

Straw into Gold: Kindergarten Harvest
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*Yet again summer wains into fall,
With pumpkins and apples, and leaves above all -
Leaves lovely painted rust, red and gold:
These memories of beauty will the heart ever hold.*

Recently I journeyed across New York state, my first continental travel experience beyond the confines of relatively narrow valleys bordered by sheltering hills and mountains, or the sea. I witnessed with exhilaration and wonder mile after mile of breeze-stirred wheat, burnished red-gold under a clear blue sky, and pale, green-fading-to-ivory oats interspersed with immense vibrant fields of corn. I had been thinking about kindergarten and this time of the harvest for several weeks, and the image came to mind of Rumpelstiltskin spinning roomfuls of straw into gold. But in this case, the miraculous upward weaving process of drawing golden grains out of the bare and now dying blade was influenced not only by the elemental forces of the earth but also by the power of the sun. And, like the poor miller's daughter, we can move beyond helplessness and ignorance in the face of the elemental forces at work in our food and in our nutrition to conscious active understanding. We too can discover Rumpelstiltskin's name.

We are more than what we eat; indeed, we are what the plants “eat” and what we do with what we eat. Is our task only to stay alive, or do we have the potential to transform our food substances into uniquely human creative activities? One can say that plants are woven out of light; so through our individual soul forces we create light within ourselves through the process of digestion. Herbert Sieweke in chapter 14 of his book *Antroposophische Medizin* wrote, “Just as man maintains a process which creates matter within himself which is stimulated and initiated by the ingestion of food, so too he develops a light creating process within himself which is stimulated and activated through an active reception of the external world of light.” Looking at the grain plant, at the growing stalk, one sees at the base a close overlapping of leaf and stem. The tendency to a round bulb reflecting the influence of the moon is overshadowed by the stalk. This masterpiece of static engineering carries its golden seed head crown upward into the sun using a minimum of matter. The alternate positioning of the leaves indicates the influence of Mercury which emerges alternately from east to west of the sun's path. Preeminently, however, the full heads of ripened grains are children of the sun out of the straw comes the gold.

In ancient Persian times, during which researchers feel grain cultivation developed, the priest-king Zarathustra asked Ahura Mazda, the spiritual being whom he perceived in the sun, what nourished the first man. The answer came, “He ate fire and drank the light”.

Sun-Moon-Mercury: How do planetary influences relate to daily nutrition and the kindergarten child? How does one connect fairy tale images with the fruits of the garden and their transformation from kitchen to the table? If we enliven our imaginative forces through quiet and open observation of growth in the plant we can begin to understand the images of myth and folk tales in a new way. This exploration into the extraordinary complexity and genius of the process of digestion and transmutation of substances can awaken in us an echo of the open sense perceptive faculties we once had as children. We have heard that the young child is an imitative being open to the sense world and reflecting in his whole being that which is seen, heard and felt in the surrounding environment from a soul mirror of pure love. That idea takes on a profound new depth of meaning as we slowly reawaken the childlike joy and reverence within our own beings. It is out of these feeling perceptions that a true sense for nutrition develops which no amount of technical knowledge or cookbooks can explain.

In *The Child's Changing Consciousness and Waldorf Education*, Rudolf Steiner states “..in reality the child chooses to imitate out of an even higher motive than that of love. The child is prompted by what in later life one might call religious or pious devotion This attitude of soul is strongest during the child's earliest years and it continues, gradually declining, up to the change of teeth. We must never underestimate the delicate influences one could also call them imponderable influences - which, to a child's power of perception, emanate from the environment, summoning forth an urge to imitate. We must on no account underestimate this most fundamental and important aspect of the child's early years.” Soul activities and physical activities are related: the young child experiences life in a mood of reverential imitation, and thrives through repetition indeed, knows in repetition, and this continues until the change of teeth when abstract memory is established. In the home or school setting we have numerous ideal opportunities to involve children in a myriad of daily, weekly and seasonal activities regarding meal preparation... for instance setting the table (the same way each time) not only with plates and utensils but also with a small centerpiece from the garden or nature; commencing the meal with a regular verse and a lit candle; clearing up and sweeping accompanied with a song. We can make the mundane into simple, satisfying pleasures performed harmoniously and artistically, and it is this attitude of soul which falls as fertile seed into the ground of the child's soul.

A rhythmical succession of grains, and preparation of regular weekly special foods, such as the baking of bread, making of soup, and grinding and stirring of sweet millet porridge (prefaced by a telling of the Grimm's fairy tale of the same name), also, serves the child well. These are generally part of a Waldorf kindergarten's routine and can be duplicated and/or supplemented at home. Interestingly, these activities tend to involve the three specific grains which are related to those aforementioned forces which so strongly influence the entire grass family: Sun, Moon and Mercury. These grains are rice, wheat and millet.

Rice, as well as being subject to the effects of the sun, has a very strong relationship to the moon, growing in water over which element the moon rules: ebb and flow alternates with the rhythm of the moon. Hence, young rice shoots stand awash in the rising and falling of the water. The protein in rice permeates the entire seed body; it is high in calcium, easily digestible, and strengthens the life forces of the human organism rather than stimulating a wakeful consciousness. “Rice interwoven with light and water, with its loosely bound panicle, is not as strongly connected with the forces of the earth as wheat, rye and barley.” Otilie Zeller in his work *Reis, das Getreide Asiens* comments, “These people (the Asians) have a deep and rich soul life; they work hard at planting and watering rice by hand with great skill both industrious and playful.”

Organically, or if possible, biodynamically grown medium grain rice, delicately flavored with paprika and lightly salted towards the end of cooking, can be served in countless ways and lends itself well to all seasonal vegetables. Try serving it up in small ice cream scoop balls, or substituting it for pasta, a refined product, in vegetable soup. In classic Chinese and other languages of southeast Asia the word for “rice” and “nourishment” is the same.

As rice has a strong connection with the moon, so does wheat with its dependency on light and warmth show its special relationship to the Sun. Indeed today wheat is cultivated worldwide, and its sowing and harvesting follows the path of the Sun through the seasons. Hence in the course of the year it is always wheat harvest time somewhere on the earth. Here we have the archetypal light-filled fruit of the sun, whose effects in man are harmonious and balanced over all the organs. Nowadays many people experience allergies to wheat and, as food for thought, one might wonder if the genetic manipulation and intensive hybridization of the original forms of wheat are causative factors or the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides as residues, refining and processing, or simply deficient nutrients due to impoverished soil. A host of other influences may come into play for the allergy sufferer (an increasing number of whom are children), but these are beyond the scope of this article.

Amongst the three basic forms of wheat stands spelt, which has general availability in health food stores and through food cooperatives in the form of grain, flour, couscous, pasta, baked goods, and cereal flakes (ask for special orders if not on the shelf in your local store). Many persons sensitive to wheat can readily tolerate spelt; indeed many people without allergies prefer its delicious flavor, its digestibility and the fact that spelt plants vigorously resist all hybridization and fertilization by artificial means; it remains an untampered with, naturally grown whole grain. On the practical side one will find that products made with spelt flour -bread or pastries - will have a softer crumb than those made with durum wheat. The benefits of using it justify a little patient experimentation.