

The Young Child from Birth to Seven

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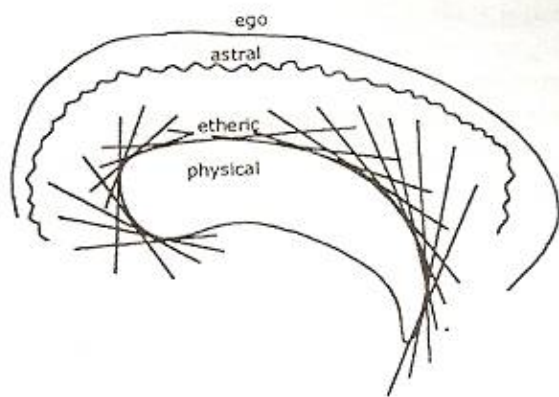
Today what I would like to address is a difficult subject in the work of Rudolf Steiner. We could say it is the question: What is the etheric? This is a difficult question because the birth of a child into the world, the birth of the physical body of a child, is accompanied by etheric forces from the cosmos that have been working through nine months to form a kind of cupola, a space, into which all of the patterns of organs and endocrine pathways, warmth and cold differentials, membranes, secretions—all of these very complex chemical reactions—have to be somehow coordinated and integrated in one space, with very little room for error. If we really think of the miracle of organization that it takes to bring an embryo to term, it is mind-boggling. Yet it is a daily occurrence. We look at this great miracle and almost take it for granted.

That process of the becoming of the human being from the nothing to the something is spearheaded and supported by the forces of the etheric. The whole being of the embryo is surrounded by cosmic Ego forces—forces of destiny, karma, heredity, entering a particular race, incarnating into a particular geographic area. All of those forces are a kind of filter very far out in the cosmos, which we could call the

Ego principle. The Ego could be thought of as a lens, but it is a selective lens that brings certain forces from the cosmos to bear in a center. It brings forces from the periphery and integrates them into what we could call a relative center. It does that primarily through the gates of the senses. The forming of the sense life in the environment of the embryo is really orchestrated by what later will be called the ego organization from the physical side or, from a cosmic side, the true self. The ego organization in the embryo is the actual physical response of matter to the organizing forces of the cosmos, but those physical responses are based on patterns of sensation that exist in potential in the farthest reaches of the cosmos. We could say that sensation is the raw material of the cosmos. No physiologist can really explain sensation in a mechanical/chemical model. Even though we know all of the instruments and the pathways that sensation takes in physiology, when it comes to the question in embryology of just how sensation forms the embryo, no one knows. But most agree that sensation does form the embryo.

There was an article in today's *Sacramento Bee* about a new thesis that yes, neurons do grow. For many years it has been assumed that the human being comes in with a certain complement of neurons and that's it for the rest of life. It has been discovered that in songbirds, part of the brain actually atrophies every season so that a new song can be learned. It was considered that a human being already had a full complement of neurons and that new neuronal patterns could not be developed. The researcher who determined that twenty years ago has now reversed his position. He now says, yes indeed, new neurons can be developed, even to old age, but it depends on the effects of the environment. This is cutting edge research, and this is exactly what Rudolf Steiner was saying years ago.

We could say that the Ego acts, through the gates of the twelve senses, as a kind of filter or lens for cosmic force. Inside that gate of the senses within the



organism is found the action of the cosmic astral body, the motion of the planets—in front of the fixed stars—creating loops and pockets and angles and particular forms. Within that realm of the cosmic astral is what we could call the personal etheric, or the individualized etheric. It is these individualized etheric forces to which Rudolf Steiner is often referring when he uses the phrase *etheric formative forces*. They are the etheric forces which create form. The etheric forces themselves, per se, are really cosmic forces. According to Rudolf Steiner, if the human form were placed into the pure, cosmic etheric forces, it would be disintegrated; it would be annihilated.

Now this seems like a contradictory perspective—that in one instance the etheric forces would annihilate the human form, and from another perspective the etheric forces are there as the source of the sculptural forces, of the building of the form. It seems contradictory, until we develop a perspective that every “body” such as the Ego, the astral body, the etheric body—every subtle body—has a cosmic dimension and an earthly dimension. In the earthly dimension, these cosmic forces, which really live on the periphery of the cosmos, come under the spell, so to speak, of the Ego being and become focused into a relative center. From there these cosmic forces begin to create form. They begin to create the possibility of the upbuilding and maintaining of the form. The upbuilding of the form is the work of the musical forces.

The musical forces allow the *new* to have a place to manifest. The creation of the previously determined pattern of the form itself and its decay, we could say, are the work of the etheric forces. It is when the cosmic side of these celestial forces comes under the sway of an Ego being that the possibility of awakening in a body of flesh arises. The young child goes from existing as a spiritual being living among spiritual beings, that is as a cosmic Ego, and starts a journey through the stars and the planets, picking up impulses from the stars and planets that will eventually become the actual functions and forms within the human body. Human beings are on a journey toward incarnation. They take these celestial forces and, through the deeds of Lucifer and Ahriman, focus these celestial forces in a relative center to such a degree that an illusion of a separate self arises and is sustained.

This doesn't mean that the incarnated being no longer has a transcendent cosmic self. It just means that the illusion of the separate self has become so

focused by the Ego being that the adversaries have gained access to it through the door of matter. The matter gets incorporated into these celestial forces as an image of particular regions of the cosmos in the lung and the liver and the kidney and the heart and the bones and the senses and all of the interaction between the life organs and the sense organs. This all gives the human being the possibility of becoming another small universe. The potential human has a full complement of cosmic forces, but they have been individualized to the degree that the being who is occupying this new body has the distinct impression that he or she is the center of the universe.

There is nothing wrong with this except that the original plan was that, as soon as this perception arose, the human being would immediately have the complementary perception that our intrinsic uniqueness is what we have in common with every other being that says “I.” According to Rudolf Steiner, that was the original plan. The function of a human being was to oscillate between those two states of consciousness as a kind of reciprocating relief valve between the cosmos and the Earth, to allow for a breathing between a peripheral cosmos and a centric cosmos. The ether body of the child, under the influence of the incarnating Ego at the physical birth, becomes a kind of lens or focalizing agent that takes part of the cosmic ether—the stars we could say, or the light of the stars—and gathers the qualities of earth, water, air, and fire that exist in the various constellations. As the sun moves through the zodiac, it brings, month by month, the successive qualities of earth, water, air, and fire into the ethers around the earth. The incarnating Ego, which is an image of the sun moving through the cosmos, focuses into a relative center in the embryo a field of forces which the embryo participates in for nine months. The other three months that are left over, we could say, are the reason why we come back—because we can't really have the whole picture of the whole cosmos in one incarnation. Then when we do come back, we will have another three points of view we haven't quite worked out for each incarnation.

The activity of the Ego which brings a whole starry realm into focus, also brings a focus into the other subtle bodies. In the other subtle bodies the individualized etheric forces could be called earthly etheric forces, or personal etheric forces. Those personal etheric forces have the property of being plant-like. Plants have two fundamental modes of action: they

grow and then they decay. Growth and decay are the properties of life. Life grows by adding one and adding one and adding one. That is growth. The paradox is that life also decays by adding one and adding one and adding one. This is because if we keep adding and adding and adding, suddenly the physical dimensions of the being exceed its ability to maintain the integrity of the life.

This is called the law of minimal surfaces in physics. What it means is, if you get too big, you have to get broken apart. Think of a balloon. We fill a balloon; we keep filling a balloon; we keep filling a balloon. As we keep filling the balloon, we're just filling the balloon. We're doing the same thing; we are growing. But suddenly something happens. As the mass of the being grows by cubes (3 dimensions), the surface is only growing by squares (2 dimensions), and something has got to give. The surface membrane ruptures, and the organism goes back to a more economical stage; the organism forms a committee. Instead of trying to solve everything in the College of Teachers, we form committees, and we mandate them to grow. It is exactly the same process. All that is happening in the social life is the law of minimal surfaces.

In the biological sphere, this limits the size of the growth of a particular cell. The cell of an elephant or a whale is the same size as the cell of a mouse; there is no difference. There are just more of them. The size of a cell is limited by its ability to maintain integrity between the center of the cell and the periphery of the cell. This image of the Thrones (the Spirits of Will), the Kyriotetes, and the Spirits of Motion again. There is just so much growth that can happen inside a cell, until the membrane has to rupture and then the cell goes through a process to reform into a smaller size, as two cells. There you have the Exusiai again. Then the cell can maintain integrity. These are images that we could call the laws of the etheric, and they govern everything from individual cells in your body to governments and social revolutions. They are images of the same principles, and they come from the first phase of evolution on Old Saturn.

In Rudolf Steiner's teachings, the etheric forces have two parameters. One is that they bring life forces, forces of growth, from the periphery.



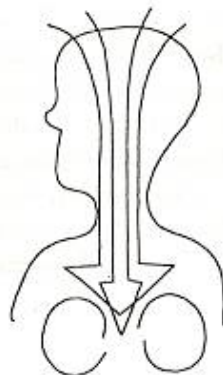
In the diagram above, I've drawn a circle, made of lines, that represents what Rudolf Steiner calls the planar forces of the etheric realm. He says that the ether forces come to the organism as planes of light from the periphery. The life comes to the organism from the periphery, from the cosmos. The growth also comes to the organism from the periphery. But within the transformed ether body of etheric formative forces, these growth forces have become so individualized that they link themselves up to the physical properties of the matter that gets incorporated into them. What results from the originally cosmic growth forces is that suddenly matter falls out of the now individualized growth forces, like the wake of a ship. There is a kind of turbulence. As the growth forces form a space, matter goes into the space and fills it up. Then what is left is matter, and the growth forces withdraw to the periphery to create another layer of life in which matter can manifest. This is the way a tree grows—from the cambium. The cambium is on the periphery; that is where the life is.

In the human organism, on the periphery are the senses: the eyes and the ears and the skin and the touching. The life forces—through the senses, through the sensation—come into the young child from the periphery—star light pouring through the gates of the senses. This is cosmic life. The forces—cosmic life—form the organs in cosmic star patterns of earth and water and air and fire; they form the lung, liver, kidney, heart. The particular pattern of the particular organ is a picture of the way in which the elements are working in that particular realm. The lung is a picture of the earth, the way in which the carbon of the earth unites with substances and then dissolves, for instance. These life forces from the periphery come in contact with young children through the environment, through what they hear and what they see and what they touch and what they taste. The moods of the other beings (adults) around the children also carry these life forces in the sheaths that are around them (adults). Young children have a kind of atavistic clair-

voyance as to how humans or animals have organized these cosmic forces. They don't listen so much to the content of a speaker's voice but to the intent, to the elemental mood of the speaker. They look at the way in which the curves in the speaker's face are animated or not, the way in which their limbs reflect their inner mobility, and from there they build their own organs from birth to seven. This is an enormous thought, that what is in the environment of a child from birth to seven is what is actually forming their life organs, through the gates of the senses. These life organs are nourished by sense impressions from the environment.

Now, in the child from birth to seven, the physical body has been born and the ether body has been pulled by the Ego into the physical body, but the ether body hasn't yet been freed. It is still working in a rather cosmic way. It is gestating, we could say, in the child from birth to seven. It is mulling over the impressions, the life impressions, that are coming in, and forming the inner organs according to the dictates of the cosmos: Now you must form a liver. Now you must form a lung. Now you must form a heart. And we could think that those organs are created in the embryo and finished, but no. They are seed-like in the fetus that has come to term. They are still unfolding. They need earth evolution in order to actually experience how the cosmic ether forces have come through the realm of the planets and are actually forming and creating the earthly forms of the body. This process is an initiation that the young children are going through before the change of teeth so that, later on, when they pick up their karma-designated temperament, when the ether body is born, they will be able to take a particular temperament on for a time and then let go of it in order to integrate it into the other temperaments. They need to have an initiation in the school of the elemental beings.

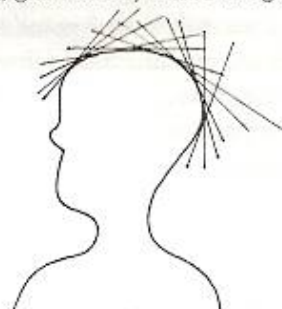
The elemental initiation they have is the forming of their life organs as a gestation process in the period from birth to seven. That initiation is through



musical and sculptural
forces co-operate

the sensations that they receive from their environment. As a result, their educative principle is imitation. They imitate what is in the environment around them. Teaching through example is the most effective form of education for birth to seven, because this is the biological imperative of that age. The etheric formative forces are impacting the physical being directly. There is no other type of cognition going on, aside from the fact that the cosmos is working to gestate an ether body. The sensations which the children experience are nutrition for their life organs directly.

Now, in the diagram here, I have tried to show a child from birth to seven, and Rudolf Steiner, in *Balance in Teaching*, gives a very interesting picture.



He says that the head principle is the area where there is a receiving of these cosmic life forces. It is because the head is really where the gateway to the senses is most concentrated. Through hearing and seeing, mainly, there is an influx, a constant influx, of these cosmic ether forces under the activity of the Ego that is united with them. A part of the cosmic Ego is building the ego organization, which is what will eventually be the instrument and life forces of the partially incarnated cosmic Ego. The ego organization is being built by this cosmic Ego, or true self, by uniting itself with part of the etheric formative forces and bringing them into contact with the physical. There is a kind of drawing down that the true self does; it focuses the ether forces down into the physical. As that happens, the activity is primarily focused in the head region. So the birth-to-seven child has a very large head because that, as we could say in a kind of funny way, is its antenna, because the antenna is resonant to the signal, and the signal is from the cosmos. This is what enables the child to draw in cosmic forces through the gates of the senses. They are focalized in the head, an image of the cosmos which looks like this.

The cosmic forces come in to the head and they pour out of the head and down into the rest of the body. They are not there in the way they are in the older child, because in the young child the Ego has only partially incarnated into the etheric forces. The etheric forces are not yet freed because the ether body has not yet been born. But they are there working to make the life organs and to complete their forming. So the picture is this: the cosmos working in through the senses from the periphery, then going down and forming liver, lung, kidney, and heart. But the liver, lung, kidney, and heart are being formed in a very cosmic way. Hidden in the music and in the speech, and in what is seen in the environment of the child are forces that are building, forming, structuring. Along with that, those etheric forces that come in contact with the earthly forces are also destroying and decaying, because the ether body, as we have said, is plant-like. The plant grows and decays; that is what it does.

Now we come to one of the difficult parts in *Balance in Teaching*, when Rudolf Steiner gives the picture that the astral body, through the musical forces, creates the processes that he calls upbuilding. In other places, he will say that the astral body is the source of illness, which can seem contradictory. But we have to be very precise as we use these terms, because they are really not contradictory at all. These concepts just require saying beforehand: This is what I am talking about at this particular stage.

In the birth-to-seven child, the ether body—the gestating ether body—dominates. The physical body is built according to that gestation pattern, but there is a kind of turbulence in the gestation. It is just like the experience of you women who have given birth; you know that there is a bit of turbulence that comes into your life during that period. It is the same in the birth-to-seven child. There is a certain turbulence in the body that is being gestated—we could say etheric turbulence. That etheric turbulence manifests itself in the oscillation between *Yes, I am like an angel* and *Now I am less like an angel* that goes on between birth and seven. Sometimes overnight. Sometimes day to day. Sometimes hour to hour. The oscillation moves back and forth between the more dynamic cosmic forces and some very incarnated fixed habit patterns. This is because the ether body, when it falls to earth and becomes earthly, is the source of habit. When these patterns later become free, at the birth of the etheric, they will be the source of temperament. The tempera-

ment, then, becomes a problem for the Ego, because the ether forces in it are fixed through habit and may not still have access to the cosmic patterns that are needed to maintain the organism. When we want to change a habit, it is very difficult to do that because the ether body, very early, is formed by particular patterns of sensation. The earthly forces that are given to this young being in the sensations in the environment form patterns in the life organs, which go on and later become temperamental disposition.

There is a picture of this that I have found to be very useful. That is the difference between a suspension and a solution. If we try to understand the activity of the etheric formative forces, we can think in terms of what a suspension is. In a suspension, there is matter suspended in a fluid medium. No matter how fine the matter becomes—we can pulverize it and pulverize it and pulverize it—if we let that sit for a while, the matter will eventually fall out of suspension and become a precipitate at the bottom of the vessel. This is the oscillation between form and decay. When a being is coming into manifestation, it uses the peripheral forces as a kind of forming blueprint or template. Those form-forces are pure life and have not yet attracted matter. That is the role of water. But then, through continued forming and the action of the Ego focused on a relative center, matter is drawn in and gets formed into substance. Once matter gets formed, it comes under the laws of the earth. Then it starts to build and open up, and then comes the law of minimal surfaces and the inevitable disruption of the membrane at the periphery, and then comes the breaking down of the systems. The system that has been formed breaks down into smaller and smaller and smaller pieces. That is decay. Then the pieces go back to earth. In the language of alchemy that is called a salt process. The salt goes into apparent solution and is lifted into a levity state by the water and then the water goes away and the salt comes back out again just as it went in. Chemically, that is a suspension. In a true solution, the salt would never come back out of the liquid. The salt never falling again would be the activity of musical forces. That is what Rudolf Steiner calls upbuilding. That is what we could call cooking. In order to do that, matter has to be taken to a higher and higher level of levity. Tomorrow we'll take a look at that one.

I wanted to bring those two images because they are useful when we try to imagine the disposition of a

child, the mood of a child, from birth to seven. As educators, what could we really look for? Even though there is not a temperamental response yet because the temperaments have not actually formed, there is the beginning of a temperamental response in the forming of a particular organ in the preschooler. This first temperamental blush is given by the organ in the body that looks after life. That is the liver.

The liver is connected most directly to the ether forces of forming and decaying, of coming into being and then going away. That is the life of the liver. In the fetus, the liver and the thymus are by far the most dominant metabolic organs in the body for the whole pre-natal development. If you look in the biological evolution of the lower kingdoms for an animal which is mostly liver, you have to go through a lot of phyla until you get up to the crustaceans. The first animal in which the whole body cavity is almost completely filled with a liver is a crayfish. The characteristic life gesture of the crayfish is: Now I'm growing; now I'm hiding. It grows and it grows and it grows, and it gets so big that the law of minimal surfaces takes over. The skin has to split. The skin splits and this very succulent little being comes out of the split skin and finds a hole to crawl into, until it can form another shell so that it is not so tasty. So there is a growth side, a developmental side, and then a kind of an "I'm shutting down and going in to my little hole" side. This is the liver rhythm. It comes from the liver as a kind of picture of the sun, even though the liver is related to Jupiter. The sun rhythm is day and night, and day and night, and day and night. This is decaying—growing: decaying (day)—growing (night).

What we could call the liver mood, or even the crayfish mood, is the source of the mood oscillations of these young ones. They are sweet and lovely and delicate and gentle, and then they turn around and whack their baby brother in the head with their doll. And you wonder: How can this be? When the liver dominates the consciousness, there is tremendous growth, and then a complete shutting down and going within, and resting and covering one's head. We could even say depression. If these forces are not met and harmonized from birth to seven, if there is not a daily rhythm, then the liver, in adulthood, will be trying to return to a stage of development where it can find in its environment forces which allow it to approach its cosmic archetype. It will be searching for rhythmic forces in its environment that allow it to

once again get in contact with its life. Unless this is developed and nurtured in the environment of the child from birth to seven, then the liver mood will permeate the rest of the temperamental development in the lower school, and then really erupt in the high school, and then become depression in intellectual soul times.

This is the root of depression. Depression really is a kind of hunger for rhythmic sensation, for sensation which is non-threatening and which can be assimilated or, we could even say, digested into life. As educators, we need to be careful that strong sensation doesn't come so quickly that the children can't digest it. Sensation should also not move abstractly into concepts for the young child, for as soon as young children are challenged with abstract ideas, there is kind of shell that forms around their life forces. Even in adults that happens. So the pictures, and the movements, and the sounds in the environment of the child from birth to seven need to be rhythmically presented with a very keen perception of day to night, and a very keen perception of season to season, because it is that kind of etheric rhythmic force that the liver is listening to as a kind of cosmic digestion of sensation.

Rudolf Steiner gives a picture that the liver is an organ that is an arrested head formation. He gives that in the physiology lectures. When you first read that you say: Whoa, what does that mean? But if we look at the picture that I presented earlier of the head receiving cosmic forces through sensation, and now we look at the liver and the place of the liver in biology, the liver comes out in the embryo as a bud of the digestive system and then lives in the digestion, receiving impulses from the world through the digested food that comes out of the intestines and the lymph. It is, we could say, listening to the sensations of the world in those fluids. The liver sits amid all of that lymph with all of these foodstuffs, and gathers it in. Into that sea of lymph there are tremendous sensations that are playing up through the lymph fluids based on the patterns of sensation in the sympathetic nervous system in the child. Rudolf Steiner connects the sympathetic nervous system to the etheric body, and it is in that ether body that shocks to the system are registered. The sympathetic nervous system brings balance back into a system that has been overloaded or stressed or shocked. So the sympathetic nervous system, especially in the metabolic system, is con-

nected to the movements of the limbs. It reacts to jerking movements in sensations, abruptness, hardness, coarseness; these all register in the physiology of the child, especially in the metabolic organs, as a kind of etheric disturbance. The metabolic system then has to secrete into the lymph all kinds of reactive secretions which cause the liver to say: What's that? What's that? What's that?? Is this okay? Is this all right? Something's going wrong!

The liver, we could say, becomes harried. It is constantly thinking that something is wrong. What it should be thinking is: I wonder what is happening on Jupiter today? That is what the liver is expecting. If it doesn't get Jupiter, if it gets simply that the adrenals and the sympathetic nervous system are dumping secretions that are a stimulus and response to environmental stress, then the liver incorporates that stress in the forming of the proteins, because the liver is a life-formative etheric organ. Because it is an etheric organ, it is a sculptural organ. What it is sculpting is the proteins that will later become liver, lung, kidney, and heart, etc. It does so by listening to the cosmic music and then sculpting the substances that come to it into usable forms for that particular physiology. So, in a way, it is like an arrested head. What it is listening to is the music of the spheres. It uses that music to create little images of Jupiter (liver), and Saturn (bones), and Venus (kidney) in the body. So in *Balance in Teaching* and in various other places, Rudolf Steiner speaks of the liver as a characteristic organ that really needs to be thought about by the kindergarten teacher. The whole physiology and the whole inner life of soul that the child from birth to seven is bringing to Earth is based on an inner clairvoyance as to what is going on in the secretions in the fluids in the body.

The Ego moves in toward the incarnating child. In their inner life children begin having memories of living among the stars. The environment impacts the senses. The children are dimly aware but not consciously aware of how the environmental sensations come into and are reflected by the physical body. The environmental sensations bounce back up because the ether body is very flexible and fluid. They bounce back up into the cosmic astral. The music of the spheres and the cosmic astral says, "I don't know what this is; you take it!" and reflects the personalized environmental sense patterns back down to the etheric, and suddenly the ether body is caught in an oscillation between the cosmic astral and the physical body.

The ether body doesn't know what to do with the personalized forces. So what it does is make a little moving model of this oscillating movement. This model is then called adrenaline, or testosterone, or thyroid secretion, or digestive juices. Bodily secretions are a kind of fixed movement model of the stimulus-response pattern—one part per million of adrenaline in the blood coming out of the kidneys, and instantly the whole body is on a fight-or-flight pattern for fifteen minutes. The secretion is an individualized movement. It is a substance that is a concentrated cosmic movement. The child from birth to seven is acting out the patterns of its secretions. That is what Rudolf Steiner is saying. The environment impacts the organs. The life organ tries to accommodate the personalized sensation, but because the way it best does that is by creating secretion, an image of a creative movement, the secretion as movement image then goes into the blood. The child then listens to its own incarnating process through the ether body. It is a child of the cosmos from birth to seven and it acts out what the pattern of stimulus-response would be in the particular organ that is secreting. That, in the language of anthroposophy and in pedagogy, is called fantasy.

The fantasy life of the child is driven by the sensations that are impacting the ether body, this earthly ether body that is creating secretions as images out of the cosmic formative patterns. So if there is acting out, the teacher looks to the environment and tries to create—especially for the liver—a kind of rhythmical massage of the liver. Day after day after day after day, things are presented and then moved on just a little bit, and then just a little bit, and then just a little bit, always building in a rhythmical way, and allowing for very clear pictures to go into sleep. The clearer the picture, the more the liver can get it. The liver has a very dull consciousness. It is not tremendously aware of itself, we could say. It is very much aware of what is coming to it. As a result, you can remove three quarters of your liver and it will regenerate. That is tremendous life. The characteristic of life is that it grows and decays, but it is not terribly aware. So during the birth-to-seven time, there is tremendous life pouring in through the senses of the young child. Fantasy arises in the child as a response to these sensations. The educator who looks at the environment and the rhythm of sensation has the best handle on being able to heal those liver rhythms of waking and sleeping and dreaming—day to day to day.

When that happens in the environment of the children, there will not be a hunger for images when they are thirty-five. They won't succumb to the great temptation of striving to out-do the next person by inundating themselves with sensations. The great struggle of adults today is to somehow transform their sensing

so that they become aware that they are citizens of the cosmos as well as citizens of the earth.

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