

## THE QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENTS

When hearing of temperaments for the first time it is natural to question whether or not they actually do exist. Everyone is familiar with temper, and also with those things which we call mood, character, or behavior. But we hesitate to accept the idea that there is more than one temperament, or that they may be classified into four groups, each one entirely different from the others. We have become accustomed to calling temperament "temper", and speak of it usually when we "lose our temper" or make an effort not to do so.

The Greek philosophers did not speak loosely about temperaments. In studying their works we clearly see that they realized the significance of them and were the first to use this knowledge in their teaching.

The evidence of temperaments can be seen in nature as well as in human beings. Think of the wind, for instance. We may speak of the different types of wind coming from the four points of the compass. These four winds are the most significant manifestations of the year's seasons—spring, summer, fall and winter. We may think of the year as having four ages like man—a childhood, youth, manhood and old age—for in them both we see many characteristics which are comparable.

The temperament of normal childhood is *sanguine*. Like the airy, changeable spring season the child is unsteady; he is cheerful, briefly depressed, confident, despondent, hopeful or downcast. He laughs and weeps.

The normal youth is *choleric*, full of outbursts like summer thunderstorms.

The temperament of middle age, with consciousness of the gravity of life, is *melancholic*, comparable to autumn.

Old age is *phlegmatic*. Here complete serenity is reached, a state of balance and outer inactivity; life's winter.

The characteristic of human beings is that they have individuality. Just as the year as a whole is made up of the four seasons, so do we bear within ourselves the four temperaments. But with this difference, that the individual person expresses himself through one or more temperaments along with the one typical of his age. So it is understandable that a child's individual temperament may overbalance the one characteristic of his age, though this is always present. Extensive observation reveals that one temperament is usually predominant, two are of lesser strength and the fourth is scarcely noticeable.

In the child with the *sanguine* temperament, the nervous system predominates. He is the most normal in vitality and strength as well as in bodily proportion and physiognomy. His temperament accords with the true childhood season with all its airy unsteadiness. He is easily interested in everything you show or tell him but he usually tires of it very soon. He quickly reflects his sense perceptions but is inclined not to go into anything deeply or in detail. The sanguine temperament shows itself as very sociable, generous, and humorous; but it is likely to be superficial because of its capacity for an impartial interest in such a multitude of things.

The sanguine child, in his painting, has been found to prefer the out-streaming color yellow.

The court fool, as Shakespeare has depicted him in so many plays, is a picture of the sanguine temperament grown to rank, exaggerated proportions.

As the great danger of the sanguine temperament is superficiality, the teacher tries to bring about a balance by giving the child reason to love the authority of his teacher. The sanguine child needs to find a center as counterbalance for his manifold but fleeting interests. If the teacher is able to provide an authority to which the child can look up with loving loyalty, he has taken the biggest step in proving the firm ground upon which the child may stand.

The *choleric* is the "hot-blooded", passionate temperament. In fact the Greek word *cholos* means bile, wrath. Contrary to the easily excited but shallow interest of the sanguine temperament, the choleric leans strongly to the egotistical, and to inward apathy. His build is short and strong and his head seems to sink into his body. Another indication of the choleric nature is a too strong will impulse, an over self-confidence; he is self-centered and inclined to disregard the ideas and preferences of others. He often appears reckless. When he meets the slightest hindrance to the exercise of his own will, he usually becomes very angry and explodes like a smoky volcano; he tries to command the class and dominate the playground. Such a child's interest in things is deeply rooted but its content is usually narrow. There is one goal for which he longs with great energy while other possible interests are cast aside. An extremely choleric child feels practically no sense of fellowship but is distinctly unsociable.

The advantage in the choleric nature is a steady self confidence and a consciousness of one's own worth.

We find good examples of choleric temperament in many of Shakespeare's heroes, such as Richard III and Othello.

The teacher's problem here is to encourage in such a child an ever increasing feeling of devotion—an admiration for the great men of history. Biography is a most important factor; the lives of great heroes, or artists, inventors and discoverers, are studied and discussed. It is helpful if these children can be provided with suitable subjects for a healthy and natural hero-worship. The great figures of genius lead the choleric child away from the

onesided interest in his own egotistical self-will, and give him the stimulus to develop a greater appreciation for the values to be found in others.

As might be expected, the favored color for the choleric nature is apt to be red—though there is also a slight tendency toward brown, and dark grey—and a chaotic mixture of the active colors.

Some children are *melancholic* in temperament. They tend to anemia, and seem to be largely skeleton. Their bodies are delicate, too tall and slender; their limbs are long and scrawny; their heads hang down as though too heavy to be carried by such a slender organism. The Greek word, composed of *melas* and *chole*, means black gall, and the Greeks used it to describe this very type.

He who is melancholic is usually egotistically brooding, introverted, sad, and lacking in a sound sense of humor. Hamlet is a typical melancholic. This character shows a profound depth of conscience and also the danger that lies in becoming too meditative instead of active.

Most children in whom the melancholic temperament predominates have a delicate soul life, but they are retiring and do not participate actively in the social life about them. They tend to be very religious, but would hesitate to admit it. Often they are unusually artistic and love to use passive colors in their painting especially blue and purple. Through their drawing and painting, essays, poems, or acting, runs a note of sensitiveness and delicacy, revealing in its purity—awe, devotion and piety.

The teacher appreciates these qualities in the melancholic child and finds them a helpful contribution to the orchestra of all the other temperaments in his class. But he must try to bring harmony to such a child by helping him to acquire a more normal balance. He can do this by encouraging a sincere feeling of compassion for the fate of another person, by teaching him to be more sociable in his attitude and by developing in him a keener sense of humor. Naturally, such a balance stands a chance of being attained only if the teacher himself understands the four temperaments thoroughly. He must understand their fundamental causes as well as the steps he must take in order to help the child acquire some of the characteristics of the other three.

The *phlegmatic* temperament in a child is found where there is a predominance of glandular activity. The body is rather short and usually fat, with strongly developed shoulders which seemingly try to drag down the heavy head. A phlegmatic child lives largely in his senses; he is often so overwhelmed by sense perception that his response to it is far from active. He appears to be lazy and slow and less interested in the many sides of life than in one detached part of it. When he becomes interested in one particular thing he shows a certain persistency in trying to work it out. Often the phlegmatic child seems to be well balanced and to have self control—a quality useful to the whole life of the class. Phlegmatic children are faithful, reliable and calm; they can be depended upon to perform regular duties, but being unadaptable, they do not like change.

When a child is too phlegmatic he may become apathetic and dull. The Greek word *phlegma* means phlegm—viscous humor. It is interesting to note that the words *phlegm* and *humor* are synonymous, especially since it is evident that the phlegmatic person very often has a highly developed sense of humor. Falstaff is a perfect example of the true phlegmatic.

Phlegmatic children particularly like the passive color green, and it is revealing that many of them like to paint cows lying in luscious green meadows. With children of this temperament the teacher's problem is to develop a whole-

some interest in other people. This shakes them out of much of their complacency.

We find it difficult to define "temperament" exactly. Certainly it can not be called simply an attribute of the physical body in spite of the fact that it can be seen as a physical phenomenon. It reveals something of the inner quality of the soul, of character, and yet it is neither wholly an inner fact nor an abstraction. Rather is temperament a living expression of vivid forces in the very act of building the bridge between outer, physical characteristics and inner individuality.

It is Rudolf Steiner who has rediscovered, in the existence and significance of the temperaments, something which was common knowledge among the Greek scholars. With this knowledge comes the possibility for modern man to bring balance to his very being and thus to the structure of society itself.

Temperaments, as a manifestation of life, enrich our individual existence, give expression to our physiognomy, characterize our personal value. They account for the diversity of professions, languages, nations and races. Obviously each temperament represents only one side of human nature; and so when it is allowed to grow into an extreme oneness it produces a caricature of ideal man. Seeing so many such caricatures of men in present day life, few can doubt but that an unbalance of temperaments has contributed largely to the chaos in which the world struggles today.

So far, it is only in Steiner schools that temperaments are recognized and worked with. There such recognition, together with the knowledge necessary to achieve temperamental balance, forms a basic part of the teaching methods. No effort is made to extinguish any one temperament. On the contrary, it is so directed as to make it of value, in all its inborn vitality. The teacher tries to bring to every child having a predominant temperament, some of the lacking and necessary attributes of the other three.

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