

# The Two Worlds of the Child

— Daniel Udo de Haes

*The following is an excerpt from the book *The Creative Word: The Young Child's Experience of Language and Stories*. Formerly available as *The Young Child from Floris Books*, it has recently been revised and republished by WECAN. In this chapter, Daniel Udo de Haes touches on the child's experience of the spiritual archetypes that Susan Weber refers to in her article.*

Clearly, it will be meaningful to immerse ourselves in young children's experiences of their surroundings only if we try to awaken a vivid inner awareness that we, too, once bore within us the foundations of our soul-life from the spirit-land from whence we came.

In the child's environment, we discover two distinct realms. The first is the natural world, which in the home is present through pets, houseplants, or the elements of earth, water, and so on; the second is the human realm, full of man-made things, which forms quite a considerable part of the world that surrounds us.

It is gratifying that many parents feel how important it is for children to be allowed to find an intimate relationship with the things around them. As far as nature is concerned, consider, for instance, the substance with which children have such a special connection—water.

The ability of the child to live in two worlds, which we described in the last chapter, has a close affinity to the life and nature of an amphibian, which both lives in water, its world of origin, and on dry land. This amphibious aspect of soul-life appears—more clearly in the toddler than in the child of kindergarten age—in all that the little one observes and experiences; but water is particularly important. What the little child can experience both in and with water is nearly limitless, and it is wholesome for children to play freely with water. With this attitude, we see the harm of scolding such as “Look now, what a mess you have made!”—which nullifies the joy and also the deeper effect of the play and makes children feel that they have done something “bad.” Many parents now even consider such games as pottering about in the garden with water or with the mud of a rain-puddle to be a blessing for these little ones. Others will now and then give children a bowl of water so that even indoors they can play with this wet element to their heart's content.

It can be a joy to see children absorbed in his play, and as its therapeutic value for their development comes to be more appreciated, it will be seen as an essential and matter-of-course part of the care and education of children.

As a second example, we may take the wonderful substance that combines the fluid properties of water and the hardness of earth—pure, white sand. We can rejoice in the adult who makes a small sandpit in the garden or even in the living room, where children can enjoy the forming and pouring of this wonderful substance.

In contrast to the sense for the substances of nature, a relationship with man-made objects helps children feel that their own journey from heaven to earth has already been accomplished by the whole of humanity and is still taking place. Where nature offers beacons which show the way, man-made things are signposts left by those that have gone before—and these also speak deeply to the child's soul. They can be the simplest things, large or small—for instance, little pieces of cloth of various colors (where not only the colors but also an enveloping quality may be experienced), or a bowl and spoon, or a bucket and spade, or a small jug or cup, and so on. With the bucket or cup, the importance lies in the image of taking-up and letting-go, receiving and giving away again of the precious substance contained in these man-made objects. This experience addresses moral qualities and aids in their unfolding.

In this larger human context we may return to two earlier examples, which have a twofold message to impart. The sphere or ball made by a human being, whether it be as ornament, plaything, or for some other purpose, not only speaks to toddlers' unbroken connection with the heavens, but can facilitate a

dreamy absorption in the spiritual origin of all mankind. In contrast, we may see how the adult whose soul has become a “shrine,” and has made cupboards, or shrines, on earth, can show the way to children in their recapitulation of evolution. The child in search of individual selfhood can also feel a part of humanity as a whole. Older children, who to a certain extent have already gained their independence, like to have their own cupboards to keep their treasures and secrets.

In examining ordinary, man-made things like a table, a chair, a knife, a fork, a book, it will be seen that every object has, beyond the practical reasons for its existence, roots in a deeper reality—and these are experienced profoundly by the little child who observes the object and what it does. Of course, we are here considering only simple, elementary things, and not

technologically complex objects, where the deeper reality is obscured and often less favorable.

We can understand why it is the most “everyday” manifestations, those we pass by without noticing, that so boundlessly enthrall our young children, who quietly behold what they disclose. For children to be able to call to life all the good that they bring from their heavenly home, and for these gifts to thrive, depends not only upon our loving and understanding care, but also on the quality of the surroundings in which they grow up. ♦

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