

# *Movement—A Path Toward Freedom*

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We begin with a vast question. What is the intention of the soul coming into a human life, of incarnating? Rudolf Steiner describes that the soul in the spiritual world reaches a point where it can no longer develop. The individuality must return to human experience in order to keep evolving, to purify, refine, and distill the essence of his being and give this expression through physical, earthly life. Rudolf Steiner states in *Study of Man (The Foundations of Human Experience)*:

*...Man evolves through a long period between death and a new birth and that then, within this evolution, he reaches a point where he dies, as it were, for the spiritual world—where conditions of his life in the spiritual world oblige him to pass over into another form of existence. He receives this other form of existence in that he lets himself be clothed with the physical and etheric body. What he has to receive by being clothed with the physical and etheric body he could not receive if he were simply to go on evolving in a straight line in the spiritual world (p. 17).*

Now when this descent is made, how does the individuality actually “take up residence” in this new physical body and make the body a “home”? Our language clues us that we “move in.” It is literally through movement that the child begins to take possession of the body and make it a worthy instrument to express the uniqueness and intentions of his being.

Movement is the signature of life. Rudolf Steiner describes that the individuality, between death and rebirth, journeys out to the farthest reaches of the cosmos to digest and distill experiences from the past. When this is complete, he resolves to incarnate and moves back through the zodiac and planetary spheres to collect his capacities and intentions for its next adventure on earth.

Physical conception occurs through movement as the mother’s egg makes its passage from the ovary and is met by the sperm swimming towards it. Fertilization unlocks a process of astonishing growth. At pregnancy’s end, the baby descends through the birth canal to emerge into the earthly world after it has practiced

moving, twisting, and kicking in the womb. The newborn explores all kinds of movement. Initially erratic and uncontrolled, these are first brought into order by infantile reflexes that let the body experience its first predictable, guided physical responses to gravity and body position. The baby continues to move, explore and strengthen so that by age three she has achieved uprightiness, taken first steps, spoken first words, and begun to show awakening thinking, all through gifts bestowed upon the child by the spiritual hierarchies.

These developments are meant to unfold in a predictable, healthy manner. But as educators we see more and more children for whom this development is compromised. Children are less coordinated, secure, and confident in their bodies. Increasing numbers are described as having sensory processing difficulties where integration of the sensory systems is disordered. It is through movement that these systems are strengthened and matured. The rich movement possibilities that have been the hallmark of healthy childhood now lie in jeopardy.

We can suggest many reasons why this might be so—over-arching fearfulness about injury so children are overly protected, passive life style, technology and conveniences replacing the need to be purposefully active, to name a few. Further detractors from healthy development include over-stimulation of the senses, hurriedness that allows no time to digest and consolidate experience, and truthful sensory experiences being replaced by “virtual” substitutes on screens.

Audrey McAllen, the late originator of the Extra Lesson therapeutic support work within our Waldorf schools, summed up the situation in a potent way. Children who come into life with a handicapping condition, such as Down’s Syndrome, are carrying personal karma. Yet the children we see with sensory integration issues and subtle impediments and learning challenges she described as “victims of world karma.” Through the ways that human beings have changed the world in a race to master and exploit the earth and the heavens surrounding it, the world has become a less friendly and supportive place for children’s healthy

development; and these children are innocent victims. As we look at these “signs of the times,” it is important to neither despair nor adopt a “Don’t worry, be happy” attitude. We need objective appreciation of what is confronting the children and ourselves to be clear and courageous in meeting these challenges.

In the three previous WECAN February conferences, Dr. Gerald Karnow asked us to make *Study of Man* our pedagogical foundation. How do thoughts from these lectures guide us to help the young child to healthy incarnation? Rudolf Steiner first states that this is a spiritual as well as a physical task.

*We will be conscious that physical existence here is a continuation of the spiritual, and that we, through education, have to carry on what has hitherto been done by higher beings without our participation. This alone will give the right mood and feeling to our whole system of teaching and education, if we fill ourselves with the consciousness: here, in this human being, you, with your action, have to achieve a continuation of what higher beings have done before his birth (Study of Man, p. 17).*

Further on in Lecture One, Rudolf Steiner states that education has the task of helping the child learn to breathe rightly. Each breath presses the cerebro-spinal fluid up into the brain and then releases it to flow back down into the body, transplanting the rhythm of breathing to the brain.

*Breathing is the most important mediator between the outer physical world and the human being who is entering it. . . The most important measures in education will consist in paying attention to all that rightly organizes the breathing process into the nerve-sense process. In the higher sense the child has to learn to take up into his spirit what is bestowed on him in that he is born to breathe. . . By harmonizing the breathing with the nerve-sense process we draw all that is soul and spirit into the physical life of the child. . . The child cannot breathe in the right inner way, and education will have to consist in teaching the child to breathe rightly (Study of Man, p. 20-21).*

In physical breathing there is in-breath / out-breath, a movement between contraction and expansion. We utilize this rhythmic flow to form the kindergarten day as in-breath of focused activity alternates with out-breath to more relaxed consciousness. Thus we form the breathing “movement” of activities within our day. Rudolf Steiner describes this same polarity in the tenth lecture of *Education for Special Needs* as **point**

and **periphery**. Looking back to the task of incarnation, we could say that the child is striving to move from the cosmic “periphery” to develop in earthly life the concentrated “point” of his individuality. Each human being is striving to find and consolidate the stable center point of his being-hood from which he can move to fulfill his destiny in the world. Alternation back and forth between these polarities brings us back to movement as a form of breathing. Literally through physical movement, the child comes to experience the stable center point from which she can explore the world and find her secure place within it.

Earlier in this article the gifts of infantile reflexes as a first movement “educator” were described. These paved the way for the cosmically bestowed capacities to achieve uprightness/walking, speaking, and thinking. In the eighth lecture of *Study of Man*, Rudolf Steiner presents the Twelve Senses, gifts the zodiac bestows to each human being as avenues to experience the physical and social world. In simple listing, these are the senses of touch, life, self-movement, balance, smell, taste, sight, warmth, hearing, word or speech, thought, and ability to sense the ego-being of another. Our educational goal is to offer nourishing sensory experience in all twelve. But as early childhood educators, our focus is to help young children develop health and strength in the first four, known as the foundational or will senses. Two that we work with daily in circle activities are **self-movement** and **balance**. Cooperating with the other senses, these two enable the child to find a center point, expand to the periphery of the world, and then contract back into a stable center again. These two senses have the most to do with physical movement as well. In grasping the archetypal gestures and the physical movements associated with these, we have a guiding image of how we can help the child learn to breathe rightly both literally and figuratively.

Mainstream terminology calls balance the **vestibular** sense. Steiner describes it as an inward sense through which we “relate ourselves to right and left, to forward and backward [and] hold ourselves in balance so we do not fall over” (*Study of Man*, p. 119). Its sensory organs are the three semi-circular canals of the inner ear along with a chamber, called the vestibule, just below where the canals meet. These let us know where our body is relative to earth’s gravity. Every movement of the head causes fluid within this system to move and stimulate nerve cells that inform us of our position in the three planes of space. When we are standing in equilibrium in these three spatial planes, we are in the upright posture of the human being, holding ourselves in the concen-

trated point. The pathway to a healthy and reliable vestibular sense lies in doing all kinds of movements that stimulate or challenge our balance. Paradoxically, we have to move to educate the balance system so it can know what upright stillness—being in the point—is. Whenever we circle in a ring, twirl, step up and down, rock, sway, roll, somersault, walk a beam, balance on a tippy river stone, teeter-totter, swing, or climb, we are stimulating and strengthening the vestibular system. By imitating the peripheral, spinning movements of the cosmos and the earth, we guide our balance to be able to find the center point and stability in uprightness. Attaining uprightness in all spheres of life is really the human goal.

Self-movement Steiner describes as the sense which lets us know “whether we are at rest or in movement, whether our muscles are flexed or not” (*Study of Man*, p. 119). Self-movement lets us experience the relation of body parts to each other and gives us a map of body geography. In mainstream terminology this is known as **proprioception**. Its perceptive organs are sensors in all joints that register the position of each body part. Whenever we allow gravity to pull us to the “point,” we are working as well with the proprioceptive system. As we jump and land, carry heavy objects, donkey kick or wheel-barrow with hands on the floor, hang from a bar, jump rope, or feel pressure in any joint, we experience the proprioceptive sensory system. These movements pull us to a point of concentration, weight, and stable physical control of the body, which is also a goal in gaining intentional control of the physical body.

Children in our classrooms reveal to us daily their need to strengthen and mature the vestibular and proprioceptive systems by all the movements and antics they seek. They become squirmy and restless, tipping chairs, wiggling, sometimes becoming virtual dervishes as they seek enough vestibular stimulation to help them know through balance where they are in space. When they lose experience of their body parts through inefficient, under-developed proprioception, they clump and bump, hug, dog pile, and wrestle as means for gaining reassurance of where their limbs and body parts actually are.

These two senses are intimate partners which constantly inform each other of any need to adjust position and posture to breathe rightly between point of self and periphery of world. It is critical to remember that these two work together. Stimulating only the vestibular can spin us too far out into the periphery. Emphasizing the proprioceptive to an extreme binds us to gravity and makes us heavy and stone-like. But we

cannot stay frozen there; we must breathe out into the periphery to keep our sense of orientation. As we work with these two as partners in movement imaginations, we are educating movement and sensory breathing, as *Study of Man* mandates as one educational task.

This movement education, however, touches on something far more vast than we could usually imagine. Rudolf Steiner indicates that there are relationships among the senses. He states that these essential will senses we are considering are the foundation from which the four highest senses of hearing, word, thought, and ego develop. These Steiner also denotes as the spiritual or social senses. How these develop either extends or limits our capacities in social life. The health of the foundational senses directly influences how well the upper senses will develop. If the lower ones are weak, the upper ones are endangered. The health of the highest senses depends upon how the child grows health in the lower senses in the early years.

Some years ago Arthur Zajonc, physics professor at Amherst and former General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in North America, described building the medieval cathedrals as the social deed of that time. Generations of unnamed, dedicated workers followed the direction of master builders to erect these structures. Group commitment to build to the glory of God united people in this effort. Dr. Zajonc then questioned what the “cathedral” of our time might be. He suggested that it is the healthy social life.

If social life is the cathedral, then the senses we strengthen each day in our movement work are the foundation on which it stands. If we can carry these images of breathing—expansion/contraction, point/periphery, proprioceptive/vestibular with us—we realize the magnitude of what our simple movement work with the children may mean. Giving health and strength to the foundational senses through movement also builds the capacities of the highest senses for healthy social life for each individual. Movement education and the qualities it embraces—imagination, flexibility, truthful archetypal movements, and joy—also lays the basis for our social life. This matters not only for the welfare of each individual but also for the future of humanity.

*In breathing, grace may two-fold be.  
We breathe air in, we set it free.  
The in-breath binds, the out unwinds  
And thus, with marvels, life entwines.  
Then thanks to God when we are pressed  
And thank Him when he gives us rest.*

—Goethe