

Part of this picture is our relationship and respect for all human beings—especially the person the children see us with most. If we do not speak to, gesture toward, and convey love for the person we are working with, the children can only imitate our discord and the lack of respect we carry. It is essential that we have a positive relationship in order to be worthy of the children. We as teachers often desire that young children will get along with one another—but if we do not convey a positive example the children cannot imitate us.

## ***Holding the Adult in a Meditative Light Deepening Our Work with Parents in the Parent-Child Class***

• Magdalena Toran

We are given through the insights of Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy a deep understanding of the young child. An archetypal image of health for the whole human being is continually guiding our work. This archetypal childhood is surrounded and penetrated by the calming strength of rhythm, physical and soul warmth, healthy nutrition, purposeful work, ample time in nature, healthy sleep habits, physical movement and above all love. We know too that the soul life of the mother and father deeply affect this incarnating child. It can be said that the child lives within the soul life of the adults surrounding her, especially the mother.

*The mother's soul can be pictured as forming a protective cloak around the baby – a Madonna's cloak, raying out into the environment and affecting the whole atmosphere surrounding the child. It enfolds him in warmth and deeply affects him* (Salter 91-92).

This true image of the young child lives within us, but the realities of modern life and our own

## **References**

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development as human beings can leave us many obstacles and challenges. These challenges can prevent our ability as parents to offer the ideal to our children.

In the Parent-Child work the teacher is in the unique position of having the parents and their children in the classroom. The parent then becomes, in a sense, the student. The guiding inspiration for this work of meditation on the adult came from recognizing that if I wanted to best serve the children, I needed to find a way to support the parents in their own unfolding. Some parents who enter the classroom are eager and open to receiving all that can be shared about the needs of their children. They feel safe and confident. Usually the children of these parents also feel safe and confident. The parents who feel anxious, stressed and defensive are the ones who is often not approachable in a verbal or direct way. It is those parents' children who need the most support.

*During the early months, and in fact for the first three years, the young child, living within the cloak, experiences himself as part of the*

*Mother, sharing fully her soul life. If Mother's soul life is calm and joyous, so will the baby within the Madonna's cloak be similarly affected. If Mother is nervous and anxious, this will also be expressed in the cloak* (Salter 91-92).

There are many ways for human beings to express warmth towards each other. We have all experienced the right word at the right moment (or silence when we needed it), the feeling of a hand on our shoulder, a phone call, someone's intentionality as they offer us a needed insight, hot soup on a cold day. Each person finds her own way of bringing warmth to another, and as the sun calls forth the flowers from the cold ground in springtime so we, too, open when someone turns warmly towards us. There is a call in me to discover how I might deepen that expression of warmth in my work that those in my care might open ever so slightly, that we might all be more deeply in loving service to our children. Prayer and meditation are ways in which a teacher can cultivate warmth between herself and a parent in service of a child. To approach another human being in this way can create a compassionate and informed understanding of the other, a bridge between the teacher and the parent.

I will share my insights and a method for approaching parents in this way as well as my experiences from engaging in this practice.

Before going into the methods of meditation and my experiences in practicing them there are some important preparatory considerations that I would like to develop. These are: the desire never to compromise the personal freedom of another; assessing one's motives; clarity of preparation; and no expectation of a response.

One overwhelming desire I had in the activity of meditation for adults in my care was not to compromise their personal freedom. I do not know what the person truly needs and it would be a grave mistake if I thought I knew. The only thing I could be sure of was that there was a suffering in the adult, which manifested itself as insecurity, fear, anxiety, over-confidence, coolness, and/or depression. The suffering of another is obvious to us and we know it is not the truest possibility of human life. But pain and suffering have their

place in our development and it is not for us to wish them away. It is also not appropriate for me to pray for harmony between the parent and the child because there is again the possibility that they have something important to work out together. We cannot with our small minds know what is best for another person, which is why we have arrived at the place of prayer or meditation. (We should probably arrive there more often.) We can only claim the truth, which is that we do not know what to do for the other. There is simply a desire in us to be of service to them and to their unfolding. We do not know what form that will take. Claire Blatchford offers us this wisdom in her book *Becoming*:

*You're pushing too hard in your prayer life for what you want to see in others.  
The spiritual world is so vast,  
So immense in its possibilities,  
Do not block the way with your preferences.  
Pray only for my [Christ's] light on and in others.  
Leave the rest, the details, to me and to the angels.  
Remember it is the intention that matters, that is all.  
Even for yourself, leave the imaginings to me.  
Let this teach you that true love brings freedom;  
It is free of personal expectations,  
it rejoices in the other,  
that is all* (105).

If we approach our meditation in this way we create an opening in ourselves where something higher can work.

A further development of this idea is the assessing of one's motives in the activity of meditating on another. Our motives must be truly selfless, originating from a loving desire to assist another in order that his highest and best self may emerge. Henning Köhler states, "We are concerned here with a totally selfless method, dedicated to serving mankind – This must be done consciously, with clarity, avoiding any trace of egotism..." (Köhler, 4) We can access in ourselves, using our cognitive forces as well as our heart sense, whether we are selfishly or selflessly

motivated. For example I was searching for further material for my research project for my training at Sophia's Hearth Family Center and chose someone in my class whom I found to be irritating and difficult. I went home that night and methodically and coolly held her in my thoughts. There was no warmth in me for this parent and I did not succeed in cultivating any. My motives were selfish. I needed material for my research project so I was going to pray for her! If I had held her in my heart out of genuine interest and a desire to be of service to her and her child then I would have been acting selflessly and perhaps experienced a different outcome. Köhler describes this by stating: "Finding answers by this method has to be based upon genuine interest and involvement; we must be really stirred by a desire to understand the child's [or adult's] being." (Köhler, 4)

Koehler goes on to say: "We will, as a rule, succeed in getting what sleep has to offer only if we have done a thorough job of preparation." It is my feeling that preparation encompasses many different aspects and will vary for each person. We must uncover for ourselves what our preparation entails. First there is the preparation of one's self. This may mean making more time in the evening than usual to become inwardly quiet. It is difficult to think clearly on another when one's own personal thoughts are filling the mind. It also helps to think about the person for a number of days in a row before the actual activity of meditation, just calling them to mind and reflecting on why you might be bringing her to your consciousness in a special way.

It is also important to be able to create a clear mental picture of her, her physical appearance and her soul gesture. Often the physical body is a strong expression of the soul gesture of the person. For example: does she walk heavily with slumped shoulders? Is the handshake limp and cool? Does she back away when being spoken to? All of these can be quietly noted, free from any sympathetic judgment. This is a way of coming into deeper relationship with the person, of deepening one's involvement with the other.

We can easily experience something done with preparedness and care versus something done absentmindedly and in haste. As with anything else in life we will have greater success by engaging

in a caring, loving, thoughtful way. After preparing in this way one can approach the meditation with lightness, openness, and trust. There is a deep joy that comes from working in this way and as a practice develops a greater perception can occur of the helping spiritual beings that surround us. To think that the angels hear us does inspire joy and dedication!

Expectation of an outcome or response to a prayer can act like a dam upon the flow of assistance. One can think to herself "There, I've done everything right. I imagine this person with a clear mind and a loving attention and prayed my little prayer. When I wake in the morning I am going to love them all the better and know just what to do!" There is egotism in deservedness and expectation. So we must free ourselves from an expected outcome and only be grateful if one can perceive the activity of the angels in oneself or in the other. Again, the way in which help is received is as varied as the individual. Perhaps the assistance will manifest itself as something a week from now, or only after ten years. Perhaps it will be healing between the person in the prayer and someone you've never met. The possibilities for healing are endless. If you have approached the prayer with intentionality, integrity, and love, you can be grateful for that opportunity alone. And gratitude is important. If one does perceive a change in one's own being or in the other than it is extremely important to be grateful for that.

### **Description of Meditation**

To arrive at a meditation for this I used as a model that which many early childhood teachers and class teachers use to meditate on their children. That is, simply put, to picture the child in one's mind before going to sleep. This practice is used widely and many authors have written comprehensively on the subject (for example Henning Köhler, Michaela Glöckler, Helmut von Kügelgen).

The teacher may find it helpful to prepare herself by coming into a more meditative mind. This can be done by saying quietly within oneself what is intended for the next few minutes, taking a series of deep breaths, and quieting the thoughts going through the mind. Then the teacher can call up in herself an image of the person. It is amazing

how quickly the image of the other comes, as if it has been waiting all the time to be seen by us. We hold the image of the person in our heart and perceive him as clearly as possible. Often an image comes of time we have spent with him, how he has interacted with their child or with another parent. We can see him as he is walking, as he has shaken our hand, or as he is seated at the table. Whatever image comes we hold it lovingly in our heart.

The image of the other is held with the recognition that out of my limited self I do not know how best to serve this person in my care but that I am open to being in service to the highest in them. In doing this, the teacher creates in herself a vessel into which wisdom may flow. It is this opening that allows for assistance to be given. The teacher can ask for assistance at any time during this process from her angel or the Christ. The full image of the other is then offered up to the spiritual world with a grateful heart. Each one of us has a different experience or feeling of what it is that is supporting human beings in their development. This may be felt or experienced as warmth or a light, as the arms of the angels, as the Christ Being or the Christ Light. One colleague described it as "the ever unfolding rose of love." Whatever that is for each of us it has love at its source and it is into this love that we gently place the other. One can also give thanks at this time for the Love that one is experiencing and the help that is being offered. After this it may be important to come back into a more "everyday" mind, a few deep breaths and opening the eyes will gently bring the teacher out of the meditative experience. The teacher then goes into rest and into sleep.

It would be extremely presumptuous of me to say that I understand what happens to the human being during sleep and so I must lean into my sense of the activity that occurs there and what can be taken from the insights of Anthroposophy, which describe how in sleep we turn away from the world of the senses and toward the spiritual world. Something can happen in this time between our waking days where insights can be revealed to us. With curiosity we can explore what that means for each of us and for our children. We place this meditation at the end of the day and before going to sleep so that the angels and the spiritual world might assist us in our work.

### **Experiences resulting from engaging with my research topic**

Each time I entered into the activity of meditation on an adult in my care I had valuable experiences, which strengthened my commitment to working in this way. The most noticeable experiences occurred with parents for whom I had followed all the indications offered in this paper. If ever I tried to "practice" meditating on someone with a desire to accumulate material for my research I felt an extreme emptiness both in the meditation and upon awakening. This affirmed for me that the greatest motive has to be a genuine interest in the well-being of the parent and her child. All of this work was intended to create an opening in the adult that might allow for deeper communication and assistance for the child we hold between us. What I found when I entered into the meditation in the most genuine way was that movement would happen that I could not have created out of myself. I will share an example of this. (Names have been changed to respect the privacy of the people involved.)

Sally Sullivan came to my class eager to participate and perceiving that Waldorf education was something she wanted for herself and for her daughter. She describes her daughter Annie as a "free spirit" and very bright. This is true of Annie; she is beaming with intelligence and strength. I perceived immediately that she "ruled the roost" and that her mother was almost frightened of the strength she saw in her daughter. Sally felt safe with me and we had many conversations about her daughter and how she might meet her. Annie responded well to me and to being in the class. But it was hard for Sally because Annie's behavior could at times cause embarrassment in her mother. Sally would back away from Annie energetically and physically when she started acting out for fear that she would have a tantrum from which Sally could not retrieve her. After the first few weeks of class Sally and Annie's attendance became sporadic, as Annie was often sick. One night I had a long conversation on the phone with Sally and she was saying that she thought it might be better for her and Annie not to come to class any more because it seemed so hard for Annie to be there. I trusted my perception that it was not hard for Annie

to be in the class but hard for her mother. I also felt strongly that Annie was meant to be in my class and that I might be able to help her mother perceive her daughter more clearly, and have a more enjoyable experience of parenting her. In that phone conversation Sally revealed more of what Annie's schedule was like. When I hung up the phone I was truly angry with Sally. I was angry with her for making choices for Annie that I perceived were making it very difficult for Annie to feel safe and be healthy in her body. I also was angry that she might take her out of the class when I felt that being there could help Annie and her mother.

When I took Sally into my sleep that night I had a strong image of her and my interest was genuine and very deep. I really wanted to help Annie and I felt a great love for her. I awoke in the morning with a profoundly new perception of Sally. I realized how before I was really filled with criticism and judgment of her for how she was with her daughter. I felt that I was really able to perceive what it was to think of her in that way. Instead I was filled with a deep love for her and for her path in life. There was in me a new space for Sally where she could come as she was and I would receive her. This opening in me really felt to be a gift. It was not something I could have done with my cognitive mind. I could have recognized I was judgmental and that I needed to change my perceptions of her but I could not decide to see her differently. Henning Köhler speaks of this: "What can be achieved in this way is naturally much richer, more and more deeply grounded, than any head knowledge one might try convulsively to translate into action, action taken mostly in vain. You experience how an insight, one that you are neither able nor willing to put into immediate practice but rather continue to 'meditate' on as a questioning carried into sleep, works formatively, reshaping the structure of your habits. And you experience, too, how you are enabled to read the 'answer' in your own changing conduct. It is an answer you could not have found by any amount of merely theoretical searching" (Köhler, 3-4).

After that experience Annie did not miss another class due to illness. She came often and grew more and more calm, as did her

mother. Many other doors also opened. Annie's father, who had been reluctant to have Annie participate in the program, arrived at class one day unexpectedly. He continued to come often after that and I could tell that he was being nurtured by what he experienced there. Sally soon reported to me that Thomas was now willing to support Annie's application process for the Nursery at school. Last week I met them as they were coming in for their parent interview, eager to have Annie in the school.

This was the most profound experience out of all the meditations I practiced but it was also the one where my desire to be of assistance to the child was the strongest. My sense is that this loving desire is stronger than even the most thoroughly prepared meditation. As Köhler described in the above quotation, it may be and I imagine often is, our own conduct that needs changing in order to be of deeper service to another. In this instance an opening was created in me where Sally could feel truly safe. From that safety she could relax more and everything flowed more smoothly. I also believe the spiritual world could work more easily with us as there was less resistance between us.

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