

The mind of a child is pure Nothingness. While our genetic inheritance determines the sensitivities of an individual, that is, the degree of receptiveness and reaction to the internal and external environments, what we apprehend in the consciousness a young infant is a pure being-there. The young infant is all pre-reflective consciousness: there is awareness but no thinking, and therefore there is no Self. It is our great moral imperative *to do our best* to endow our child with a wholesome Self. To the degree we succeed and fail at this will be reflected in our own Self-respect: our integrity, peace of mind, and our happiness.

Although the greatest gift we can bestow our child—as you might guess by now—is not from the world, nevertheless, they do need the world in the right measure to develop a healthy mind. To this extent a good parent needs to provide for a child's physical needs, with the correct amount and quality of food (i.e., a balanced diet) and the proper amount exercise. Most important, child needs to feel protected, in a safe environment at home and at school. These obligations can be met by parent(s) at almost any economic level.

Because human consciousness is devoid natural inhibitions, since it is a total freedom, it is crucial that we provide a child with the right measure of discipline to foster self-control. By establishing consistent rules and boundaries, and by applying suitable doses of gratification and punishment, we help the child develop and internalize restraints to his/her behavior, which is indispensable for a balanced, healthy sense of Self. That is, by saying “no” to a child, the child learns to say a “no” to him/her-self: internalizes inhibition. A child that grows without limits, without respect for rules nor personal boundaries, does not know who he or she is: The Self becomes an ambiguous and distorted entity, causing undue suffering to the child and others. To this extent, the great negligence of our times is not allotting for enough intimate attention and discipline for our children: too much T.V., too much electronic media, and too little personal interaction.

It is by way of personal interaction with a parent that an infant can identify a separate existence from the world, to determine a being-there, to engender a point of view on the World. Personal interaction between child and parents is then critical in the first two years of life for the child to develop a healthy, congruent, assertive Self. Prompt attention to the cries of the young infant reinforces self-existence and mitigates stress. In bestowing Self-awareness, eye contact is essential: the presence of the eyes, the Look, communicate a self-objectiveness to the infant, a being something—being a Me. But, no less important is talking. Personal words have a directness, a force of identification and reassurance, which is essential for successful bonding with the child and promoting self-esteem. The touching the body communicates affection, intimacy, and protection. The infant left to cry, not touched, not spoken to, not Looked with, develops an unstable, confused, frustrated Self; a Self always hungry for reassurance, for recognition, and intimacy.

By the time we become parents most of us have forgotten what it was like to be a child, how it felt to discover the world, and how we idolized our parents as our own personal heroes—as superhuman beings. As we grow older, the flaws of those who care for us became increasingly apparent: the lax integrity, the imperfect honesty, the weakness of character, and for some, the outright cruelty. With time, as we become the heirs of their salt, the disenchantment and disappointments with our parents become the justification for our own shortcomings.

We are the prime and the most important teacher of our children. Children learn by observing their parents; they walk, talk, and gesture like their parents; they absorb our values even if they seem to rebel against them; they integrate our way of thinking and our emotional sensitivity. They are the heirs of our salt and water.

With our children, we have the opportunity to do better, to change the future, to dilute the salt. With careful mindfulness of our thoughts, our emotions, our actions,

and reactions, we gain a healing perspective; and in healing our own minds, we heal the ones who love us, who look up to us, and who depend on us for their wellbeing. We can be mindful of our motivations and fears; of the memories and emotions which are triggered by situations or by their misbehavior; of our own reactions and the appropriateness of our punishments. We should be keenly aware of the importance we give them as individuals, the respect we render them, while maintaining the integrity and respect of the parent-child relationship: love them and respect them, but let them know who is boss. Most of all, we must bestow them intimate personal attention. We need to model for them integrity, self-respect, respect of others, honesty, and sincerity. We must assure them of being cared for and loved. We can be authentic heroes for them!

With human beings, however,  $2+2$  will almost invariably not equal 4. What ultimately becomes of an individual is individual, and therefore, beyond anyone else's resolve or control; as each of us has a personal road to travel and personal choices to make. We can only do our best to help our children become an upright, happy persons. But to do our best to help them, we must be Real with ourselves first. We must make a heroic commitment to do our best by them. We will only be held morally accountable for the negligence of doing the right thing. It is in this that our children gift us with the opportunity to accomplish the ultimate act of true love and personal fulfillment: to give of ourselves selflessly for the sake of others.