents is to have our children's backs (brains?) when their own emotion regulation isn't quite yet up to the task. Like the spotter who stands ready to help lift the massive barbell if the guy on the bench can't quite

summon the strength from his weaker position, we help our child lift the load of his distressing emotions until his own neural regulatory system can manage the task on its own.

As we help our children regain balance after big and little upsets, we foster strength and flexibility in their all-important self-regulatory capacities, by helping stress biochemicals recede and pleasure chemicals flow. We also help them orient in a healthy way toward the universal and perennial experience of frustration. Together these are core features of the all-important quality of *resilience*—the ability to regain inner and outer balance following a stressful experience. Self-regulation is also centrally related to *self-control*, which researchers are seeing emerge as a fundamental determinant of a child's successful adult future—"so important that it may play an approximately equal role with other well-known influences on a person's life course, such as intelligence and social class."[41] A newly released study followed 3,000 people from birth to age thirty-two and found that differences in self-control that begin to show up as early as age three reliably predict health, financial, familial and even criminal status decades later.

Asked what self-control looks like at that age, one of the researchers explains, "A three-year-old with good self-control can focus on a puzzle or game and stick with it until he solves it, take turns working on the puzzle nicely with another child, and get satisfaction from solving it, with a big smile." As for a child with poor self-control, he "might refuse to play with anything that required any effort of him, might leave the puzzle in the middle to run around the room, might lose his temper and throw the puzzle at the other child, and might end up in tears, instead of feeling satisfied."[42]

If a child is consistently left to his own devices when he's overly frustrated, he doesn't develop the inner self-regulatory capacities he would were he to have the assistance of a connected adult; his brain will be hardwired with the tendency to respond to future frustrations in one of two basic modes—lashing out, or "rolling over" and going internally numb. (There tends to be a sex differentiation to these responses, with males more often responding with the *outward* aggression, and females with the *inward* aggression.) But when frustrated children have the benefit of parental support, presence and modeling example, not only do they develop essential self-regulation, but their brains also hardwire a more healthy reflexive response to frustration, which is to *act*—to try and change the frustrating situation. So here again we see how closely self-regulation is tied to the formation of healthy will energies and how all of it is key for raising Generation Peace.

What you might not realize is that pretty much every kind of conventional "disciplinary" measure elicits a cascade of hormones in the child's nervous system that curtails optimally healthy brain development. Even just the threat of such discipline—a spanking, a time-out, or even a disgusted look from her parent—can instantly shift a child's biochemistry into protection mode. Every time a child receives a punitive rebuke or scolding, it's like a small shock to her system. (I mean, imagine yourself, today, receiving sternly delivered negative feedback about something you did; it is the rare person who can hear that without feeling a tightening in the stomach or a flush in the cheeks—and we're adults, supposedly possessed of all our state-regulation neural software!)

A child's self-regulation capacities are in nascent form, wiring up to suit the experiences she is encountering; her natural response to these kinds of "relational concussions," over years of repeated such incidents, is to erect protective inner barriers that become increasingly difficult for parents (or anyone) to broach. How many times have we heard the parental lament, "I just can't seem to get *through* to her!"? This is one key reason why. And if we lose the ability to get

through to our children, we lose our special role as their most powerful booster rockets for becoming agents of positive change.

How to De-Peace Your Child: Spanking, Shaming & Isolating

Spanking – In our modern, supposedly civilized society, hitting as a means of teaching is still shockingly prevalent, despite the myriad studies proving its destructiveness.[43] Any perceived effectiveness of swatting, slapping or spanking is nothing more than short-term compliance rooted in a child's fear of the parent. (This is a hallmark of the *authoritarian* style of parenting—in which children's unquestioning obedience is the goal—rather than *authoritative* parenting for peace—marked by the parents' decisive yet respectful leadership role and an ever-deepening bond of loving trust between them and their children.) Rather than internalizing any moral message or noble value by being spanked, a child grows resentful and avoidant of the parent. This, together with the inner contortions of denial and dissociation from the distressing negative feelings that a child must perform, exact a steep, enduring toll on their wellbeing. Spanked toddlers are less likely to listen, are less compliant and have more poorly developed motor skills; spanked adolescents are more likely to suffer depression, alcohol addiction and suicidal thoughts. Children who are hit are more likely as adults to hit their partners and their own children—and so it goes, the transgenerational-go-round of violence, which ripples outward from family to community to society. In *Parenting for a Peaceful World,* Robin Grille writes,

> The school bully or juvenile delinquent is an emotionally injured individual trying to compensate for an inner feeling of powerlessness. The same is true for those who grow up to become autocrats, dictators and bullies in business. …Bullies are not a fact of life but an artifact of history.[44]

Grille raises the compelling idea that there is likely a connection between the U.S.'s legal sanction of corporal punishment in schools in twenty-one states (*and corporal punishment at home in all 50 states*), and some of the harsher aspects of U.S. domestic and foreign policies and social issues: we have the highest documented rate of incarceration worldwide, the highest homicide rate among affluent democracies, and are the only western democracy to retain the death penalty (despite its researched ineffectiveness at deterring crime); we are one of only five countries (together with Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia) to retain the death penalty for juveniles; one of just two (with Somalia) that has declined to sign the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.[45] The list goes on, but you get the idea. The scourges of violent social, institutional and public policy are grown from tender shoots in the home.

Shaming – Punishment need not be physical to exact a toll on a child's developing personality and the lifelong neural templates for how he will relate to himself, others, and the world. And indeed, a far more common form of violence routinely used in disciplining children is *shaming*. Shaming is more subtle than hitting, but in many ways, more insidiously damaging because the child cannot consciously point to the hurtful moment of impact. Rather, shamed children sustain an incremental erosion of their competent, loving, "good enough" selves with each verbal rebuke. Shame researcher Brene Brown, in her 2010 TEDTalk, aptly defines shame simply as the fear of disconnection: "There's something about me that if other people know it or see it, I won't be worthy of connection."[46]

Such exclamations as "Bad boy!" or "You're very naughty!" are clear examples of shaming, in which the message is a diminishment or accusatory "diagnosis" of the child. One problem with shame is that it's not always so obvious—and thus so readily available for reconsideration by parents seeking a more constructive mode of parenting. Experts through the

years have counseled parents to focus on expressing displeasure with the behavior and not the person doing the behavior, but this can easily lead to shaming as well, as in, "Your whining and crying is not okay."

(And focusing on behaviors—and on extinguishing those we don't want—is a short-sighted, limited approach, like focusing on symptoms and medicating them away: it doesn't address the underlying cause. In fact, one of the ways adults shame children is to quiz them, "Why did you [hit your sister / put syrup on the dog / lie to Mommy]?" A child usually does not consciously know why she did something "naughty," so this puts her on the spot and adds another layer of shame related to the unmet expectation that she should be able to answer you.)

Shame is like the stealth bomber of emotional zingers: it can slip into almost any verbal exchange. It all depends on what's going on in the mind and heart of the person uttering the words. For example, "That's so silly" can be delivered during a loving, playful exchange in a tone that cultivates warmth and connection, or it can be landed as a shame-based dismissal of a child's earnest feelings, thoughts or actions. And this lacing of garden-variety words with something as corrosive as shame is a process that is virtually unconscious. Few parents—or should I say, few parents who'd be inclined to read this book—open their mouths with the conscious intention, "I'm going to shame my child now."

And it's practically universal in our culture; the vast majority of us have been shamed as children by parents, siblings, teachers, peers. For us to become aware and sensitive to shame is like a fish becoming aware of water. But we may be aware of shame's fallout, either in ourselves or in those close to us. Its immediate effect is to "unravel connection," says Brown. Then over time, shame becomes a part of us. Those who have internalized shame tend to specialize in—and often fluctuate between—one of two polarized patterns of expression: emotional muteness, paralysis and dissociation from their own feelings and needs; or bouts of hostility and rage, which is either expressed outward toward others or internalized as depression, self-destructive behaviors and even suicide. Shame corrupts social intelligence by inhibiting the development of empathy and the ability to take responsibility for oneself, leading to a habit of blaming.[47] The effects of shame begin in the earliest moments of a child's life; a comprehensive August 2010 *New York Times* article on depression in preschoolers zeroed in on the shame that parents (unintentionally and unwittingly) inflicted on their young children.[48]

With respect to parenting for a more peaceful, constructively interdependent society, Robin Grille points out that "So many of our most problematic social behaviors are compulsive covers for inner feelings of shame. To conceal our shame, we sneer at others, we criticize, we moralize, we judge, we patronize and we condescend. …Finally, the shamed tend to anticipate feeling humiliated and disapproved of by others, and this can lead to hostility, even fury. Quite often, shame makes us want to punish others. When angry, shame-prone individuals are more likely to be malevolent, indirectly aggressive or self-destructive—their anger finds no appropriate expression."[49]

Isolation – So here you are one afternoon, at the end of your rope with an out-of-control three-year-old. You know you won't spank her, and you have become mindful of avoiding shame-based measures, so what's left? Is "Time Out" the answer? At risk of incurring the frustrated wrath of parents everywhere, my answer is no. While time-outs were conceived as a more humane alternative to spanking, they land a blow to the brain and psyche rather than to the bottom. Right at the moment when the child is overwhelmed by a flood of emotions that she cannot manage, and she most needs the regulating presence (that is, close *physical* presence) of her attachment figure, she's banished to her room or her "Naughty Chair" or her "Thinking Rug"

or her [fill in the blank with any of a list of prettied-up names people have devised for this particular form of exile].

What a tantruming child (or, more helpful to think of her instead as a *struggling* child) most needs is time-*in*—that is, *in* secure, soothing arms, *in* the steadying, regulating sphere of your engaged presence. Time out is developmentally and neurobiologically counter-productive: it deprives a child of regulation just when she needs it most, throws her system into protection mode, and erodes her trust in and relationship with her parent. After all the fussing is over and order is restored, the memory trace etched in her social brain is, *When I'm having trouble, I'm on my own.* This is not the foundation we're striving to offer Generation Peace. We wish for them the suite of healthy social and relational capacities of resilience—which includes being comfortable reaching out for help when needed. Let's not extinguish that skill with our well-meaning attempts at positive discipline!

#

The foregoing three forms of "discipline"—punishment is not true discipline, thus the quotation marks—short-circuit Nature's plan for the unfolding of peace-loving intelligence. And they don't only happen in "My way or the highway" authoritarian homes. Because of the unconscious, reflexive nature of how parenting often goes—in which we either reprise with our own children the way we were raised, or, in an effort to "never" do to them what they did to us, we seize on predominant cultural parenting modes—these corrosive approaches also feature in homes where parents regard themselves as progressive and enlightened. Indeed, in the course of a single generation, Time-Out has become the gold standard in discipline for savvy parents. And thus the cycle of (usually unintentional, often subtle) parenting violence continues. As Robin Grille points out,

> Child rearing has historically been so violent… that almost all of us are either battered children or descendants of battered children. It is no wonder that violence persists in so many forms, across all age groups, and that most of us are capable of slipping and treating our children violently on occasions, even if we strive against it.[50]

Fostering Growth While Keeping Peaceful Boundaries

As a sound alternative to all three of the above measures, consider using a time-out in the way it was originally conceived in sports: for a team (not just one struggling player) needing to take a pause to regroup, rethink its strategy, and return refreshed. Used in this "us-as-a-team" manner—"Let *us* take a time out"—it is a demonstration that while you're not happy with the way things are going or the choices he has just made, you are on his side in this challenging moment—and always. You can find your own name and style for this regrouping process; in psychologist Lawrence Cohen's family it's "A Meeting on the Couch":

> Discipline is a chance to improve your connection with your children instead of forming another wall that separates you. The best way to make discipline more connecting is to think *We* have a problem instead of *My kid* is misbehaving.
>
> Sometimes just changing the scene and making reconnection a top priority can create a dramatic difference, and the tension is gone as soon as you get to the couch, so you might end up just goofing around and being silly together.[51]

Indeed. In his wonderful book *Playful Parenting*, Cohen offers a roadmap for parents wanting to enrich their family life with more play—and that is a worthy goal for all of us. Parenting for peace is all about providing the most fertile ground possible for the blossoming of our children's social and cognitive intelligence, and among the animal kingdom—in which we

are supposedly the crowning achievement—it is a fact that the more intelligent the animal, the more it continues to play throughout adulthood. There are rich layers of meaning to even the most casual play, Cohen points out, and not only is it the primary way children sift through, practice and integrate the massive amounts of new incoming data they encounter in the course of a day of life, it is also their way of processing hurts and frustrations. "Play is where children show us the inner feelings and experiences that they can't or won't talk about."

But somewhere along the way to adulthood the vast majority of us forgot how to play. Life became serious business—and parenting along with it. And especially for those of us who had less security in our childhood, who may have never really felt safe to enter that imaginary frolic zone,[52] when invited by our children to play, we're like deer in the headlights. For some, every detail of parenting is a grave matter; the stakes feel intangibly yet dangerously high (*It's got to go right this time*). Our own uneasiness seeds uneasiness in our children and this itself can evoke challenging behavior. The sad irony in this negative feedback loop is that these are the parents whose buttons are particularly sensitive, their own childhood "stuff" so ready, like a dry tinder box, to be set off by the sparks of a child's unwanted behaviors. The beauty of Cohen's approach is that it offers a playful way out of that contracting spiral that is helpful and healing to everyone: "As long as we are grown up enough to handle things like keeping them safe and getting dinner on the table, our children want and need us to loosen up."[53]

If I'd had the gift of this perspective back there in that painful moment with my son, I might have used one of Cohen's many playful ideas to free us both out of that tight spot—such as *pretending* to be angry. "Okay, so let's play the game of 'Mommy pretends to be really angry at Ian': [making an exaggerate lion face] I'm *sooooooooo* angry at Ian… I may have to steal his shoe!", at which point Ian would have felt drawn in by my silliness, rather than pushed away by my own lack of inner regulation and, of course, by my physically violent act. The fact is, parenting can actually be a whole lot more fun and light-hearted that we typically realize, once we get over our culturally imprinted worry that if we use humor to diffuse and redirect a disciplinary jam, we're somehow failing our parental role by not taking it seriously enough… or rewarding/reinforcing "misbehavior" by not bringing the hammer down… or slipping down that slippery slope of being their friend rather than their parent. The fact is, the more confident, credible and authoritative a leader truly is, the lighter the touch he or she needs to use to be effective and admired.

"Misbehavior" is a trap of a concept in the first place—a term only appropriate for situations in which someone truly understands the alternatives and consciously chooses to engage in bad behavior. But for the young child, this is simply not the case. The young child is a scientist figuring out the world, gathering data and conducting experiments. Her behaviors that don't please us are more helpfully considered as "mistakes" rather than misbehavior. Do we punish people for mistakes? Not if we want improvement, excellence and growth!

And even the most suspiciously flagrant "mistake" of a child reflects an *unmet need*. Figuring out what that need is, rather than focusing on the inexperienced way the child expressed the need, or ineffective strategy he used to meet his need, is central to parenting success and peace in the home. Lawrence Cohen boils these needs into two basic categories—the need for connection, or the need to feel effective and successful—and gives myriad examples of how play can a) help us figure out a child's underlying needs; and b) unfold solutions to meeting the child's needs. And most importantly, play provides a bridge through which parent and child can reconnect after any of the many disconnections we experience in the course of the day. And as we've seen, connection is the heart of parenting for peace.

So for example, "stealing" a piece of your jewelry or some other precious item—yes, even your money—can be a child's way to get close to you, to "keep you with her." Hitting or teasing another child is also sometimes a young, inexperienced human's misguided strategy to connect. And yet that same behavior—hitting, or even biting—will be used by another child (or the same child in a different circumstance) as an attempted strategy for meeting an entirely different need, such as the need to feel less fearful, embarrassed, isolated, or envious.

Waldorf kindergarten teacher Barbara Patterson[54] shares some wonderfully unexpected, lovely and effective healing approaches to such things as hitting and biting—which can evoke strong feelings, and sometimes, reactive, unmindful reactions in parents. Having some creative responses at the ready can help us maintain the calm, loving authority children so need from us.

Healing actions for unacceptable behavior:

Hitting: Wrap the child's hands in a comforting scarf and sit next to him: "When your hands are warm and strong, they don't hit." (Same for kicking.)

Biting: Give the child a large piece of apple or carrot, and have her sit next to you to eat it: "We bite the carrot, not our friends."

Violent play: Real work is the cure for violent play: digging holes or moving stones in the garden, carrying wood, stacking bricks.

Defiance: Between ages two and four, children can be very stubborn, and it's best to simply overlook some of their negative reactions (remember, they're always imitating!). Just go with the child and begin doing with him what you want him to do, without anger or lots of explaining. Don't waiver or allow him to wriggle out of it. For example, rather than butting heads about him picking up his toys, just begin rhythmically picking up a toy or two and putting them into the bin. Like with a yawn, he will hardly be able to keep himself from joining in. Then you can thank him for doing it!

"Tattling" and other upsets with socializing: Chronic problems in this area suggest difficulties or weakness in the child's developing social brain / will energies. Involve her in your work, to let her feel the adult's creative strength focused upon a particular activity. Washing dishes is a wonderful healing action here, as is baking. Sometimes merely listening to children's upset or tears will ease up the problem enough so that they can respond to a suggestion as simple as, "Just go start over."

These all feature an important theme in constructive discipline: it is always more effective to focus on what the child *may* do, rather than issuing a "You may *not*…" prohibition. This approach also reduces the risk of putting the child into a disconnected neurobiological protection state. And in fact, Patterson suggests that the very word "May" can have seemingly magical properties, as in, "You may put the forks on the table now": it presents no question for the child to either answer or ignore, and it implies the notion of *privilege* to be doing what the adult is suggesting. And indeed, a child enjoying a secure, connected relationship with her parents *does* find it a privilege and a joy to behave in harmony with their wishes. In this way, robust attachment is like the power steering of parenting!

In his compelling book on key dynamics in attachment, *Hold On To Your Child*, Gordon Neufeld cautions that this "power assisted" aspect of the parent-child relationship requires "careful nurturance and trust":

> It is a violation of the relationship not to believe in the child's desire [to behave well] when it actually exists, for example to accuse the child of harboring ill intentions when we disapprove of her behavior. Such accusations can easily trigger defenses in the child, harm the relationship, and make her feel like being bad. …It's a vicious circle. External motivators for behavior such as reward and punishments may destroy the precious

> internal motivation to be good, making leverage by such artificial means necessary by default. As an investment in easy parenting, trusting in a child's desire to be good for us is one of the best.[55]

Keeping this sacred trust in mind, and the foregoing principles regarding the significance of your example, and the importance of relationship and play; of clear messages and limited choices; of healthy rhythms; remember that the single most pivotal ingredient in harmonious, joyful parenting is *you*—your confidence, conviction, and trust in yourself and in your child.

What's All This Hoopla About Praise?

While on the subject of trust between you and your child, let us tackle the topic of praise. Somewhere along the way it became generally assumed that praise builds self-esteem, leading to the daily parental litany of "Nice job!" and "Great throw!" and "Gorgeous painting!" and on and on ad nauseum. When our second child was a toddler, our R.I.E. teacher gently suggested that we parents reconsider our attitudes toward praise. She presented the counterintuitive (and definitely counter-cultural) notion that praise—especially the kind that is routinely doled out to kids as standard practice these days—can insidiously erode a child's intrinsic motivation, pleasure, and self-satisfaction in a given task or activity.

Indeed, praise deflects a child's focus away from her inner will to create, play and do, outward to our response to *what* she creates, plays and does. In his book *Punished by Rewards* Alfie Kohn points out that praise "sustains a dependence on our evaluations, our decisions about what is good and bad, rather than helping them begin to form their own judgments. It leads them to measure their worth in terms of what will lead us to smile and offer the positive words they crave."[56] Their natural intrinsic motivation, delight, and sense of just-rightness wear away, and they become dependent on the illusory glow of pseudo-self-esteem coming from outside in. One of the most helpful things I ever heard Dr. Laura say on her radio show was that self-esteem is about whether you impress *yourself* through how you act. Or as the saying goes, "Self-esteem is an inside job."

We now have a generation of young adults whose addiction to the constant flow of external rewards and positive feedback has become an issue for employers. There are even companies who specialize in providing flashy workplace demonstrations of praise and acknowledgement for employees whose motivation and morale flags without such external bolstering. This is not a dependence that we want for Generation Peace; rather, we want them to feel an abiding sense of rightness, worthiness and "enoughness" from deep within.

One morning Sarah's three-year-old daughter Emma called to her—"Come look, Mama!" When Sarah rounded the corner to the family room, there was Emma's new puzzle, all put together. Rather than the standard, "Great job!" or "I'm so proud of you!" Sarah said, "Emma, you finished that puzzle all by yourself!" She simply reflected what was true, with no judgment attached. Her gratifying reward was Emma's own assessment: "I *smart!*" Self-esteem doesn't come any more vivid than that, or any more authentic. It was Emma's, given by herself to herself, via an appraisal she made of her own accomplishment. She truly owned the doing of that puzzle, and the pride that came with it.

As Kohn points out, "…*the most notable aspect of a positive judgment is not that it is positive but that it is a judgment.* [Emphasis his.] Just as every carrot contains a stick, so every verbal reward contains within it the seed of a verbal punishment…"[57] Praise is just one side of a two-sided coin, whose other face is criticism. Sometimes well-meaning parents sidestep the double-edged nature of praise by sticking to words of reflection, encouragement, and

acknowledgment—"I notice you set the table by yourself," "You've climbed up really high on the jungle gym," and the like. But author Naomi Aldort points out the pitfalls here as well, especially when our goal is to raise self-directed, secure individuals with whom we share a strong bond of trust: "Sensitive and smart, [our children] perceive that we have an agenda, that we are manipulating them toward some preferred or 'improved' end result. …Gradually, a shift occurs. …No longer do they trust in their actions, and no longer do they trust us, for we are not really on their side."[58]

Regarding a parent's offering encouragement or demonstrating loving support by commenting on what a child is doing, Aldort says, "Even when we intervene with casual commentary on our children's imaginative play, doubts sneak in. What children are experiencing inwardly at these times is often so remote from our 'educated' guesses that bewilderment soon turns to self-denial and self-doubt." As I reflected on what seemed like a radical notion of Aldort's back when my own children were small, and continued to observe interactions between other parents and their children, I came to wonder why we feel this need, this near-compulsion, to constantly comment. *Why do we have to say anything at all*? Aldort thoughtfully suggests that one cause of our verbal meddling involves our own histories: What we don't trust in ourselves, what we weren't *supported* in trusting in ourselves, as children—our natural impulse toward self-directed, un*adult*erated learning explorations—we have a hard time supporting in our own children.

Another factor in our commentary compulsion is that nowhere in our society is something allowed to simply *be*, without blurbs, hype, or headlines—and never has this been truer than in today's iTwitterFaceLinkInPod culture. Along with sheltering our young children from screened media itself, we do them an important service and honor to spare them the self-referencing, aggrandizing, "look at me" sensibilities that saturate these technologies, and our very society. Parents may worry that their children will be left behind if not allowed to participate in this high-tech web of supposed connectivity, but a decade of Waldorf school graduates (in which computers are excused from the curricula in both lower and middle school) suggests that this concern is unfounded: teens quickly pick up computer techno-skills as if born to it. Indeed, the current generation takes to these technologies with a natural ease and affinity; let us give them the gift of unfolding their own imaginative and will capacities before letting them loose into the realm of the digital, which when introduced too early curtails that development. (It bears noting that the chief technology officer of e-Bay, as well as employees of tech giants Google, Apple, Yahoo and Hewlett-Packard send their children to a Waldorf school.)[59]

The Cost of a "Head Start"

Our current culture's lifestyle tends to undermine a child's will energies, draining rather than building them up. We ask them to think, reason and "get smart" at ever-younger ages, much to the detriment of their healthy development. The child's life forces (remember—like the life forces at work in a plant to unfold the blossom) are needed for the complex activity of building up the physical body until around age seven. (A milestone event signaling the completion of this phase is the emergence of the first permanent teeth.) When we engage the young child in academics and other intellectual pursuits—in which the jobs of memory and structured thinking consume tremendous amounts of physiological energy—the life forces are diverted from their main tasks, and the healthy development of the body and brain can be compromised in lifelong ways.[60] We can use the metaphor of electric power to understand the importance of protecting

and nurturing the young child's will energies: our children are born with a vast supply of latent wattage—all their intelligence, their passions, personality, *everything*—but without a grid or infrastructure through which this power can be effectively utilized. Supporting their life forces (the development of their etheric body) during early childhood is how we foster this infrastructure, so that when the latent power begins to course—during the seven-to-fourteen stage—there is a strong, flexible and integral deployment system for it.

Academics and other pseudo-mature pursuits—including organized competitive sports—may indeed produce a child who is very bright and capable, and who may very well enjoy the work, but who later—by middle- or high-school age—can burn out, become depressed, cynical, or disengaged, because there is little inner foundation to support this intellect. It's like having tons of wattage without a strong grid to deploy it—dangerous. Supporting the healthy development of a child's will during early childhood is an investment in her future; it builds a sound infrastructure that will contain and conduct her future interests, passions, and intellectual pursuits.

Our current ignorance of this developmental need is surely a significant contributing factor to the multiple crises facing our children. Developmental and learning disorders, along with behavioral problems, are epidemic. Depressive disorders are appearing earlier in life than in past decades; indeed, The National Institute of Mental Health has over the last generation documented substantial increases in the use of myriad psychotropic medications, including antidepressants, in *preschool-aged children!*[61]

Many of our middle- and high-school children have become jaded; they do not seem to find in school, in learning, or in life, anything about which to be excited, enthused, or inspired. Their will forces whose development ideally should have been supported in early childhood, instead often languish, latent yet unrealized, sapped by the adultifying activities with which parents packed their young lives. Without these will forces, which are transformed in later childhood and young adulthood into *interest in the world,* our youth fall prey to cynicism, ennui, and yes—ironically—*boredom.* Along with the Generation Peace qualities I mention often, there is one hugely important quality I haven't yet mentioned: *curiosity*. A person can have the kindest heart, but if she has no interest in the world around her, she isn't going to be a vital agent of innovative change, is she? All parents hope that their children will be interesting people as they grow up, but of much more importance is that members of a peacemaker generation be *interested* people. When young children have the opportunity for a kind of "constructive boredom"—i.e., calm, predictable, home-based rhythms—then as teenagers they can scarcely understand the notion of boredom, for their interest in the world is so robust!

Family physician Philip Incao suggests that the ever-growing numbers of youth suffering from "Is that all there is?" ennui, and myriad psychosocial and learning disorders, stress, anxiety, depression and even suicidal thoughts,[62] are telling us that they aren't finding what they need when they come into this world and into their families. Warns Incao, "They are the canaries in the coal mine."

Protecting the Bud, Envisioning the Blossom

Your child is not a blank slate or empty vessel who needs to be filled up with copious amounts of excellent information. Your child comes to you with a nascent intellect that is consolidating energy and waiting to unfold in good time, like a flower in the bud. You would never pry open a rosebud to somehow optimize or improve upon it! Instead, you would make sure it has the best soil and nourishing fertilizer to support its optimal unfolding.

So it is with our children. But *we* are the soil in which our children grow. For those precious and critical early years, we are their earth, their sun and their water. If we are willing to embrace that daunting and magnificent responsibility, then the potential for their lifelong well-being is virtually unlimited… as are the prospects of them unfolding as socially adept agents of peace, innovation and planetary evolution.

Principles to Practice

Presence – Our children's healthy development calls on us to pursue our own development, and presence practice is one of the richest, most versatile ways to do this. In any moment we can align and attune ourselves more deeply to what we're engaged in: gestures can become prayers, thoughts can become meditations, comments can become blessings. It may come naturally to you, or it may feel foreign and awkward, no matter: striving toward the gathered moment is the heart of presence practice—to become more present to yourself, to Life… to the onion, the computer, the bathtub, the car… and to your child.

- Thoughout these Steps I have encouraged you to engage in some kind of meditative or contemplative practice, including mindfulness—which can be seen as bringing presence to the daily movements of life. This helps you to answer this important question in the affirmative: *Do I as the parent have mastery over something as fundamental as the movement of my own thoughts?* Because your level of parental self-possession is perceived by your child, and when the answer is Yes, this in turn fosters a respect for you that is deep, implicit, and which rarely wavers.
- One presence practice that can be very helpful is a daily review just as you're about to go to sleep. Simply play in your mind the day's events—the good, the bad and the ugly. The critically important aspect to this exercise is that you do so *without any judgment*: it is to be as objective a viewing as possible, like a movie of someone else's life. If you insist on having any feelings about it, let them simply be gratitude for most of the scenes, and for those that didn't go as well as you'd wish, simple compassion—as you would feel when watching a stranger who is struggling. This is one of those mysterious, seemingly simple practices that when done regularly can bring more ease to life and effect astonishing transformations within. The next morning some events might stand out in your mind, calling for action; notice how you benefit from the clarity this practice can bring—how you are enabled from within to address tough situations.
- At this step when discipline issues first arise in earnest, it's good to remember what I pointed out in Step One: whatever you put your attention on, you get more of. When we're upset, we're choosing to be present to that which we *don't* want. When we get annoyed or angry with our children the same thing happens—we're being present to everything we don't want, rather than standing in that loving, authoritative center and focusing on what we *do* want (and calmly expect) from our child. Becky Bailey writes in *Easy to Love, Hard to Discipline*, "Learning to focus your attention on the outcomes that you desire will bring you enormous power. It is probably the most important technique you can learn for living peacefully with children (and with other adults), and for finding joy in life."[63]
    - Related to this is the understanding that our unconscious doesn't process *negation*; in other words, it doesn't really hear the "don't" when you admonish, "Don't put your muddy shoes on the kitchen table." (So he'll also hear just "…

touch the priceless crystal lamp!" or "…cross the street alone.") A good rule of thumb, then, is to try and say what she *may* do rather than what she shouldn't do: "Sweetheart, put your muddy shoes on the mat by the door."

- One of the best times to share moments of connected presence with your children is just before they go to sleep. The bedtime story—and quiet conversation before or afterward—is perhaps the most important time to shelter and cherish with your children, right up into their adolescent years. It is when they are often at their softest and most tender—when their hearts are open and they are most apt to share what is living inside them. For many parents, this is precious time in which they nightly continue to learn and be present to the truest essence of their child.
- Parent-child conflict often arises when the parent's reality collides with (and usually overrules) the child's reality. Kim John Payne offers a way of weaving the two realities into a harmonious shared presence that helps immensely with the practical kinds of struggles we can have with young children on a daily basis—especially volatile times such as the dinnertime example he gives. The classic evening scene plays out like this in untold millions of homes, in which the child is deeply engrossed in playing, then Mom calls to him, "Ten minutes till dinner!!"… then "Five minutes till dinner!"… and so on until the countdown is over and she says, mildly (or more than mildly) annoyed, "Spencer, dinner's ready now, hurry up and go wash your hands," but he does not change gears whatsoever, is still deeply engaged in building his Lego castle, and a struggle ensues. Payne calls his alternative approach "My World, Your World, Our World," and it can work magic at these kinds of touchy transition times, in which agendas tend to collide and struggles arise: "Mom goes to the child who is engrossed in playing, sits next to him for just a few moments, just simply present. The child turns his attention to her—he cannot help but do so, he's wired for it!—and that's when she says 'Dinner's going to be ready in a few minutes—I'd better go back and grate the cheese just like you like it.' They each return to their worlds, and then she comes back another time or two in this way, so that there is an *intersection* of her world and his world. They don't collide, but become 'our world.'" And things happen with much more ease and harmony in "our world"! (There are of course as many variations on this as there are parents, children, and imaginations; I seem to remember when Ian was deeply engrossed in his trains I might show up and say that the train's engineer has requested that he come have dinner in the dining car of another train—"over here, toward the dining room table!")
- Bath time is one of those daily events that can take on the character of a tedious chore, or the opportunity for a smorgasbord of playful, intimate time to be present with your child. The deciding factor is simply your own consciousness. There is something freeing about the very element of the water you're sharing as you bathe your child—let your imagination fly with every wish you have for her, giving thanks for the health and beauty of her physical being. It's a wonderful time, as you're soaping and rinsing, to demonstrate reverent, joyful celebration of her body and your blessings on what she might do with it: "May your strong legs walk you across this marvelous planet"… "May your creative hands shape beautiful ways of joy"… "May this beautiful face bring smiles to many others …" And when shampooing it is helpful to engage a most elaborate imaginary scene on the ceiling for her to gaze at while you rinse: the gazillion stars in the night sky, or the colorful fish in the ocean's underwater universe…? We can also greet and bless the water itself—the true elixir of life. Barely of speaking age, one little girl

clearly had developed an appreciative rapport with the living water, when as it drained away at the end of her bath, she exclaimed "Bye bye, water!" Yes, the bath's warm, watery atmosphere invites delicious whimsy—particularly helpful for the parent who may not be naturally whimsical. Let your child draw you into her world of wonder as you share this time together.

- The warmth and wetness of bath time suggests a return to the womb, and it is indeed between about the ages of 2½ and 3½ when children have been known to relate pre-birth or birth memories. At this age you might occasionally ask, "Do you remember the time before you were born?" or "What was it like for you when you were in Mommy's tummy?" You might get a delightful surprise one evening!

Awareness – One helpful aspect of awareness for this step is to understand a few key developmental turning points during this stage of your child's life. It can help enliven your job as a parent to watch for and delight in these milestones.

- Last step I described the baby's gradually developing cognitive awareness of *object permanence*; somewhere between 18 and 24 months this complex shift completes, freeing the child from the limitations of the concrete information brought in by his senses. This is epic: he can now construct a mental representation of the world and locate objects after a series of visible displacements that include hidden conceptual transitions (e.g., the potato moved from the box under the cloth.) He can *imagine* where an item might be even when he cannot see, hear, or touch it.
- The second of Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages begins around 18 months and lasts through roughly age three, as the child gains more control over her body and its movements. (This is the time of toilet training as well as myriad experiments by this wee scientist in her exciting environment.) Erikson suggested that this is the stage at which the child internalizes a fundamental sense of either *autonomy* or *shame and doubt*. The child begins to experience a sense of independence, and this impulse may first emerge as her demand, "Me do it myself." It helps parents to know that even though it may not seem like it, the child is also beginning to develop some self-control in her environment (including the basic self-control involved in toileting). Her budding autonomy can be supported with loving, authoritative boundaries and the opportunity to make mistakes without retribution. The life virtues gained through the positive resolution of this psychosocial crisis are *self-control*, *courage*, and *will*.
- Following his cognitive achievement of object permanence, the child embarks on what will be several years (from about two to about seven years of age) of what Piaget called the *preoperational stage*, in which not only can he hold a mental representation of objects, but now he can mentally manipulate them (as opposed to last stage's limitation to physical manipulation of objects). He can now perform such mental actions as imagination and symbolic encoding (which Gen Peace parents will do well *not* to exploit to introduce early academics). These are all the wellspring of his important endeavor of playing.
- From infancy through the child's third year she experiences a gradually dawning awareness of her own individuality separate from her mother and the rest of the world—first as a basic bodily reality and over time as a deeper existential reality. This process

has some pivotal moments, such as when she turns two.[‡] This time has earned the unfortunate nickname of the terrible twos because it can come as an unsettling surprise to parents when their "easy" child suddenly begins practicing her individuality by saying "No" in countless creative ways. It helps to have a big picture sense of what's going on in order to maintain your equanimity and not get flummoxed by your child's sudden obstinacy. Watch for the fascinating self-referencing transition taking place in the language of the two-to-three year old, when "Baby do it" evolves into "Janie do it," and then, one magical day, "*I* do it." It is in the sacred ground of this new name "I" to which she has now awakened that the seeds for her future sense of self are planted and will flourish.

- The third stage of Erickson's psychosocial development runs from about ages three to five, during which the child internalizes a sense of either *initiative* or *guilt,* as he sees and imitates the adults in his world and takes the initiative to imagine, elaborate, and direct new scenarios through play. In this way he experiments with prototypical grown-up experiences and asserts his budding power over his world. If he is supported with both encouragement and boundaries, he develops a sense of being capable of leading himself and others, and gains the life virtue of *purpose*. Guilt can come over the child by virtue of the huge, earth-shattering things she contemplates (and sometimes does) in the sheer exuberant enjoyment of her new motor and mental powers. His conflict is: "What I *can* do, and what I'm growing increasingly aware of what I may and may not do..." as he is slowly beginning to internalize a self-regulating "parent" part of himself. If his efforts at initiative are dismissed, shamed or thwarted, he can internalize lifelong guilt, self-doubt and a lack of initiative. Parents can foster initiative through offering the child the chance to find pleasurable accomplishment in wielding tools, cooking utensils, meaningful toys and objects—and even in caring for younger children.
- No matter how much awareness and presence practice you have engaged in, preparing for being with a young child… now you really *are* with a young child, and that can push lots of buttons! Continue to foster compassionate awareness of your own history of being parented, and let that awareness breathe space into the interactions you have with your own child—the space needed for peaceful intention to take root and flourish.
- Within the kind of Gen Peace disciplinary framework outlined in this book, whose intention is to foster a growth-over-protection posture in the child—and thus does not feature fear-based training of what to do and not do—it's important to realize that it's only around the fifth year that awakens in the child a truly organic, internalized sense of right and wrong. Until then, patient parents with their eyes on the big peace picture will realize that discipline necessarily involves loving repetition of right action—again and again, over and over, day in and day out—for the child to imitate.
- The fourth stage of Erickson's psychosocial development begins during this step—around age five—and resolves around age eleven: *industry* v. *inferiority*. During this stage the child's psychosocial milieu widens considerably to include peers and teachers, who join parents in influencing this outcome. It is a time of learning many new things, accomplishing new tasks, and cooperation with others, all of which can contribute to the child's deeply felt sense of industry. It marks the origin of the work ethic wherein a sense

[‡] Each of the three seven-year phases of a child's life is marked by a significant developmental milestone in his or her awakening, maturing sense of self relative to the world, occurring roughly two years into the cycle—at age two, age nine and age sixteen.

of what is valued by society is incorporated by the child. She is ready to learn avidly, and to become bigger in the sense of sharing obligation and performance during this period of development. He is eager to make things cooperatively, to combine with other children for the purpose of constructing and planning, and is open to guidance from teachers and to emulate ideal prototypes. Positive regard and encouragement by peers foster industry (and by contrast, the lack of it can seed a lasting sense of inferiority); parents, teachers, and other adults who offer worthwhile tasks and meaningful challenges will also help foster a sense of industry—and the life virtue of *competence* and *method*. It's important to note, in this era of early academics, that the assignment of tasks that are beyond the child's ability will tend to produce a sense of failure and inferiority.

Rhythm – This is a parent's best friend. Rhythm is one of the greatest needs of the young child, but also a fundamental human principle, often forgotten in our supercharged, 24/7 world. (Fyi, the first thing "Super Nanny" does is put every family on a schedule, and just that improves the situation tremendously!) Young children thrive on and crave rhythmicity to their days, their weeks, even the seasons: "This is when we eat, this is when we nap, this is when we have play time… Tuesdays we go to the park, Wednesdays we go to the Farmer's Market, Sunday we visit Grandma, and summer is beach time!" Seems monotonous to us as adults, because we're essentially different creatures inside our skulls. The limbic or "feeling brain" structures developing in these early years are critical to the formation of all later brain-based capacities. Rhythm's external consistency & predictability allow the growing child to gradually internalize regulation & stability—which we now know is *the* foundation for all human success, including intelligence, relationships, and joy.

- Ecologist Sandra Steingraber writes, "When one is not yet old enough to read the calendar or the clock's face, when the difference between 'next month' and 'tomorrow' still seems a little fuzzy, it is comforting to know that the year's longest day comes when the strawberries appear, that one's birthday falls during apple-picking time, that the geese fly away when the pumpkins are ripe…"[64] Even when one *is* old enough, these knowings bring a deep level of connectedness, which itself is a warp thread of peace and joy. Pulsing through all of these natural rhythms is *etheric* energy—the life-giving force that animates all elements of the natural world. Only minerals have solely a physical body; everything else, including plants and of course animals, has an etheric body. It is the etheric body of your child that is still "in gestation" during this seven-year period, and rhythm is a primary form of nourishment. As Thomas Poplawski notes about the etheric, "Its rhythms are like those of the moon and the tides and, if supported by external rhythms, will hum along quietly and smoothly."[65]
- The two most fundamental rhythmic aspects for your child's daily life are mealtimes and bedtime; they should fall at the same times each day as consistently and smoothly as possible. The child's dinner should be early—5:30 or 6:00—to allow for an appropriately early bedtime. This may mean that the adults in the household have dinner together later… or Mom eats with the child earlier and has a wee snack as her partner dines later… or any of numerous other arrangements that respect the child's rhythmicity needs.
- The two key aspects of bedtime are: 1) it should be early—during the seven o'clock hour so that she is asleep by eight at the latest—because it is healthiest for

her and also it allows you and your partner time every evening that is yours alone, which brings joy into the family; and 2) it should be organized around the understanding that the child's last impressions are taken into the night life of her psyche, and will have implications for her growth. (Children do their growing at nighttime, like plants!) This should guide your choices for the entire bedtime ritual—the stories, the singing, the coziness—so that it ushers them with delight, peace, and tranquility into their mysterious night of dreaming and dancing with the angels.

- Consider your child's naptime sacrosanct, as it really is an elixir for him. I recall how my friends mercilessly teased me about my obsessive "rigidity" in holding to Ian's nap schedule ("No, I can't do a park date at noon"); not too many years later those same friends were commiserating about their kids' regulation and sleep issues, saying how wise I'd been to establish and so fiercely preserve his sleep rhythms. Sleep is the royal cradle of growth; protect it and Life will thank you.
- Perhaps the most precious gift you can give yourself and your children throughout these early years is *time*: one of the handiest, all-purpose tips that makes virtually everything easier is, *Slowwww dowwwwnnnn.* Remember the langorous pace of "milk time" after your baby was born? Well, here's the thing about the "new normal" that follows: a child's pace is naturally poky. Kim John Payne points out, "We're confronted with the often simple requests of these small beings (whom we love immeasurably), and yet their pleas seem to be coming form a galaxy far away, from the planet 'slow.'"[66] Attuning when possible to your child's unhurried rhythms makes everyone's life sweeter. As I like to say—and this pretty much applies to all aspects of life—"slow down, pleasure up." Allow twice as long as you think it should take to do anything—a trip to the grocery store, a visit to the playground at the park, a stop at the library. Put this formula on your fridge: *Perceived Time Requirement x 2 = Sanity, Joy & Peace!*
- Support the internal rhythms of your child's self-regulatory system, which needs to be worked and practiced to fully develop. This calls for some interludes of <gasp> boredom, which are essential for the fully articulated wiring of the brain circuitry that mediates her own inner capacities to manage and balance her emotional states—stress, boredom, pleasure, and a basic sense of being connected to Life. This serves as a significant protective factor against high-risk behaviors not too many years from now, which are ways of attempting manage such emotions from the outside in. Regular intervals of "not much to do" are also a boon for her flourishing imagination.
- By contrast, one enlivening activity that's wonderful to include in your rhythm is a weekly gathering at the home of one of the mom friends you've met by now—at the park, or a La Leche League meeting, or way back at your prenatal yoga class. As you rotate homes each week you all mutually enrich your child's and your own experience through, say, the mom who is a wonderful baker… and this other mom who is a master at sculpting beeswax… and this one who knits.
- Take a cue from Waldorf kindergartens, where each day goes with the cooking of a particular dish. (I still vividly remember the teacher reassuring the other children as my daughter and her friend were picked up as usual before lunch on Wednesday, "Yes, Eve and Julia leave early on soup day." This *is* how children

mark time!) You need not be rigid about it, and you can even consider it liberating: you don't have to wonder what side dish you'll serve! ("We have pasta on this day, sweet potatoes on that day.") It may seem boring, but trust that there is still the five-year-old inside you that will take comfort in it. You can elaborate this to include such child-friendly activities as sweeping floors, folding laundry, and weeding in the garden. ("Monday is broom day"… "Thursday is dirt day…" and so on.)

- The kitchen is especially fertile ground for peaceable episodes with our young children, as it features such basic, hands-on activities that result in near-magic alchemy. Having a day when you cook—bread, cookies, soup—maybe not once a week (daunting for many of us!), but on a regular basis, maybe every other week, is like bank for your child's will energies. There is rhythmicity to so much of the process— chopping, stirring, kneading—and we can enhance it with singing or chanting ("This is the way we bake our bread, bake our bread, bake our bread…"). Follow your child's affinities, for he will lead you to his favorites. There was a leek tart that became one of our favorites… And remember that it is the process and not the product that is the whole point! The conversations that will unfold are like no others, such as when my friend added a bit of cognac to a chocolate cake she was making, and her son licked the mixing spoon, winced, and asked, "Mommy, are you sure this is for *humans?*"
- Any rhythm designed to support the etheric energies needs to include regular time outside in nature, particularly when they are very little, either walking alongside you or in a stroller. Walking in the rain is especially recommended (followed by drying off and warming up afterward)! Bare feet on the earth is rich; one particularly wise teacher told me that he makes it a point daily to walk across the grass and soil in his front yard for the morning paper in his bare feet, summer or winter, says it grounds him. (Granted, he lives in California!) Having a child by your side… looking out through her eyes of wonder… gives you permission to be especially exuberant in expressing delight in a world in which everything is magically alive. "Hello, leaves… hello, pebbles… hello, wind!" A central tenet of esoteric psychology is that once you acknowledge the life in everything, it awakens life (etheric energy) in you. Perhaps this is one reason behind the success of mindfulness for treating depression.[67]
- Back in Step Two I mentioned the concept of a nature table. Children delight in this tangible portrait of life's rhythms. During each season Nature offers treasures for her to discover while on your outdoor adventures. In spring you can find interesting seed pods… in summer wild grasses and flowers… and in autumn you can gather beautiful leaves—some for the table and perhaps some to glue into a journal, each leaf facing a page with a little description of where it was picked up, what was going on that day, etc. As children grow they can get quite elaborate in their depiction of the seasons on the nature table, complete with mirrors for frozen ponds in winter!
- Seasonal rhythm can also be nurtured through certain fairy tales. The symbols, numerical themes, and repetitive rhythms of classic fairy tales hold deep meaning for children. (A more thorough discussion of fairy tales—most appropriate for the school-aged child—follows in the next step.) Here are four season-specific tales

that are wonderful for the younger child, four and up. During the fall months: *The Three Little Pigs*; during wintertime: *Mother Holle*, *The Shoemaker's Elves*; at the New Year: *Jack and the Beanstalk*; in the springtime: *Briar Rose*.

Example – Rudolf Steiner said that the young child is really an eye, taking in everything, registering everything, *without analysis*. They don't so much hear our words, but pick up everything else. And they imitate everything. So recall the master question: "Am I worthy of my child's unquestioning imitation?"

- One great Waldorf kindergarten teacher, Patty McNulty, taught me an important aspect of this principle for this age: mothers, find the queen in you, and fathers, the king. Seek out and cultivate your inner nobility, benevolence, and knowing authority. This can be a tall order if you grew up with words that undermined your sense of deserving respect. I have often engaged my counseling clients in guided imageries with surprising success in addressing this very important aspect of inner development: they call to mind a familiar discipline scene with their child and then vividly see and feel the experience of responding in this unfamiliar, "beneficent parent" mode to their child. A child needs to sense a dignity about her parents, and their attitude toward parenting (and thus, to her). Sometimes parental insecurities are expressed as silly humor that undermines this dignity. One father used to deliver his son to the kindergarten classroom by lifting him off his head and announcing in a goofy voice, "Here's my trained monkey!" Such a scenario doesn't fit this elevated atmosphere I'm speaking of. Of course you can—and should—be playful on a regular basis, but let it be from a place of deeply sensing and owning your own dignity and that of your child.
- Find what it is that you deeply know—that you know best—and bring that to your child. Let them see you deeply engaged in it, let them feel your passion for it. In age appropriate ways, involve them in it. It could be engine repair or the cultivation of orchids—whatever for you is a source of confidence, of one thousand percent inner knowingness, which are powerful forms of peace to model. Best not to *talk* all about it—just do it, revel in how it feeds you, and allow your child to absorb everything in that deep rapport.
- Perhaps the truest, most potent teaching example for the child is for her parents to live a profound inner life, without putting it on obvious display (as in Jesus instructing us to "pray in a closet"). Rudolf Steiner said that the child learns most from who we are *when no one is looking*. I was always touched by the remarkable dedication and commitment Ms. McNulty devoted to her calling of working so intensely with young children. She didn't watch television, she took care to not even listen to much (if any) news of world events, even current events that seemed to be on everyone's minds and lips. When I asked her about this, she said, "The children feed on our consciousness." I found that profound, and so sensible. Young children do live mostly outside the realm of words—they pick up and sense what is far beyond the things we yammer at them. They pick up on the truth that lies beneath, behind and before our words. So yes, children feed on our consciousness, and once we can swallow that daunting reality, let us choose: *What do we want to be feeding them?*
- If we complain about chores—even just in the way we make the gesture of doing the chore—it will be emulated (perhaps not right away, but years from now). So,

for example, take care that the books you read to your little one also interest you; if you are forcing yourself to read to your child (again, as a chore), you risk his imitation in the form of resisting the desire to read!

- A dimension of daily life that is potent in its regularity and its constant presence is that of eating. Through your example, instill the idea and the habit that we eat with consciousness in the name of friendship with our fifty trillion cells whose work and joy is to keep us alive. To bring presence and mindfulness to the simple act of eating is a lifelong gift to confer on your children. (One excellent—and quick—blessing before a meal or even a snack: "Here's to the health of all of our cells.")
    - Sandra Steingraber shares dietician Laurine Brown's simple, child-friendly food groups, of which there are only three: "*go foods* (whole grains and complex starches for energy), *grow foods* (protein for building body parts), and *glow foods* (brightly colored fruits and vegetables, full of vitamins)."[68]
- One of the challenges many parents meet in setting boundaries, redirecting unacceptable behavior, and denying dire requests (another term for whining, usually as you run the gauntlet of a toy store or any supermarket check-out, for example) is confronting their own guilt, insecurity and fear of disappointing their children. (This is often related to them confusing their own childhood experience with their child's. I love John Breeding's bluntly sage invitation: "Make peace with disappointing your child or go crazy.") Along with that is the discomfort many of us have—it's cultural—regarding the value of emotional expression, when our children cry, scream or melt down. The example you set by surmounting your inner struggles to attain the self-possession to kindly but firmly say "No" despite a full court press is one of the greatest gifts you can give your children—for it won't be many years before you will want them to be able to do the very same thing: say "no" in the face of conflicting feelings, high emotions and intense (peer) pressure!
- Children learn unfortunate lessons of cynicism (a subtle violence) when their parents take pleasure in criticizing friends, acquaintances, politicians. Children take our cues about how to treat themselves, others and the environment—with compassionate care or mindless disregard. They absorb the inner and outer atmosphere we create. Consider Kim John Payne's suggestion to go on a "shame, blame and put-down diet." He further offers wise counsel: ask yourself "What need was not met in *me*, that prompted that put-down?"[69] You might also take Eleanor Roosevelt's cue: "Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people."
- Sing often—softly or right out loud: it helps leaven and brighten the atmosphere. Even just humming works wonders in the brain, bringing oxytocin into your bloodstream. The quality of every gesture we make percolates into the psyche of our child: the way we set the table, wash the dishes, make the bed, vacuum, or respond to a wrong number on the phone. In these situations, when we are flowing we give them the gift of a flowing attitude. The way we even *touch* objects matters; we can cultivate a precision in our gestures that is a tremendous gift to our kids. This self-mastery is perhaps the single most potent influence we have on our children.

Nurturance – This is the practical demonstration of love, the giving of ourselves to our child: how we cuddle them, feed them, speak to them, look at them. Everything is an opportunity for nurturance of our children, from how we choose their toys and books, their clothing, the colors for their rooms, what to feed them, even the attitude we hold while preparing their meals! And we must also take care to apply this principle throughout the household—to people, pets, fruits and vegetables, our cooking pots… and of course to our partners and especially to ourselves.

- If there is one quality to most strive to express on a daily, even hourly, basis in our lives with young children, let it be the warmth of *kindness*. Kindness with them, as they struggle with the many frustrations that come with being little in a big world and wishing to do more than their capacities will yet let them. Kindness with ourselves, whose own tender places are so often laid open anew when we give ourselves over to the tumultuous adventure of parenting for peace. I was blessed to be friends with Laura Huxley, the late widow of Aldous Huxley, best known as the author of *Brave New World* but also a pioneering researcher who had studied myriad psychological, philosophical and spiritual systems aimed at furthering human potential. Laura often told the story that during a lecture near the end of his life, Aldous was asked what the most effective technique was for positively transforming a life. He answered, "It is a little embarrassing that after all my years of researching and experimenting, I would just say, 'Be a little kinder.'"
    - Laura's nephew Piero Ferrucci devoted an entire book to illuminating, through the latest research in many different fields, that we are "designed to be kind"—and how imperative it is for us to make the conscious choice to *do so*! In *The Power of Kindness* he writes, "In this exciting but dangerous moment of human history, kindness is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Maybe if we treat each other, and our planet, a little better, we can survive, even thrive."[70]
- Hand in hand with kindness, at the pinnacle of parenting for peace, is empathy—the actively nurturing posture of feeling the experience of another, and caring deeply about it. Not only is empathy the golden ground from which loving responses spring, it is an essential capacity for Generation Peace. Your child is watching and downloading your styles of relating, and every time you respond with empathy to her… to your pet… to your UPS person… and so on, you foster within her greater depths of this fundamental peacemaker quality. Robin Grille, in the very first paragraph of his epic *Parenting for a Peaceful World*, writes that "the human brain and heart that are met primarily with empathy in the critical early years cannot and will not grow to choose a violent or selfish life."[71]
- Empathy—seeing and feeling the moment through your child's eyes—together with your calm, loving and authoritative mindset helps make discipline a source of nurturance, growth, and greater connectedness for your child, rather than shame and disconnection. One spiritually oriented mother's empathy for her daughter—a spiritual being having a newly physical experience, needing to learn so many basics—led her to issue the gentle, rather enchanting correction: "Darling, that's not how it's done here on Earth. Let me show you…" This harnessed another quality that is so helpful for disciplinary moments—humor! When we can have a sense of humor, to laugh *with* him at a mistake (not *at* him), it adds tremendous

ease to what could otherwise be moments of struggle. This is a boon to parenting a toddler for peace, but will remain a helpful staple throughout the teen years.

- If you go to any park on any day in any city, you will see a child fall and start to cry and then you will see his mother swoop him up and begin to chant incessantly, "You're okay, you're okay, no blood, you're okay!" Meanwhile, the child wails. Only very occasionally will you see a mother who calmly reflects her child's true experience: "Yes, love, I saw that you tripped over that bucket and fell down. And that hurt, didn't it?" Or maybe, "That was pretty scary, huh?" She reflects *what is so*--not what she wishes were so, or what she might prefer to be so. Her child's crying ebbs, and he is quickly ready to get back to his business of playing. He has been *heard*. This kind of nurturance fosters connection—between a parent and child, and between a child and his own inner knowing.
- In almost every choice you make for your child, there is the opportunity to nurture him with reverence, awe and beauty. Will the walls in his room be the common off-white, or will you choose instead a soft pastel hue that envelops him with warmth and beauty? Will you absent-mindedly crack the eggs for his breakfast and toss the shells in the garbage can, or thank the chicken that gave this perfectly formed, protein-rich slice of perfection? This is an invitation to leaven and enliven the days for you and your child. (Of course there will be some eggs cracked without a story or a blessing!) One helpful way to approach this is to imagine looking out at the world through your child's eyes, which brings the uplifting quality of *wonder* to the fore. The more we can live, as Joseph Chilton Pearce puts it, "in constant astonishment," the more we can attune to the aspect of our children that seeks reverence, awe and beauty.
- One of the simplest ways to increase a sense of reverence and awe is to put yourself on a zip-the-lip regime. Say less, let it mean more. There is an epidemic raging, which I call TTD (Talk it To Death) syndrome. I gave one example earlier in this step, but one only has to spend a little time with any American family to see TTD in action: "Why is there a rainbow on the wall?" "Well, Samantha, the sunlight is being split into seven different wavelengths by the refractive index of the crystal on my watch sitting there on the counter." Wonder and awe quotient abysmally low. David Elkind offers an illustration of how young children's questions are usually focused on the *purpose* (why) of things rather than an explanation (how): His preschool aged son asked him, "Daddy, why does the sun shine?" At first tempted to give him a scientific answer about the relationship of heat and light, he remembered this principle behind the young child's questions. He simply answered, "To keep us warm, and to make the grass and the flowers grow."[72] In this spirit, a more nurturing response to Samantha's question about the rainbow might have been, "To make our morning more beautiful with the special qualities that sunlight can have."
    - Your young child (especially at four and five) will generate a seemingly unending stream of questions—one of the ways he is working on developing intellectual and social initiative. There is a delicate balance for the attuned parent to strike—between falling into the TTD trap on the one hand, or being dismissive or unresponsive to the child's earnest inquiries on the other. If we brush off, demean or ignore a child's questions he may

associate curiosity with a feeling of guilt or shame, which is a catastrophe for the future peacemaker, in whom curiosity must remain a crackling blaze. To support and foster his robust sense of initiative and curiosity, strive to feel your way into the lifeworld of the young child, which wants to know in a way that preserves wonder and reverence for still-magical world. There is time aplenty for the bottom-line, scientific knowledge of "reality."

    - Here are two handy responses to have at the ready, which work in virtually any situation in which you're caught off-guard by your child's question (like one our son asked, "Do people grow *down* before they die?"). The first is, "I wonder..." This leaves the child's own imagination to all the possibilities that will come her way, and allows her to remain in the dream-space that is a child's right. I fear, however, that in our hyper-intellectual culture many parents would feel remiss in giving a response like this, afraid of failing the child by not providing an "answer." Yes, "I wonder" can be considered an advanced maneuver that you can work toward saying with confidence and tranquility. The second is Elkind's suggestion to ask the question back to the child. "Well, why do *you* think a rainbow has appeared in our kitchen?" This will often elicit a stream of enchanting insights into your child's imaginative capacities—all of which should be met with the utmost interest and respect for her opinions on the matter, never "corrected." Remember, there will be time aplenty for "reality."

- The nurturing power of stories cannot be overstated. Stories told out of your own imagination or memory are the gold standard, but it is the rare parent gifted with this talent (I certainly wasn't). One way to begin to cultivate the knack for "just telling a story" is to relate some of your own adventures—those of course appropriate for the age. Stories of your travels, your own childhood, your activities while expecting him, are all great fodder. And children always love to hear about the day they were born. The point is to highlight the sensations, the beauty, the wonder, the feelings, rather than "just the facts, ma'am." Children love repetition and will ask for the same story over and over—and will often protest if you miss a crucial detail. Story time can become a soaring collaborative event as the child gets a bit older and adds her own fanciful embellishments.
    - When choosing books for your child, it is helpful to have a few basic criteria with which to sift out the gems from the glut of so-called children's literature out there. To me the most basic is that there is beauty (as opposed to just cleverness) in the illustrations, especially in the depiction of the human form. So many illustrations portray people in caricatured, exaggerated and even grotesque ways, which has a subtly discouraging effect upon a child's psyche. Another is that it draws on wonder, imagination, and reverence for its subject, whereas countless books feature overly adult perspectives and tones such as irony or sarcasm. And remember to choose the books that *you* resonate with; your little one will be nurtured by the resonance you feel with the story and illustrations.
- It is important to keep the question before you, *What can I do to nurture myself?* These are demanding days. It has become cliché because it's so true: full-time parenting is the most difficult job. Have a favorite book or magazine to read on a

subject you find fulfilling and nourishing. Have someone close at hand who is a friendly voice for you; a chat with him or her is nurturing time, even if it's brief—in person or via Skype or even the quaint old telephone. Friendship connections fire up the oxytocin system, they replenish you.

- Research demonstrates the power of giving to restore and refill our own psyche. There are some moments when we can make a space inside, a silence, and connect through our imagination with parents around the globe, wishing them the best, dedicating to them an echo of the joys we have. When you open out a dimension of your days in this way, it can fill you with an expanded sense of appreciation for what you're living—a potent antidote for cabin fever.
- Time in nature is an absolutely essential form of nurture, for the young child and for us. Science has now even quantified some how's and why's of nature's important role in human wellbeing: Natural settings engage our attention in subtle, relaxed ways—the rustling of leaves, patterns of clouds, colors of a sunset, birds taking flight, the gnarled shape of an old tree. Contrast this with the manmade world of a cityscape that demands the active attention of the person strolling city streets—"Walk"/"Don't Walk" lights, the pedestrian about to bump into you with her hot Starbucks, the ambulance passing siren blaring; together with the bombardment of sensation of bus-bench ads, traffic, and the overall noise level. Constant exposure to such an environment is like running an engine at high RPMs without a break. Natural environments give our brains' "attention equipment" a chance to reset, refresh and renew. In fact, out of this research has even emerged something called ART—Attention Restoration Therapy! So as it often happens, science has now "proven" what philosophers have long known—in this case, Henry Thoreau: "We can never have enough of nature."[73]
- Remember the nurturing power of warmth, and use your imagination to bring this quality into your child's home life in a variety of ways. Not only is it a fundamental need of the young child's unfolding will forces, it is needed all the more in today's world in which, write Piero Ferrucci, "we are all in the midst of a 'global cooling.' Human relations are becoming colder."[74] Fire (candles included), teas, soups, yummy natural fiber layers of clothing, the tone of your voice, the colors on your walls—these are all opportunities for warming up the atmosphere. Bedtime is especially a time for warmth: a candle burning during the bedtime story can be very soothing.
- Family traditions warm the soul and reinforce a deep sense of connectedness. Creating a few meaningful traditions when your child is young pays untold dividends as they grow up and hit the teen years but still find great comfort and joy in them. Holidays offer particularly ripe opportunities for developing your own unique touches—some of which may not catch on while others will become sacrosanct within the family. One friend has the simplest, most elegant Christmas tradition, by which all of the gifts that Santa brings are wrapped in white paper, period. (How brilliant is *that???!*) In my own family I carried on a tradition begun by my own mother: on Christmas Eve when I went to my room to get ready for bed, there was always a gift of new PJs waiting on my pillow—as there now is for my son and daughter (even though they're 20 and 24!). Perhaps the most fervently adored tradition in our family became the Easter egg hunt, whereby my husband

John did a maestro's job at hiding eggs (that had been dyed by the kids earlier in the week) in and around the house.

  - One great idea is to choose one special, consistent event every year (or most years) and record it on video. (For us it was indeed the increasingly competitive world-class egg hunt.) I think it would be great to shoot the classic "measuring the kids on the closet doorway" event each year. Whatever event you choose, it makes for a great growing-up montage when your kid is eighteen!

- One of the key decisions you will be faced with is preschool: whether to send her, and if so, when to start and what kind. Parents today are offered far less choice than when my children were this age; managing to find a non-academic preschool these days is kind of like Dorothy managing to get the witch's broom! The downward thrust of the former first-grade curriculum into kindergarten and now into preschool means that years four, five, and six (and sometimes even three and two) are spent on "pre-academics" and kindergarten preparation. This is a catastrophe for every dimension of Generation Peace potential! David Elkind's *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* is an absolute must-read, even if you skip his compelling analysis of why we're so hell-bent as a culture on hurrying our children, and his excellent explanation of children's developmental needs and abilities at these ages, and flip directly to the section on exactly what to look for in a healthy preschool for your child.[75] Keep in mind that early education has a more fundamental and enduring impact on the very shape of your child—his social intelligence, his capacities for peace, innovation and enjoyment of life—than does college. So if it's a question of finances, my motto is, Spend it at the front end, and let the back end take care of itself.
  - I have explained the importance of play for fostering the capacities of a peacemaker. One portrait of a *truly* developmentally appropriate (see below) preschool curriculum comes from Waldorf education: "In the nursery-kindergarten, children play at cooking, they dress up and become mothers and fathers, kings and queens; they sing, paint, and color. Through songs and poems they learn to enjoy language; they learn to play together, hear stories, see puppet shows, bake bread, make soup, model beeswax, and build houses out of boxes, sheets, and boards. To become fully engaged in such work is the child's best preparation for life. It builds powers of concentration, interest, and a lifelong love of learning."[76]
  - Preschool administrators throw around the buzz-term *developmentally appropriate* somewhat loosely in my experience, sometimes using a child's interest in an activity as evidence of its developmental appropriateness, which isn't valid. Young children will often happily embrace colorful workbooks, spelling tests, and group drills (none of which are appropriate); for one thing, they are exquisitely receptive: they pick up on what *we* want them to do, and they are eager to please us. It doesn't mean that it's the right thing to do, any more than it would be right to let them have all the sweets or toys they *think* they'd like to have!

Trust – As the mother with a child in her womb trusts that his organs are forming correctly, that trust in the hidden inner process of your child's vibrant development continues into childhood.

The days go on and on, each flowing into the next, and we don't readily see the transformations that are happening. Trust that the forces of life are working in your child. Sometimes we need little boosts of inspiration to continue fanning the faintly glowing embers of our trust in the notion that "this too shall pass" (whether it's colic or potty accidents or sleep droughts). Then we hear one of countless stories like that of a colleague whose child barely smiled until the age of seven, when he seemingly overnight came out of his cocoon. Trust that this mysterious, magical being called your child has his or her own timetable for the unfolding of everything.

As I write this it's impossible to overlook the epidemic rates of ADD, AD/HD, sensory processing, autistic spectrum and other psychosocial disorders. Many of these would no long be considered epidemic but have become endemic: tragically common. While this book is not geared to the child with special needs, nor to a child with serious developmental delays, all of the principles nonetheless apply as enriching adjuncts alongside whatever specialized guidance you receive from your child's healthcare professionals.

- I know many women—myself included—who never thought they were mother material, who didn't think they had the capacity to surrender to "just being a mother." By trusting the mysterious streams of Life and your own inner capacities—your imagination, your insight, your savvy—you'll discover activities suited to your child *and* you, which will beautifully foster his sense of joy of being alive. And it is this, ultimately, that must flourish vibrantly in the peacemaker—the joy of being alive.
- Cultivate trust in your own affinities rather than in any preconceived ideas—from the culture, from your in-laws, even from me! You have embarked on this hero's journey that is an existentially solitary endeavor, and if bucking the status quo brings loneliness, let it also bring delightful exhilaration.

Simplicity – Recall that simplicity is a portal to joy, and joy lies at the very foundation of health, wellbeing and peace. Cultivating a sense of wonder and imagination fosters "rich simplicity," because then everything becomes something amazing: wind through the trees is fairies dancing… a piece of wood becomes an alligator or a doll… a spoon becomes a great flag or a king's scepter. Then we don't need to constantly purchase things. (Laura Huxley once mused to me that the two overriding cultural messages with which we are bombarded are: 1) "Buy it"; and 2) "Throw it away.") When anything can become a toy, the child experiences such freedom! And a child—or parent—who can wonder and imagine is on a path toward unlimited peacemaking horizons.

- The child's deepest need is to be *seen* and *known*. Simplifying daily life helps that to happen more; as I like to say, "When we overbook, we overlook."
- Kim John Payne's study with children clinically diagnosed with ADHD found that when family life was simplified in three main areas—environment (including what the children were taking in via diet as well as information), screened media, and schedules—well over half of the children (68%) tested out of the clinical ADHD range after just four months.[77] No Ritalin, just simplicity.[§] Definitely with a child younger than six or seven, but also with older kids, the more we can simplify life, the more peace we will have in the home, and thus woven into the fabric of the child's developing brain. It becomes a feedback loop generating a reservoir of inner wealth in your child, available to be spent in myriad

[§] Along with a reduction in hyperactivity and attention issues, the simplicity intervention also resulted in a significant increase in academic achievement—an outcome *not* seen with medication.

peacemaking ways from mastering her moods, to discovering creative solutions, to caressing her loved one.

- When seeking to simplify a family environment or routine that has become overly complicated, I suggest beginning with the most basic, recurring events first—eating and sleeping:
    - Sleep is Nature's own simple treasure, offered to us nightly, and we frequently spurn it in favor of all manner of other trivial pursuits. And we suffer for it. Your child needs anywhere between ten and fourteen hours sleep (including naps) depending on her age. Ensuring that our children get the sleep they need means making a sizable commitment to prioritizing it on a daily basis—to serve her dinner early enough to begin the bath-to-bedtime routine means curbing late afternoon errands or activities; throw the afternoon nap in there beforehand and suddenly you're reminded of the earliest days of nursing when it seemed the end of one session practically dovetailed into the beginning of the next, with no "me" time in there anywhere! Clearly, "simple" doesn't always mean "easy." It requires foresight, fortitude, and organization. According to the National Sleep Foundation the sleep needs of various ages are:

Toddlers	12-14 hours
Preschoolers	11-13 hours
School-age children	10-11 hours
Adolescents	9-10 hours
Adults	7-9 hours

    - Make simple, predictable meals (seafood Wednesdays, lentil Thursdays, etc.) that feature limited choices of healthy, child-friendly foods—perhaps including two different vegetables, one he already likes and a newer one that he's free to ignore after one taste. (If you are nonchalant about it, eat it yourself, and keep offering it, he will come around.) Don't enter into negotiations or struggles around food. Don't even begin the slide down the slippery slope of being a short-order cook. Use your calm, loving authority (and the same tranquil conviction with which you buckle her into her seat-belt) to make it clear what is on the menu at a given meal. You might keep a fruit-and-vegetable snack center in the fridge that is always available to the child as a reasonable alternative if she's feeling particularly contrary. Cook big batches of things and freeze. Cook dinner in the morning for a simpler afternoon and evening. (I personally think a crock-pot in every home would contribute significantly to world peace: twenty minutes of work in the morning and your dinner awaits you at five—not to mention your home is filled with the heavenly aroma of home cooking!)
    - Drastically reduce or banish altogether juices and other beverages from your kitchen. If I had it to do over again, I'd have gone further than cutting apple juice with half water; I'd have weaned my children on the delights of pure, vibrant water, period. Not only are the dangers of high fructose intake coming to light,[78] inadequate intake of water is a silent epidemic of untold proportions in most developed countries and is a significant contributor to a long list of physical ailments, suboptimal development and degenerative diseases. The common belief that juices, soft drinks, coffee, tea, and other manufactured beverages are contribute to the body's need for liquids is "an elementary but catastrophic mistake," according to F. Batmanghelidj, author of *Your Body's Many Cries for*

Water. Yes, they do contain water, but also enough dehydrating agents to cancel it out plus steal extra water reserves from the body! The book's physician author cautions that when we give children juice, sodas, and other flavored drinks, we inadvertently (and disastrously) cultivate their innate preference for them, and "reduce the free urge to drink water."[79]

- Simplify the child's entire sensory field—in other words, the environment that is your home, his room in particular. Reduce the number of "things" by at least half. Typically, the number of a child's toys is best reduced by drastic proportions; the fewer there are, the more meaning each has. It's a great idea to rotate several toys in and out of her environment every week or two, which injects an element of novelty and freshness, without having to keep buying. (Of course you cannot remove her very precious favorite one or two toys.) The same with books. It may come as a shock that it's possible for a child to have too many books, but it is. As with toys, the more select the collection is, the more engaged a child will tend to become with them. Consider the noise level in your home as well, listening from inside his new little ears. This may mean installing double-paned windows to dampen street noise, or laying more rugs down on your hardwood floors.
- As mentioned earlier, an important aspect of keeping a child's life simple is in keeping the number of choices per day within appropriate bounds—which means typically far fewer choices than the average parent offers. Park yourself in the yogurt aisle at the grocery store and you won't have to wait long to witness an example, in which a mom launches into an extended negotiation to placate even the youngest child—three, four—about her choice of as she reaches for some cartons and her child yells, "No!!!": "No, not raspberry? Here, how 'bout blueberry, you love blueberry. No? Honey, well [child points]—Oh, you want the vanilla? Okay, we'll get the vanilla… and I'm going to get some blueberry as well [child starts to protest]—No, no, don't worry, you don't have to eat it, it's for Daddy and me." A child freighted with too many choices suffers the anxiety of having too much say in matters that should simply be decided by grown-ups. There is plenty of time ahead for the empowerment of more choice and greater autonomy, and the more we allow the young child her season of insouciance in which others are in charge, the more fully she can blossom into that next sphere of freedom. My basic rule of thumb for how many choices to offer a child in a day is the same as the classic (though rarely heeded anymore) equation for how many children to invite to his birthday party: the age of the child, plus one. So if he's three, he gets four choices per day on average. Maybe three today and five tomorrow, loosey goosey. And the choices are not open-ended, but a choice between two options (either of which is acceptable to you). And the choice is proffered by you, not demanded by her in the form of a protest against something you've chosen. You can sometimes even say to the child, "Relax, you're not in charge." Calm. Authoritative. Loving. Peace. Ahhhh…
- Speaking of birthday parties, in the words of Thoreau, "Simplify, simplify." Strive to heed the above formula. Steer clear of major productions; homegrown parties are usually the most successful, and most satisfying for the child.
- Here are some ways to both simplify and enrich the very ways in which we interact with our children:
    - Let your discipline mantra be "Imitation, redirection, habituation": be sure you're modeling the kinds of behavior you want to see in your child; when she starts to

veer in the wrong direction (like, toward Grandma's priceless vase, or the front door that someone left open), simply redirect her by taking her hand or even literally "steering" her gently by the shoulders while cheerfully informing her of what's next; the more often you model behaviors and she engages in them, the more habituated she becomes and the fewer kerfuffles and struggles there will be. This notion of habituation goes against the cultural grain, especially since the permissive parenting revolution of the seventies and the idea that children should be allowed to be free to express themselves without such constraints or regimentation. The fact is, when beginning to learn any skill—carpentry, sculpture, poetry—some regimentation is required. The apprentice must first learn the basic conventions; the more fluent she becomes, the freer she is to then find her uniquely expressive departure from the conventional. A foundational behavioral structure gives the child a safety net so that she may relax.

- If we can recalibrate our own attitude toward misbehavior it brings a lot of simple peace into the family. At this age—certainly until the age of five—it is best to think in terms of your child simply making a mistake rather than breaking rules, misbehaving, or being uncooperative. The brain equipment simply isn't yet in place to retain rules and to restrain their impulses—even though they truly *do* want more than anything else to please you. Would *you* want someone to scold, shame or punish you when you make a mistake, especially if you were trying your best? Making mistakes shows we're risking new growth and exploration. If your child *stops* making mistakes, that's the time to worry; it means she's not feeling safe and secure enough to venture forth into new learning.
- One handy little technique in those moments when you're feeling exasperated is to take a breath and imagine being his *grandmother* rather than his mother. Grandparents have the gift of not getting too bogged down in discipline stuff; their love is just so big and relaxed it kind of blinds them to a child's small infractions. One eight-year-old French boy wrote his description of grandmothers and it included the line, "…and they know how to close their eyes to our mistakes." A variation on this theme is to simply say to the mildly errant child, "When I was your age, I would do that exact thing…" It leavens the atmosphere and lighter is always more peaceful.
- It is often simplifying, especially in cases of repeated "mistakes," to try and suss out the pure impulse behind your child's seriously bad behavior. The future artist might be incorrigible about drawing on the walls; the child who's stealing your jewelry might be having severe separation anxiety and wants to keep you with him. Nancy Jewel Poer tells the story of the little boy who was throwing darts into the wall of the sun porch and when (rather than freaking out and commanding him to "stop that right this minute") a grown-up asked why (with sincere curiosity, not as the classic rhetorical ambush), the boy said, "Listen," and then threw another dart. When it landed it made a *booooi-oooi-oooinggg*; this boy went on to become a master mechanic for whom tuning in to those kinds of sounds was essential.

- The more we simplify, the more we embolden ourselves to rely upon and find strength in our own resources. Make no mistake—this is subversive stuff. This book may have innocent little cookies on its cover, but it actually calls for a revolution—an awakening to your own power that comes from within, not from without. And every time your child

sees you putting your inner resources to work, even if they are the slimmest of resources, that is a potent education for her. It will come far more naturally to her to do the same.

RESOURCES

Some informative sites on the issue of television

"Television and Children" (a comprehensive gathering of information from the *YourChild Development & Behavior Resources* of the University of Michigan Health System) –http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/tv.htm

"The Debilitating Effects of TV on Children" – http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2009/09/27/the-debilitating-effects-of-tv-on-children/

"TV & Brainwaves: Published Studies" – www.tvsmarter.com/documents/brainwaves3.html

"Study Links TV and Depression" – http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/03/science/sci-tv3

Rabbit Ears Entertainment (They have now added illustrations to their repertoire of wonderfully narrated tales, so my suggestion is to play them *just for the audio* to maximize the participation of your child's engaged imagination and forestall the "screen seduction" as long as possible!) – www.rabbitears.com

Chinaberry Books & Other Treasures for the Whole Family – This was one of my most beloved sources of books and audio when my children were young! I encourage you to support this and other dedicated children's bookstores, which are struggling (*a la* Meg Ryan's doomed Shop Around the Corner in *You've Got Mail*) to stay afloat and serve children in the face of giants like Amazon and Barnes & Noble. In Los Angeles we have Children's Book World; see where *your* nearest real children's book store is, and go! Meanwhile Chinaberry has a wonderful selection of storytelling and audio CDs at www.chinaberry.com/cat.cfm/pgc/11400

Audio Titles I Highly Recommend – See first if you can find them at your local children's bookstore, and if not, yes, they are available from Amazon:

- *Teaching Peace*, Red Grammar (songs)
- *Baby Beluga*, Raffi (songs)
- *10-Carrot Diamond*, Charlotte Diamond (songs)
- *Free to Be You and Me*, Marlo Thomas and others (songs & stories)
- Any storytelling CDs by Odds Bodkin

Videos – A very short list, indeed!

Episodes of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* and *The Mother Goose Treasury of Sing-Along Nursery Rhymes* Vols. I and II (available on Amazon); it is exactly due to their *un*sophisticated production elements—which seem almost comical to us adults—that these are most developmentally and "sensorially" respectful.

Epilogue

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world. –Anne Frank

There is a parable in which three villagers are strolling along the bank of their community's river, and suddenly to their dismay they see a child, then another, then many children, being swept past them in the water's swift current. One villager without hesitation dives in to try and save at least one or two; another dashes up the street to a shop in order to call for rescue help. (There are no cell phones in this parable.) The third villager simply runs away, which shocks her companions. They are stunned by her insensitivity and apparent apathy to this tragedy. But she is neither insensitive nor apathetic; she runs her heart out up-river to see how she might prevent the children from falling into the river in the first place.

Parenting for peace in the ways described in this book may very well lead you to sometimes feel uninvolved in myriad "right now" approaches to social renewal, political or policy reform, environmental activism, and efforts towards spreading peace. But hopefully I have made the case for what an imperative, long-view healing approach it really is: like FDR said, "We can't build the future for our youth, but we can build the youth for our future."

While living these seven parenting steps and principles certainly does not preclude participating in more short-term progressive activism, it does call for restraint in spreading yourself—time, attention, energies—so thin that it erodes the impulse to which you have dedicated yourself at home. Tendrils of guilt may arise as you delete email after email inviting you to join this coalition or send that letter or make just a single phone call in the name of any of countless worthy causes. But your worthy cause is finishing her popsicle-stick castle and needs your technical support. Of course as children grow older and spend days at school… teens spend evenings at play rehearsal… our own time and energies become freer to take up action on projects that align with our ideals. And indeed, this is the embodiment of the example principle, a potent means of guiding our children's affinities toward intentionality in life—a central dimension of the peacemaker.

Mother and Child Communion

If you've read this far, then what I'm about to say won't likely shock, surprise or even disturb you. I unapologetically and politically incorrectly declare what I know to be an irreducible truth about human development: *Children need their mothers.*

Nature set it up this way, and it's based on psychobiological realities that we ignore at our collective peril. Of course one doesn't say this in polite company, at least if you don't want to be branded an anti-feminist seeking to overturn women's rights. Yes, fathers are irreplaceably important and can indeed be the primary caregiver, as can any consistent, loving, attuned adult—eventually. But in those early weeks and months, it is the mother whom the child knows from his nine months of prenatal communion, it is the mother whose body, voice, smell, heartbeat and essence is perceived as an extension of his very being, and it is indeed the mother in whose sphere he will experience the most unperturbed, healthy unfolding of his *self*.

But the topic of whether mothers "should" be with their children is a political/philosophical landmine, fenced off from scrutiny by a "cultural code of silence," notes Mary Eberstadt in her bracing *Policy Review* article "Home Alone America." In it she quotes columnist George Will's point that "we are far advanced in a vast experiment in mother-child separation that is essentially off-limits to public debate."[1]

The past fifty years of social and human-rights evolution have flung open doors and choices to women; and yet, the past fifteen years of advances in brain and developmental science have given us information that should—if we're paying attention—make those choices harder: *Relationship with a consistent, stable, attuned, loving adult, within a predictable, stable environment, is what builds a healthy brain and develops a successful human, period.* In addition to the serious neurodevelopmental implications of infant/child-mother separation—and despite massive amounts of propaganda to the contrary—statistics show that the more time infants and children spend per week in institutionalized day care, the more likely they are to exhibit aggression, cruelty, noncompliance, lack of impulse control, and other precursors of the joyless, low-peace adult.[2] Their social brain develops differently.

These findings indicate an *association* and not *causation* between day care and these developmental trajectories, with the possibility that other features of these children's environments contribute to such outcomes. Highlighting the complexities of this tough issue, which belie blanket solutions, is the fact that this finding does not necessarily hold true for children of low-education mothers; in this circumstance research has found the reverse may be true—that the time *away* from home in daycare can reduce aggression in children.[3] Several such studies have replicated the finding that "family characteristics are generally stronger determinants in physical aggression problems than participation in daycare." Indeed, central to our intentions of parenting for peace is that "the strongest predictor of how well a child behaves was a feature of maternal parenting that the researchers described as sensitivity—how attuned a mother is to a child's wants and needs."[4] There it is again, that beautiful word *attuned*. Higher maternal education and family income also predicted lower levels of children's problem behaviors.

I'm probably really asking for it by suggesting that educated mothers stay home with their young children. Especially when the prevailing cultural atmosphere is expressed in blog entries like this: "I love my son, but I was losing my mind staying home with him. We finally put him in day care part-time; I reasoned that I could spend $100 a week on a therapist, who would tell me to put him in day care, or I could send him straight to day care for the same price." Eberstadt writes,

> Faced with the endemic uncertainties and boundless chores of domestic life, many adults, male and female, end up preferring what Hochschild calls the "managed cheer" of work. Modern office life, she argues, offer[s] simpler

> emotional involvements, more solvable tasks, and often a more companionable and appreciative class of people than those waiting at home.[5]

Due to what Eberstadt calls "the reluctance of many academics and opinion leaders to be seen as hostile to the social advancement of women," this mother-child conundrum is either ignored or reduced to a polarizing, overly simplistic "Mommy Wars" caricature. But women's lib isn't the culprit; it has been the choice of mothers in eras long before feminism to contract out the "drudgery" of childcare to others. The loss here is deep and pervasive: no ruling class in human history has a collective positive memory of the endeavor of raising children. Those who are equipped to really enjoy being with their children, and who find full-time mothering an enriching experience, are still a cultural anomaly! It is no wonder then, in a society where social programs are driven by consumer demand of the economic majority, that we don't have family leave, career flexibility, and other policies that would support mothers and children being together for the critical first three years. We wish we wanted them, but do we really?

No doubt Erica Jong (most famous for conceptualizing the *zipless fuck* in her best-selling 1970s sexual liberation manifesto *Fear of Flying*) expressed the feelings of many when she decried attachment parenting in a recent *Wall Street Journal* editorial, saying it's "a prison for mothers, and it represents as much of a backlash against women's freedom as the right-to-life movement."[6] My book is not designed to convince those who, like Jong, would actually say with a straight face, "Our cultural myth is that nurturance matters deeply." If you feel truly and irretrievably imprisoned by motherhood, then by all means find someone freer to raise your child; according to all of the neurobiological principles I have shared in this book, and the shaping power of your example, you would likely raise a child who also feels imprisoned, and who might naturally seek to imprison. This book is not to proselytize but to invite: if the ideas I share resonate somewhere inside you, wonderful. Try them on, see if and how they fit. It is my intention that on the foundation of these principles, your own intuitive and inner knowing, in collaboration with Life, will emerge and engage as you journey through the steps.

I myself was the most unlikely image of the woman who would fall for that "cultural myth" that nurturance would matter deeply to my children—and indeed, to re-conceive my career, my priorities, and ultimately, my very self. I had a Golden Mike trophy on the piano, a Perma-Plaqued Emmy nomination on the wall, and a bright future in documentary television production. Who knows what I might have produced? But behind my hyper-achieving, always-gleaming façade, which shone with "higher-than-average self-esteem," there were essential aspects of myself I had unknowingly tucked away in order to live my tidy and ultimately somewhat superficial life. Something in my soul knew that to answer this call to mothering—*really* mothering, not hiring it out like my own mother had—would enrich me in unimaginable ways. No one was more surprised than me that I decided to "stay home" and do the hard work of motherhood.

Mothering broke me open and then urged me toward wholeness. The first mother profiled in Step Five was me. I was adopted when I was five days old in one of the first open adoptions in California. Mom (my adoptive mother, who died when I was twenty-one) was a charismatic, energetic, powerfully attractive woman with exquisite taste in everything, and a keen business sense. She wasn't home much, but there was always some caring housekeeper around to attend to me, and to do the cooking. Many hands

attended to me but never the ones that felt like home. My shining high self-esteem was a fragile sham to keep my profound experience of "not-enoughness" hidden.

While inside I struggled, outside I strained to present a status-quo face. I wore J. Crew, prepared organic baby food, went to Mommy & Me, clenched my teeth, and tried to keep it together. I was living what Clarissa Pinkola Estés calls *the grinning depression*. My mounting inner conflict made me feel like an alien in a world of seemingly happy mothers-who-adored-mothering. One day, I drove alone to a scenic canyon overlook and in the cocooned privacy of my car screamed, "*I hate being a motherrrrrr!!!*" It is clear to me now that my torment would have been tremendously eased had I not been so firmly entrenched in the production-and-evaluation-focused industrial worldview, had I situated myself in a context in which the halting process of my own inner development would have been more compassionately held and valued. As it was, I had summoned up Lisa Reagan's recipe for hell—trying to be the "perfect holistic mother" without redefining what perfection really is: *being present to whatever is authentically presenting itself in this moment.*

A big part of mothering my children involved re-parenting myself, re-wiring my brain. I am not the woman I was when I watched that first pregnancy test stick turn positive. Life intends that along with our children, we too become new people by allowing parenthood to remodel us from the inside out.

Long before I dreamed of the term… or the book… I discovered by living it that the miracle of parenting for peace is profoundly reciprocal: if we allow ourselves to fully enter that riotously flowing river of chaos, consciousness and connection, not only are our children raised into people of peace, we are also remade… reborn… rekindled by Life.

It is the ultimate joy ride.

On the other hand, it may be that you find yourself right now feeling sadness or regret because you are reading this "too late." You missed the boat. You already parented children, so your chance to try all this has passed. Or, you *were* already parented, and didn't receive these things that children need. As I said in the opening pages, my intention is not to provoke blame, regret, or, most of all, guilt. With new awareness comes an understandable tendency to veer in that direction. I invite all of us who missed those many boats to heed an admonition from the renowned psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl, who wrote, "What is to give light must endure burning." Let us be willing to feel the burn of what we missed, and light the way for those to come.

Raising Human Nature

Research has found that people who possess an internalized sense of trust and security express a whole range of what we would call human virtues: altruism, compassion, the willingness to forgive. One study, encouraged by the Dalai Lama, reveals that Buddhist monks' mindfulness and meditation practice changes brain circuitry to enhance compassionate response to suffering; the scientist behind that research says the message he has taken away is that virtues can actually be considered as "the product of trainable mental skills."[7]

Psychologist Michael McCullough suggest that we all have the neural equipment for both revenge and forgiveness, and that which we choose to use is largely dependent

upon our life histories. "By the time I'm an adult," he says, "my history of being betrayed, violated, having my trust broken—or their opposites—pushes me toward a strategy *tuned to the circumstances of my development*."[8]

I italicized that last line because in the same week I'm writing this, a huge media hullaballoo is unfurling over Amy Chua's new book about so-called "tiger mothering"—stereotyped by her as Chinese—which details a severely authoritarian parenting model featuring shame, judgment, and withering performance demands. She suggests that as a guiding principle, Chinese parents (as contrasted with American) "assume strength, not fragility."[9] While *Parenting for Peace* does not fit the simplistic stereotype of the American parenting model Chua maligns (which includes permissiveness, indulgence, and oversaturation with "self-esteem building" praise—all of which I also decry), it is at fundamental odds with Chua's central principle. I would suggest that instead of *assuming* strength rather than fragility, our role is to *allow for the development of* strength and the diminishment of fragility. In that difference may very well lie the future of our species.

I also want to point out that it is possible to be intellectually or artistically accomplished yet virtually devoid of the kinds of social intelligence that characterizes the peacemaker. Two examples: Seung-Hui Cho, the perpetrator of the Virginia Tech massacre (the deadliest peacetime shooting incident by a single gunman in U.S. history, on or off a school campus), was noted for his excellence in English and math, and held up by teachers as an example for other students; and Amy Bishop, the "brilliant" biologist who killed three (and wounded three other) fellow University of Alabama professors who had voted against her tenure. When she called her husband from jail, Bishop asked if their children had done their homework. It was soon uncovered that she had shot and killed her 18-year-old brother in 1986 (deemed accidental in a ruling police were "never comfortable with") and was the prime suspect in a 1993 pipe bombing attack on a Harvard professor from whom Bishop was anticipating a poor evaluation.

In their exquisite book *A General Theory of Love*, Thomas Lewis and his fellow child psychiatrist co-authors warn, "In humans, the neocortical capacity for thought can easily obscure other, more occult mental activities. Indeed, the blazing obviousness of cogitation opens the way to a pancognitive fallacy: *I think, therefore everything I am is thinking*. But in the words of a neocortical brain as mighty as Einstein's: 'We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead; it can only serve.'"[10] We're well advised to follow Rumi's admonition: "Sell your cleverness and purchase bewilderment."

Raising Humanity

Martin Luther King warned, "Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men." So how to have well-guided men, and women? In their remarkable book *Spontaneous Evolution: Our Positive Future*, Bruce Lipton and Steve Bhaerman note that civilization today more accurately represents inhumanity than humanity, and suggests that the "indifference, intolerance, cruelty, spitefulness" and other inhumane traits so prevalent in today's world are largely the result of developmental programming—i.e., the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors with which we are raised as children and unquestioningly carry into our adulthood. They write,

> From an evolutionary standpoint, we can no longer point to the best among us as evidence of our fitness. As we find our civilization precariously perched on the

> Endangered Species List, our biological imperative is unconsciously driving us to adopt humane traits so that humans may fully evolve into the life-sustaining organism defined as humanity.[11]

There is a beautifully perfect storm gathering for us to do just that. Lipton and Bhaerman (along with others, such as philosopher Ervin Laszlo, in his *Chaos Point: 2012 and Beyond*) trace the upside of the breakdown of virtually all of our current systems—such as our economy, our environment, our politics. It is precisely when systems groan under the burden of pressures they cannot withstand, and decay toward collapse, that the opportunity for transformation presents itself. A new worldview can then ascend: breakdown paves the way for breakthrough. Lipton and Bhaerman also see us on the cusp of the next in a historical series of shifts, from our current reductionist worldview—a matter-centric model of reality in which everything can be explained, experienced or fixed by reducing it to its component parts—to a holistic worldview, which values matter and spirit in balance and embraces what the quantum physicists have long known: everything interacts with everything else, and individual consciousness is the agent of change. Laszlo envisions how the ascendant worldview, which he terms *holos*, will open humanity to higher planetary values and priorities—"the expansion of human consideration beyond its own needs into the universe of wisdom and compassion of which it is part."[12] He sees that cultivation of consciousness lies at the heart of this monumental shift.

Even though he wrote almost sixty years before them, Teilhard—who framed evolution as "an ascent towards consciousness"—sounds like a contemporary of the above futurists, envisioning that when we can finally use our sophistication to "harness for God the energies of love," for the second time in our human history, we will discover fire. We're currently at the point where lots of people are rubbing lots of sticks together and some sparks are starting to glow. Lipton and Bhaerman stress that we not wait for change to flow from even the most enlightened people in positions of power—that this change isn't going to come from "individuals who lead from the top. The emphasis in on the awakening of all cellular souls who create a coherent loving field so empowered leaders can be attuned to the healthy central voice of the super-organism that is humanity."[13]

We are the ones we've been waiting for.
We are the fire-makers and the sparks.

With doomsday looming ever larger in our viewfinder, can we truly consider the humble endeavor of raising children as a viable contribution toward planetary transformation? I fail to see how we cannot! Lipton, Bhaerman and Laszlo agree that an urgent metamorphosis requires that a critical mass of people like you and me take an active role in the shift, by changing their fundamental belief systems. Why not also go up-river and keep people from falling into the waters of a faulty worldview in the first place?! And at the same time raise a generation whose neural circuitry is natively wired, rather than retrofitted, for the new world we hope to usher in?

There are a mere handful of notable writers who acknowledge the importance of healthy child development to our viable future, such as child psychiatrist Bruce Perry's mention in *Born for Love: Why Empathy is Essential—and Endangered* that "raising children in a way that fully expresses empathy may be the key to cultural productivity, creativity and security."[14] Likewise, Lewis and his co-authors conclude:

> The thick marble walls of libraries and museums protect our supposed bequest to future ages. How short a vision. Our children are the builders of tomorrow's world—quiet infants, clumsy toddlers, and running, squealing second-graders, whose pliable neurons carry within them all humanity's hope. Their flexible brains have yet to germinate the ideas, the songs, and the societies of tomorrow. They can create the next world or they can annihilate it. In either case, they will do so in our names.[15]

But psychiatrists don't typically wield much muscle in the arena of social development goals and policy-making. I find it astonishing that amidst the many current books by acclaimed futurists who engage brilliant levels of imaginative thinking toward strategic, intentional planning for a more sustainable future for humanity, *nowhere does anyone mention children or parenting!* Despite what seems like a most obvious strategy for reforming the future—introducing a fundamentally reformed style of future citizen—the so-called visionaries seem to suffer a gaping blind spot—a sobering reflection of our powerful, collective forgetting of childhood and its pivotal role in our shared fate. This forgetting is so strong that these visionaries even invoke powerful images related to life's beginnings seemingly without noticing they've overlooked a most significant dimension of change potential. In Laszlo's book alone, not only is there a chapter entitled "The Birthing of a New World," but in the foreword Barbara Marx Hubbard invokes a delivery room metaphor in which our new, sustainable world is coming down the birth canal but it is not clear whether the midwife (us) will be able to ensure a safe birth.

One exception to this deafening silence is Raffi Cavoukian's *Child Honoring: How to Turn This World Around*, an exceptional collection of chapters by renowned experts in many fields, addressing the novel concept of orienting ourselves around a worldview that meets the needs of its children—"the untapped power of our species." Cavoukian, who has transformed from a beloved children's troubadour into a "global troubadour and advocate not only for children but also for a viable future we all might share," conceived Child Honoring as "a global credo for maximizing joy and reducing suffering by respecting the goodness of every human being at the beginning of life, with benefits rippling in all directions." He emphasizes that "effective strategic planning must embrace—as a priority—the universal needs of the very young. Their wellbeing will comprise the true test of all our efforts."[16]

But do our efforts come too late? Can we parent for peace with any sense of tranquility that it is enough, soon enough? Despite the urgency of the crises we face, Teilhard counseled that we are wise to maintain perspective and sidestep discouragement:

> After all half a million years, perhaps even a million, were required for life to pass from the pre-hominids to modern man. Should we now start wringing our hands because, less than two centuries after glimpsing a higher state, modern man is still at loggerheads with himself? …To have understood the immensity around us, behind us, and in front of us is already a first step. …Let us keep calm and take heart.[17]

If you have chosen the path of parenting for peace, most likely feeling like a salmon swimming upstream against the tide of the status quo, you may encounter countless moments of doubt. There will be times when it will be easy to lose sight of the fact that you are contributing powerful leverage towards the worldview shift on which will turn planetary transformation. On those days, find encouragement in the words of Neil Postman, who wrote so eloquently about what he saw as the inexorable erosion of childhood and what parents might do to resist this devolution—such as controlling the

flow and influence of media in the lives of their children. He called for "conceiving of parenting as an act of rebellion against American culture," and admitted that it requires "a level of attention that most parents are not prepared to give to child-rearing."

> Nonetheless, there are parents who are committed to doing all of these things, who are in effect defying the directives of their culture. Such parents are not only helping their children to *have* a childhood but are, at the same time, creating a sort of intellectual elite. Certainly in the short run the children who grow up in such homes will, as adults, be much favored by business, the professions, and the media themselves. What can we say of the long run? Only this: Those parents who resist the spirit of the age will contribute to what might be called the Monastery Effect, for they will help to keep alive a humane tradition. It is not conceivable that our culture will forget that it needs children. But it is halfway toward forgetting that children need childhood. Those who insist on remembering shall perform a noble service.[18]

Parenting for peace has its own paradoxical wave-particle nature: it is something lived for the richness it brings in each moment—the human connection, the joy, the growth—and also a profoundly important investment in the wellbeing of our global family. It is the ultimate Now and Later proposition.

Farewell and Fair Winds

And now it is later. Fourteen came and went… sixteen… eighteen. Joy flowed, along with some tears. The milestones of driving and graduation passed. Your baby bird grew wings and flew away. Now the world is his nest, and his canvas. Where did the years go, you wonder. Those molasses days of her infancy and toddlerhood, days that stretched on and on and felt like they'd never end, when did they become the steady march of childhood and then overnight the unstoppable blur of her teens? What in the beginning felt like an infinite reach of time stretching out before you—your child's childhood—today feels like a handful of quicksilver that shimmered for a moment and then was gone.

Unless you're reading this after your child is grown, you won't believe me. You'll think I'm overly sentimental, or a terrible exaggerator, like those annoying people who, when they see you with your baby or toddler, warn you *It goes so fast.* Really? Goes so fast? Do you know how long I waited while he sat on the potty chair this morning and did nothing?? And then he went in his pants five minutes later! Do you know how long I waited for her to unlock her door after storming in there because I insisted she finish her sophomore project before she could drive to the mall? Part of the miracle and the mystery is this wave/particle aspect of life: both are true, depending on where you stand. The parenting journey is at once interminably long and achingly brief.

I should qualify that: the *residential* portion of the parenting journey can feel like a marathon in the moment and a sprint in retrospect. The silver lining of the so-called empty nest is that you never stop being a parent and your child never stops needing you. Your grown children indeed need you to be solidly there for them in new ways, so the seeds you've sown and tended all these many years can unfurl into vibrant maturity. Life is now their teacher, but you are still needed as an unwavering source of love, counsel, friendship, and enthusiastic support as they experiment with myriad dimensions of being in the world.

This is when you as a parent for peace are graced to witness your child's emergence as a fully flourishing global citizen with emotional, intellectual and social intelligence and a reverence for both humanity and nature—a peacemaker, poised to make a positive difference in a challenged world.

Awe is exceeded only by gratitude in the soul of a parent who knows that this is because he or she answered Life's invitation to learn, stretch and grow as their child's parent. Because you answered that call with a resounding yes, there are no regrets and no what-ifs.

And there is no peace like that peace.

Notes

Introduction

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