## Walking with Children, Walking with God

by Sara L. Blackstock General Conference 1990 Snowmass, Colorado

As director of a school-age day care center for the last four years, I have been blessed with a human laboratory. I work with about 180 children in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. One of the great joys of this job is the intense and real relationship which the staff and I have with the children. We live with almost 100 children daily. It is very close to a family feeling in many ways, and it is definitely a community.

Even though I am an accredited California teacher with about 25 years of teaching experience behind me, it was not until working here that I really began to experience the joys of working with children. I have come to explain the difference, to myself anyway, like this: as a teacher I had to impose a system on the children which had been orchestrated by a removed bureaucratic hierarchy. "Educating children," in such a context, almost seems to mean taking them out of their real life, relative frameworks and putting information into them.

In day care, we can live with the children in a way that is relevant to them. We can look to the children and say: "What do you want to do? We will help you do it." We can couch reading, writing, and arithmetic within the realms of carpentry, sewing, block building, puppetry, drama, animals, and games. We have the privilege of the freedom of working with children in a more natural setting, natural to their own developmental patterns. Another great advantage is that six grade levels live together, learning from and nurturing each other, along with the inevitable fights and conflicts. The first grader watches the fifth grader play Risk and then begins to model, pretending at first, playing Risk. The house area is a potent realm: the fifth graders just finish pretending to be on a date in a restaurant. They leave and within two minutes we observe the same scene, only with second graders. This process is constant. We can ask a fourth-grade child to clean and bandage a minor scrape for a kindergartner and the nurse- or doctor-to-be types just leap at this opportunity for "real life practice." All of this means that I have the privilege of observing children develop not only intellectually, but socially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

Throughout this talk I will be sharing examples of spiritual qualities and spiritual living as they have been gleaned from not only the above laboratory but also from the rich family experiences which parents have shared with me over the years concerning their children's development and their family environments and experiments.

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Dick Van Dyke wrote a book in 1970 called *Faith, Hope and Hilarity, the Child's Eye View of Religion*. It's a delightful compilation of children's questions, thoughts, feelings and personal experiences with and about God. He shares his 14-year-old daughter's statement shortly after they had moved to the desert in Arizona away from the maddening crowds. She said: "When I go walking in the desert, I realize I don't have to go making up wordsI don't have to talk to praythere's just an awareness of the Presence. I acknowledge the Spirit of God right where I am. That's praying. I know I've established a communication between myself and my Maker without having to talk."

Often, even with minimal guidance from the adult world, children seem to know about God, sense his presence and feel his love for them. I have found children, especially between the ages of 5 and 12 to be keenly responsive to concepts and talk about God; life and death; truth, beauty, and goodness; love; helping others; and suffering.

David Heller, a leading authority on children's spiritual development, discusses the emotional and spiritual growth of children as it relates to their perceptions of God. In his book, *Talking to Your Child about God*, he examines the crucial years between 4 and 12, when children form their most basic ideas about God and religion.

In this book he shares some of the real life letters which children have written to God:

Liz Marie, age 7, writes, "Dear Lady God, I love you. And I want to thank you for making the color pink. Pink is a beautiful creation. I think in heaven you must have made everything pink. Pink cushions, pink houses, even pink clouds. I just hope the boys don't feel too out of place. That would be too bad. I love you lots."

Tamara, age 12, writes: "It's all woven together. All of our lives. And God is at the center."

And Walt, age 10, writes: "Dear God, I love you more than anybody else that I do not know."

I have a picture of Mother Teresa on my office wall and there's nothing especially appealing about it to young children--she looks old, wrinkled, and solemn. When they ask who that sad-looking person is, I leap at the opportunity to tell them that she is one of the world's greatest spiritual leaders. Then they always ask, "What does she do?" As I tell them how she cares for some of the world's poorest people, picking up dying people off the street to help them die with peace and a sense of being loved, I can almost feel the Thought Adjuster shining through with this inspiration of greatness.

One mother wrote about her child's first expressed ability to comprehend the invisible nature of God. Her son's teacher had read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (a story about the metamorphosis of caterpillar to butterfly). The teacher had the children dramatize the event by crawling one-by-one into an enormous butcher paper cocoon and then emerge as butterflies. This five year old emerged with these words: "Very truthful idea--God can disappear."

In order to recognize spiritual living and acknowledge spiritual qualities in children, we have to first look at ourselves. Where are we in our spiritual and personal development? How does our level of development affect the lives of our children?

I will share with you some of my understandings of how we can work with the spiritual gifts--the adjutant spirits, the Thought Adjuster, the Spirit of Truth--to make the soil for our children's spiritual development more fertile. Finally, I would like to encourage all of us to examine what it means for us to be experiencing the combined privileges and duties of being students of the fifth epochal revelation and being "in partnership with God, raising his sons and daughters." What are our responsibilities, our hopes and visions for their lives? What can we do to provide the foundation for the skills they will need to carry the torches of truth, beauty, goodness and love so that their families, friends and society will better see the paths about which our Master came to tell us?

#### Seeing Through Children's Eyes

A feeling type of 6 year old told his verbal, well educated, intellectualized father who was trying to explain the Trinity of God being three persons in one, that, "There really was only one God because God fills every place and there's no room for another one. If you were a kid like me, dad, you would not have to use all of those words 'cause you would feel it." The father swallowed his humble pie and realized that his intellectualizations had interfered with his son's simple desire to feel the presence of God with his father, who needs to get in touch with his own child inside himself to be able to see where his 6-year-old boy is really at. We must look at children through the eyes of the child in ourselves.

When I was working with a group of 2 to 6 year olds, we almost became fire worshipers because a single candle in a thank you God ceremony had such an effect in its ability to set the mood for feeling the presence of God. Woe be to the one who blew it out before the proper time!

Jesus said many times that we must become as little children to enter the kingdom:

[T]he kingdom of heaven can best be realized by acquiring the spiritual attitude of a sincere child. It is not the mental immaturity of the child that I commend to you but rather the *spiritual simplicity* of such an easy-believing and fully-trusting little one. It is not so important that you should know about the fact of God as that you should increasingly grow in the ability to *feel the presence of God*. (\*1733)

On page 1861 he gives us some specific qualities of children to emulate (or allow to develop in ourselves): "To come as a little child, to receive the bestowal of sonship as a gift; to submit to the doing of the Father's will without questioning and in the full confidence and genuine trustfulness of the Father's wisdom; to come into the kingdom free from prejudice and preconception; to be open-minded and teachable like an unspoiled child."

It is the "attitude of mind" and the "response of spirit" of the child which allows mortal man to enter the kingdom of heaven. We can easily observe this attitude of mind and response of spirit in children:

A seven-year-old girl who is moving out of early childhood into the next stage of youth had been experiencing a lot of temper tantrums and emotional ups and downs. After quite a few months of parental involvement in helping her to adjust to her world and control herself, she finally announced to her family one night at dinner that she had figured out what to do about meanness-- "Just fill myself up with love so full it just squeezes the meanness right out."

A five year old had been learning sign language and one day she announced to her mother she had made up a sign for God. She put both her hands on her heart and then moved them from her heart out to the world, offering her love.

We can intellectually see that these are desirable characteristics to have, but how does one get them? How do we as adults become as little children so that we may see our children through the eyes of the child of God inside of each of us? On page 1585, Jesus responds to Thomas's concern about how children are easily deceived: "When I asked you to become as little children as the price of entering the kingdom, I referred not to ease of deception, mere willingness to believe, nor to quickness to trust pleasing strangers. What I did desire that you should gather from the illustration was the child-father relationship. You are the child, and it is *your* Father's kingdom you seek to enter." It is our relationship with our Father that will allow us not only to enter and grow in his kingdom, but will allow us to see the spiritual qualities in our children. "[T]he divine will is observed to shine brighter and brighter in the spiritualizing acts of those creatures of time who have begun to taste the divine delights of experiencing the relationship of the personality of man with the personality of the Universal Father." (\*138) As we develop our relationship with God, our light will shine brighter and clearly light the path for our children who are attracted to spiritual light like fireflies to light bulbs. One mother said it very succinctly: "Parents are limited in seeing spiritual living in their own children by their own degree of spiritual advancement. A child is likely to mirror the spirit values of their parents and, depending upon their temperament, would exhibit those values with that frame of reference."

## Finding the Hidden Treasures

A man and woman had lived in their well established home for 40 years when she became ill with a slowly debilitating and terminal illness. For 40 years she had planted flowers, weeded, pruned, fertilized, and watered, but during the last year of her illness, the 90-year-old man became so inundated with the tasks of getting through each day that caring for this paradisiacal garden became bottom priority and it became overgrown with weeds. As the wife was dying, she and her husband talked about selling the house. They both decided that after she passed on and the house was put up for sale, her husband would try to sell to a family who would discover and appreciate the hidden beauties of the years of gardening work. So they decided not to fix up the garden. When the wife died, the husband put the house up for sale, but retained control over who would buy it. The house was in a desirable area and many people looked at it, but when they saw the overgrown weeds, they thought it was so ugly and would take so much landscaping work that they did not even go close to the hidden garden, but looked at the unkempt yard from a distance. One couple wanted to put in a large swimming pool where the hidden garden now was. After about 20 couples, there came a middle-aged couple with two teenage children, one of whom was a scrawny 13 year old with a bad case of acne, who had an understanding of outward ugliness and hidden beauty. As his parents were talking about the house with the old man, he walked around in the huge yard filled with weeds, looking for something unknown, and he saw a little purple flower struggling to grow above the weeds. As he parted the weeds he discovered many little miniature irises trying to get sunshine. As he looked further and deeper into the garden he saw many beginnings of plants he recognized, for his father had taught him about the beauties of nature. The family was joyful at finding what was to them a hidden treasure and they couldn't wait to begin weeding and watering. They bought the house with t

What are we looking for? It is easy to see the lovely little well-tended blossoms--the child who sits in a quiet magical mesmerized state before a flickering candle singing "Jesus Loves Me" and thanking God for mommy and daddy; and we fall in love with the lovely little sweetpeas who bring mommy breakfast in bed. But how do we feel about the fifth grader who cannot bring mommy breakfast in bed--he just has to rush out to the park because about 10 friends are waiting for him to play baseball because he is the only one who really knows the rules and how to play fair. What spiritual quality is hidden? What spiritual qualities are usually ignored by the spiritual adults?

Most children at some stage or other exhibit any combination of the more obvious spiritual qualities--being kind, patient, appreciative of beauty, desirous of relieving suffering, joyous, sincere, trusting, and so forth. However, it is my experience, both personal and from observing others, that there is a tendency to negate the less obvious qualities and the ones which are more difficult to direct --love of adventure, competitive spirit, leadership, desire to show and teach others, perseverance and a sense of humor. These traits sometimes seem to be more obvious and/or stronger in male children, especially after the arrival of the Thought Adjuster.

There is a fifth-grade boy at the center who often seems to be on the receiving end of adult negativism. He has a large, strong body and is an obvious extrovert. You cannot keep him at the back of the line on a hike, and this has alienated him from teachers who desire to control such a child. Everything he thinks seems to immediately exit from his mouth in loud, aggressive statements. He can't keep his mouth shut, because he is full of suggestions and is a real problem solver, so he is immediately involved in anything of any intensity that happens. Some would call him a smart mouth and an instigator. I call him The Viking, and to me he is an obvious leader. When I have a problem that a child can help with, The Viking is the first one I will call to help me. He will be out front in the battles of life saying, "Follow me," if the adult world doesn't destroy his self-esteem for being himself. Granted, he does need to learn self-control and discrimination and temperance.

Remember the quote on page 159: "Love of adventure, curiosity, and dread of monotony--these traits inherent in evolving human nature--were not put there just to aggravate and annoy you during your short sojourn on earth, but rather to suggest to you that death is only the beginning of an endless career of adventure, an everlasting life of anticipation, an eternal voyage of discoveryNot until you traverse the last of the Havona circuits and visit the last of the Havona worlds, will the tonic of adventure and the stimulus of curiosity disappear from your career."

We can do better with this innate sense of adventure than give our children TV and Nintendo. We have become so paranoid as a society and lazy or exhausted as parents that we are denying our children the experience of calculated risks and reasonable adventures. It is very safe, we think, for them to watch violence on TV or to sit for hours playing Nintendo, safer than sharing in some other forms of entertainment or outlets for that desire for adventure. Kids have told me that they love Nintendo because of the challenge--once you conquer one level, there immediately is another one and by the time you've conquered the whole game, the company has produced another game with hundreds of levels to conquer. A little of this goes a long way, but it is surprising how many children have made this their substitute for adventure because their parents are not into camping, hiking, beaches, skiing, rock hunting, cave exploring, etc. It doesn't even have to be the parents that do these things, but it might have to be the parents who help arrange for the child to.

#### **Our Supreme Responsibility as Parents**

I don't think that recognizing spiritual living in children is a passive activity. When walking with children walking with God, we have to be aware of the path we are traversing so as not to lead them where they will stumble, for as Jesus emphatically said: "But whosoever causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea." (\*1761) Now, obviously, because we are not the perfect parents, friends or teachers, we do cause our children to stumble, but Jesus is talking about stumbling in a very profound way, a spiritual way, a damaging way. Adults should feel a sense of responsibility when they are in the presence of children, for they should know that the child is unconsciously modeling, but with parenting the responsibility is quite encompassing. On page 941 the Chief of Seraphim stationed on Urantia tells us that "[B]ringing a child into the worldentails the supreme responsibility of human existence." This supreme responsibility begins even before conception, as the parents are thinking about when to begin a family; and relationship begins at birth, even before birth. Relationship is the fertile soil from which grows the religious and spiritual development of our children. If we are firmly rooted in our relationship to our Father, our children will be able to send deep roots of their own being into that soil and then can be observed what is talked about on page 1013: "Religious meanings progress in self-consciousness when the child transfers his ideas of omnipotence from his parents to God. And the entire religious experience of such a child is largely dependent on whether fear or love has dominated the parent-child relationship."

Springing forth from our relationship to God will come the framework of loyalties around which our children may build their lives: "Children are permanently impressed only by the loyalties of their adult associates; precept or even example is not lastingly influential. Loyal persons are growing persons, and growth is an impressive and inspiring reality. Live loyally today--grow--and tomorrow will attend to itself. The quickest way for a tadpole to become a frog is to live loyally each moment as a tadpole." (\*1094)

And on page 2088, five of these sacred human loyalties are clearly presented: personal honor, family love, religious obligation, social duty, and economic necessity. These are each worthy of intense study and personal family interpretations. The authors of this revelation do not freely use the term "sacred." And these five sacred human loyalties are not learned by our conscious teaching of them to our children. They are absorbed into the deep part of their being as they watch us live our everyday lives. And if you think they are not aware of what we do and how we do it most of the time, spend a day consciously watching them watch you--stop talking at them and watch yourself as they watch you. Children are capable of the most minute observations. At the daycare center we spend a great deal of time in conflict resolution and as we guide them to talk to each other about problems and feelings and what began the negative feelings, we will get down to a tone of voice or a movement, a look, which was interpreted by one party as negating the validity of the other.

Our relationship to God and our loyalties are the external structure we provide for our children's development psychologically and spiritually. The universe provides the great gifts--the adjutant spirits (intuition, understanding, spontaneous association of ideas, courage, knowledge, counsel, herd instinct and social development), the Thought Adjusters and the angels--as the spiritual internal structure.

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#### **Adjutant Influence**

The adjutants begin to function with the acquisition of the potential of the ability to learn from experience, "[A]nd they function from the lowliest minds of primitive and invisible existences up to the highest types in the evolutionary scale of human beings. They are the source and pattern for the otherwise more or less mysterious behavior and incompletely understood quick reactions of mind to the material environment." (\*739)

Do we hear how important is learning from experience? There is a rather complex quote on page 1123 talking about the fact of experience: "What is human experience? It is simply any interplay between an active and questioning self and any other active and external reality. The mass of experience is determined by depth of concept plus totality of recognition of the reality of the external. The motion of experience equals the force of expectant imagination plus the keenness of the sensory discovery of the external qualities of contacted reality. The fact of experience is found in self-consciousness plus other-existences--other-thingness, other-mindedness, and other-spiritness." This is another one of those quotes that parents and teachers could chew on for quite a while and it could really help us to determine what kind of experiences we should help our children have. Nintendo and automated robotic toys may not fit these descriptions very well. Notice the key words: active, depth, reality, imagination, sensory discovery. Do you know any parents who with a minimum of whining will buy their toddler a Donald Duck doll that quacks but will not let them play with the flour and the pots and pans?

"It is civilization's protection of the child from the natural consequences of foolish conduct that contributes so much to modern insubordination." (\*941)

Do we see the connections between the beginnings of the workings of the adjutants and allowing our children to experience the natural consequences of their foolish behavior?

Now we are assuming common sense here--but the child who has never felt a hot stove or been allowed to get close enough to fire to feel its intense heat are the ones that are most likely to get burned. Children are little sensors. I have stood by a year-old child at the fireplace and watched, ready to grab hand away, as the child very carefully and slowly put the hand closer and closer to the fire until it began to get uncomfortable. I have also watched the parents of a young child with great panic grab a child away from the fire before it could feel any heat and tell the child with great emotion that the child could burn up if it got too close. We have a pool at our home which causes me great anxiety when we have our many little friends visit, but I am training myself to be a little more watchful and less reactive as they begin to experience a big body of water from the side.

Here is another example. We have a rat cult at our center--the children love to hold them and they make great pets. However, as with everything there are risks. The children are allowed to take them outside and let them run on an area called rat hill. They were plainly warned of the dangers of stepping on a rat if they did not watch where they and the rat were in relation to one another. Yes, it did happen once--a child stepped on a rat and a group of 15 children walked into the center carrying the rat, crying. The rat had not quite died, but lay in pained breathing while we all watched the life ebb away and cried together. Daily as the children take the rats out to rat hill, that story is told over and over. That one incident has done more for children being careful than any words that could be used. We let the children hold the baby rats when they are young and pink saying that if they were dropped they would die. And, yes, one was dropped and did die right before a whole circle of us. But do these experiences mean that we don't allow the children to take the rats outside or to hold baby rats? Why do we have the rats, anyway? Not for the intrinsic value of rats, for sure!

All parents should do an intense, in-depth study of the adjutants and come to understandings as to how they can provide experiential lessons in their home environments so that the adjutants can do their job. I believe that this is especially true of education--instead of accepting the "artificial and superficial education" which occurs in many of our nation's public schools. It does appear that the more we allow our children to learn from experience and provide the arenas for decisions, decisions, and more decisions, the more effective can be the work of the adjutant circuits.

#### **Thought Adjuster Influence**

"[A]llnonself desires do actually have their origin in the leadings of the indwelling Thought Adjuster, and this Adjuster is a fragment of God. The impulse of the spirit Monitor is realized in human consciousness as the urge to be altruistic, fellow-creature minded." (\*1132) Once again, it is the basic responsibility of parents to think about this and explore what it means for them in their particular home environment. What I see prevalent to a dangerous degree today--and there are a number of social researchers also concerned about this phenomenon--is the influence of TV advertising on both children and parents. It could make some kind of valuable impact on the child if instead of buying the child 10 Ninja Turtles to tell the child that 3 is enough and "Let's send the money that we would spend on the other 7 to a homeless shelter."

I teach 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades at the center in our summer school. I thought it didn't go very well this summer; they seemed somewhat bored, although they were tremendously cooperative. So we had an evaluation session and I asked them what they would like to do next summer to make it more valuable for them. When put to a vote, among many suggestions for having fun and entertaining themselves, about 85% of them voted that they wanted to go out into the community and help other people in some way or another. We will try to find a way to do this next summer.

In the Sermon on the Mount on page 1575 as explanation to the fourth supreme reaction of fatherly love, "Happy are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," they also mention that "[E]very child should early learn to sacrifice."

In an old book which was used as a textbook at Berkeley High School in the 1930's, *Piloting Modern Youth*, Dr. William S. Sadler wrote about the value of "thwarting." On page 127 of this book it says: "The non-thwarting idea is fundamentally wrong. The moment a child steps out into the workaday world, it is certain to be thwarted; this is the common lot of man. The ability to redirect impulses, to modify emotions, to curb appetites and control longings is absolutely essential to personality development and social progress. Society demands graceful submission to thwarting on the part of every individual. Thwarting, then, is natural and inevitable. It is a part of human evolution. We cannot always have our wayDisappointment is unavoidable. During very early nursery days, the child should be introduced to the idea that it cannot always have its way. It should clearly be trained in the art of becoming more or less disappointment proof. By this means many of the serious personality breakdowns of later adolescence can be prevented." Providing neat things, fun and entertainment for children are some of the more enjoyable parts of being a parent. If other activities are in balance for the child, then it is doubtful that any one activity will hurt. But it does seem that it is rather imbalanced today. I have asked many teenagers what their favorite activity is--Nintendo and shopping. I have asked them what their parents like to do on the weekends--TV and shopping.

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What else can they be doing? Listen to what 15 year olds do on that other continent we are told about: "Children remain legally subject to their parents until they are fifteen when the first initiation into civic responsibility is held. Thereafter, every five years for five successive periods similar public exercises are held for such age groups at which their obligations to parents are lessened, while their new civic and social responsibilities to the state are assumed." (\*811) Suffrage is conferred at 20--look how well prepared they are while our 20 year olds almost lay down their lives to see Led Zeppelin or Madonna. One thing is for sure--the time to begin to think about these things is not when our kids are 13 or 14.

Although children can be very, very selfish and egoistic, all of us see many examples of the beautiful caring and giving that most children are involved with all the time. How many of you have stacks (or would have if you had saved them all) of all of the drawings and sweet sayings you have been given?

#### **Angel Influence**

Jesus told his apostles on page 1761: "[F]or their angels do always behold the faces of the heavenly hosts."

In times of crisis many of us have experienced being upheld by the angels in our experiences of intense grief and shock. Going through this with children can be mightily inspiring--watching them be held by the angels and allowing themselves to be carried in the arms of loved ones, even when they have experienced the loss of a loved one.

I will share with you the most profound experience of my life with children and loss and being upheld by the angels. About one and a half years ago my sister committed suicide. Her two children, aged 10 and 12 came home from school and found her dead in her bedroom; although she had put up a chair in front of the door and they couldn't get in, they could see her feet and part of her lying on the floor. When they found they couldn't get to her, they called their father who works about one and a half hours away, and when they couldn't get him, they went out into the backyard to wait for him. When I asked them what they did out there, they said they cried. They said the hardest part (not including what they had gone through) was telling their father when he walked through the door. Do you think that the angels were holding these two children as they cried and waited?

My husband and I picked them up that night and brought them back to our home. The children and I were in one car and my husband and their father in the other. It was an exceptionally beautiful nightspringtime, full moon. As we drove through the hills we all commented on the beauty of the hills silhouetted by the full moon and shared with each other about the beautiful night in the midst of great sorrow. How amazing that these children were able to see the beauty of that night! We were very open to the process of being ministered to by the angels.

The 12-year-old girl asked me to type a letter to her mother the day after her mother had died. At this point of perhaps the greatest grief that could be experienced by a child, she had the presence of mind to want to communicate her last thoughts to her mother. She read this at her mother's open casket and then placed the letter in her mother's folded hands:

"Dear Mommy, We are sorry you are not with us. We may not know why this has happened but you probably know yourself for many reasons. We will always remember the good and happy times we spent with you. In our hearts those moments will never perish. We hope that you are at rest and peace without any worries or problems. God is with you and you are with God."

#### **Stages of Moral and Spiritual Development**

"[Jesus] taught morality, not from the nature of man, but from the relation of man to God." (\*1585) Morality is completely tied up with relationship. Remember what the chief of seraphim tells us on page 942: "Family life is the progenitor of true morality, the ancestor of the consciousness of loyalty to duty. The enforced associations of family life stabilize personality and stimulate its growth through the compulsion of necessitous adjustment to other and diverse personalities. But even more, a true family--a good family--reveals to the parental procreators the attitude of the Creator to his children, while at the same time such true parents portray to their children the first of a long series of ascending disclosures of the love of the Paradise parent of all universe children."

It is within the family that the child first learns of his/her value, first to the parents, then to self, then to the world. Before children can give to others, they first have to have a self from which to give. "But before a child has developed sufficiently to acquire moral capacity and therefore to be able to choose altruistic service, he has already developed a strong and well-unified egoistic natureVery early in life, the normal child begins to learn that it is `more blessed to give than to receive.''' (\*1131)

Children learn how to treat others by modeling the way the people they love and respect treat each other and others. If a child has a problem with bad language or putting others down, we ask the child if s/he has been put down at home. Most often they say they do hear bad language in the home and that they are put down in the home, either by parents or older siblings.

On page 1585 Jesus says, "[T]he morality of any act is determined by the individual's motive." If a child's motive is throughout life to get something that it didn't get in the early years, it is very difficult for that child to truly think of others; to live the golden rule as restated by Jesus which is to do to others as you think Jesus would do to you.

The children whose basic needs have not been fulfilled are very needy and at all junctures, their own needs take precedence over the needs of others. This can be lessened as we work to uplift their basic self-esteem. We can almost tell within a couple of days if a new child comes from a home whose parents understand and employ excellent child development principles in their rearing. The children are very sensitive to the needs of others, are usually good listeners, really hear what's being said, and respond appropriately.

What is the connection between moral development and spiritual development? "When mind chooses a right moral judgment by an act of the free will, such a decision constitutes a religious experience." (\*1131)

Innate Moral Nature--"The psychology of a child is naturally positive, not negative. So many mortals are negative because they were so trained. In the absence of wrong teaching, the mind of the normal child moves positively, in the emergence of religious consciousness, toward moral righteousness and social ministry, rather than negatively, away from sin and guilt." (\*1131)

"The Adjusters cannot invade the mortal mind until it has been duly prepared by the indwelling ministry of the adjutant mind-spirits and encircuited in the Holy Spirit. And it requires the co-ordinate function of all seven adjutants to thus qualify the human mind for the reception of an Adjuster. Creature mind must exhibit the worship outreach and indicate wisdom function by exhibiting the ability to choose between the emerging values of good and evil--moral choice." (\*1187)

It seems that there are always some children who give into the temptation to steal. When I first began working with children, I was disgusted with this, but have since found it not that unusual. It can happen in the best of homes and can be a tremendous opportunity for the child to be called to make a decision about this problem. Some children get very good at denial and would convince the best adult judge of his/her innocence. After working with children, an adult develops almost a sixth sense about the child. It is very important to be correct about the judgment; it is very important for the child to be caught and experience consequences. There are a number of good books out on how to handle this issue. I use "catching" a child as an opportunity to very directly talk to them about this being an opportunity for making a decision to be come strong. We talk about how stealing makes one feel weak inside, and every child I have talked to about this knows exactly the feeling I am describing. Every child wants to be strong; to have power; to have control over themselves for as I ask them: "If you do not control yourself, who will?," they of course will answer in some fashion or another, "Someone else." Children like to think they have some degree of control over their own lives and what they do. This is a very appealing argument for them. I will then have the child, if they are able, to write an agreement with me about their decision they must make. They can have several days to think about it, but these decisions can happen on the spot.

"Time is essential to all types of human adjustment--physical, social or economic. Only moral and spiritual adjustments can be made on the spur of the moment and even these require the passing of time for the full outworking of their material and social repercussions." (\*911)

Many of the children when they enter daycare at five or so, probably do not have their Thought Adjusters. There seems to be a lack of self-consciousness and some of them have not progressed from stage zero of moral reasoning which is: "Whatever I want is what's fair." In raising good children, Dr. Thomas Lickona outlines the stages of moral development as first shown in three decades of research by Harvard University psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg who is a widely recognized leading figure in the psychology of moral development. It is important to understand the process of moral reasoning from inside a child's mind. This helps us to appreciate the different stages children go through rather than expecting impossible things of them and belittling them for not being able to meet your expectations. For instance, it is good for fathers to have high standards and challenge their children's growth, but research shows that unfortunately, because of this lack of knowledge, father's expectations are generally two years ahead of what the child is really capable of, causing problems all around. Stage 1 is: You should do what you are told; stage 2 is: What's in it for me?; stage 3 is: What will people think of me?; stage 4 is: What if everybody did it?; and stage 5 is: Respect the rights of every person.

"Man's choosing between good and evil is influenced, not only by the keenness of his moral nature, but also by such influences as ignorance, immaturity, and delusion. A sense of proportion is also concerned in the exercise of virtue because evil may be perpetrated when the lesser is chosen in the place of the greater as a result of distortion or deception. The art of relative estimation or comparative measurement enters into the practice of the virtues of the moral realm." (\*193)

What is the connection between moral development and spirituality? "Every time man makes a reflective moral choice, he immediately experiences a new divine invasion of his soul. Moral choosing constitutes religion as the motive of inner response to outer conditions." (\*2095)

#### **External Environment**

We have been looking more at the psychological and spiritual climate of the internal development of the child. What kind of *external* environment is conducive to the development of the child's personal relationship to God; to the working of the adjutant spirits, the angels and the Thought Adjuster; to moral development and personal spiritual experience?

In his book *Talking to Children about God*, David Heller talks about the importance of planning a "spiritually enlightened home," for of course this is where it all begins as we shoot them from our arrows. This is as varied as personal home environments. Heller says, "In your home, religion is the spiritual atmosphere that you create through your everyday parenting. You may attend formal religious services every week, but your spiritual life is experienced each and every moment." (pg. 11)

#### **Great Value of Beauty**

"It was also at Jericho, in connection with the discussion of the early religious training of children in habits of divine worship, that Jesus impressed upon his apostles the great value of beauty as an influence leading to the urge to worship, especially with children. The Master by precept and example taught the value of worshiping the Creator in the midst of the natural surroundings of creationWhen it is not possible to worship God in the tabernacles of nature, men should do their best to provide houses of beauty, sanctuaries of appealing simplicity and artistic embellishment, so that the highest of human emotions may be aroused in association with the intellectual approach to spiritual communion with God. Truth, beauty, and holiness are powerful and effective aids to true worship. But spirit communion is not promoted by mere massive ornateness and overmuch embellishment with man's elaborate and ostentatious art. Beauty is most religious when it is most simple and naturelike. How unfortunate that little children should have their first introduction to concepts of public worship in cold and barren rooms so devoid of the beauty appeal and so empty of all suggestion of good cheer and inspiring holiness! The child should be introduced to worship in nature's outdoors and later accompany his parents to public houses of religious assembly which are at least as materially attractive and artistically beautiful as the home in which he is daily domiciled." (\*1840)

It would appear that we are given some direct instruction here as to the *best* ways for children to be introduced to worship--in nature's outdoors. So, parents, don't feel guilty about taking that Sunday walk with your children and having a family worship time.

It is our privilege and duty to work with the subtle yet real and powerful spiritual influences as we both progress in our own relationship with God and our growth toward the Supreme, and provide the environment and guidance for children to experience a growing relationship to their spiritual Father. Many parents who are spiritually committed are discovering arenas for working with children in many phases of our lives.

One mother conducted a study, using her daughter's preschool as her research arena, to find out about the relationship of fathers with their children based on their involvement with them since birth. She has extended this study to many other preschools and the study has of course shown that the more involvement fathers have with their children since birth, the closer is their relationship at the preschool age. Another sideline that has turned out to be very satisfying are the numerous profound and spiritual discussions she has enjoyed with fathers regarding the results of the study.

I would imagine that the hope of all of us is that our children know God as their Father. Many of us would find great joy if they would discover the fifth epochal revelation in a personal way and would embrace and participate in it on a personal level so as to make their life richer, spiritually, philosophically, psychologically and socially; and some of us would extend our dreams even a little further out for our children--that some of them might become the mighty leaders that page 2082 talks about: "Religion does need new leaders, spiritual men and women who will dare to depend solely on Jesus and his incomparable teachings[T]hese new teachers of Jesus' religionwill be exclusively devoted to the spiritual regeneration of men. And then will these spirit-born souls quickly supply the leadership and inspiration requisite for the social, moral, economic and political reorganization of the world."

And as we all know, the social, moral, economic and political reorganization of the world begins at home.

# **Children and Spiritual Community**

By Sara Blackstock

## CHILDREN IN COMMUNITY

I would imagine that most parents who are students of *The Urantia Book* would like their children to grow into people who are committed to their relationship with God, seeking His will, doing good, seeking truth and beauty, and ministering to their brothers and sisters, but who would also be drawn into the worldwide community of students of the Fifth Epochal Revelation. Most of us know how this has changed our lives for the better in almost inexpressible ways, and we would want that for our children, if it would also be God's will for them.

Although some parents are sending their children to some well organized and established churches for their basic religious education and socialization, there are others who are trying to forge a new way for their children to experience community within the context of the Fifth Epochal Revelation; and then other parents are providing a rich experience in both paths.

A survey has been sent out to study groups of *The Urantia Book* around the country asking what they are doing for their children in their study group or communities. I think the results will tell us that there are some groups who have discovered ways to richly include their children in their spiritual community. However, from the little I know about what is going on, I have gotten the idea, that as yet, most parents who are students of *The Urantia Book* are not offering (or finding) rich spiritual experiences for their children outside of their home, and even in the home, the spiritual education often seems rather tentative and experimental, with some trepidation of turning the kids off, especially as they get older.

In this paper, I will attempt to offer some observations and experiences of over 25 years of working with children in groups -- in community -- and share some things that seem to help children to establish a sense of community, and to correlate these with what *The Urantia Book* says about spiritual community.

My experience has been primarily with school age children (kindergarten--6th grade) as a teacher over the last 20 years. I now "manage" a staff of 12 teachers who work with over 250 children of these ages. Observation and experimentation are the techniques which we have used over the years, plus making a lot of mistakes with kids. The ideals and ideas of *The Urantia Book* put these past and present experiences into a meaningful framework.

I am director of a school age day care center which is on the school grounds of a public elementary school in Walnut Creek, California. We have successfully established (and are still evolving) a community involving at least 750 people, including parents, grandparents, kids and staff. I also worked for 15 years with the children of the parents who were co-workers and volunteers in the Family of God Foundation. These children were 2,3,4,5 years old and we kind of ended up hanging out together while their parents worked and because I was a teacher. I felt a desire, not only to entertain them, keep them safe and happy, but to try to establish some sense of experience of being a group and acknowledging God, for this is what the adults were doing. Eventually we discovered the importance of RITUAL, which, as you know from *The Urantia Book*, is a basic glue of groups, especially early developing groups. So allow me to begin from there.

## Factors which are part of community for children in general which might transfer to spiritual community for children:

## RITUALS

## FIRE

The first thing which I found that held these young children spellbound was FIRE. "Fire was mixed up with magic in the minds of primitive fear-ridden mortals." "Some tribes worshiped fire as a deity itself; others revered it as the family symbol of the purifying and purging spirit of their venerated deities. Vestal virgins were charged with the duty of watching sacred fires, and in the twentieth century candles still burn as a part of the ritual of many religious services." (p.947C) So here we are fitting right in with magic and "primitive minds," and even fear. We lit a candle and very, very carefully passed it around as each child who wanted to said, "Thank you, God" (for something in his/her life). This was the beginning of a ceremony which was just repeated last year at the Jesus' birthday celebration with several teenagers and a little one held in its father's lap. This little "Thank you, God" ceremony has evolved of course and I will share with you some of the other things which seem to have enough meaning to the kids to have continued to be incorporated year after year. But, you have to have fire, whether it is a candle on the table at dinner, a candle passed around by the children, or carried by the children to an altar or special place.

#### TEMPLE BUILDING

The other thing which evolved was the building of a "temple." Children and building forts in special places is well known. And it had to happen here in the religious sense. Most of the time of our "ceremonies" were spent in building the temple and getting ready for our "Thank you, God" ceremony. The building of the temple was done with great care, experimenting, talking, and some arguing. All we needed to build a temple were some fairly big pieces of material, pretty if possible, some big pins (we used diaper pins, for those were available) and clothespins. (I think at one time we even "undiapered" a toddler in order to get a necessary pin.) The kids helped pin and tie the material to bushes and trees; we put some material and other little "totems" on the floor, our candle in the middle and sat in a circle.

#### FOOD

Snacks quickly became incorporated into the ceremony. We tried to have special things--little, tasty, pretty goodies which we could eat after we said, "Thank you, God." As there were always the more adventurous ones who showed how brave they were by putting their fingers through the candle as it went around, there were the hungry, eager ones who stuck their fingers into the cupcakes, or tried to get a crumb before everyone else. Part of learning to function as a group (a community) is to wait for the group to do something together and then to choose to participate or to contribute. This learning comes hard for some two or three year olds, as it does for some 40 and 50 year olds.

#### SINGING/MUSIC

Fortunately we have had adults in our community with wonderful voices and musical ability and they would sometimes join us and sing with the kids. But if it was just myself and the kids, with my musical abilities, we were lucky to sing Jesus Loves Me, which we did regularly, only we changed it: "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the MASTER (not Bible) tells me so." And the rest of it is as you remember it.

#### CLEAN UP

This was where the sense of community responsibility came into play with these young ones. We all took turns in the important event of blowing out the candle, helping to take down the temple, collecting the clothespins, and putting it all back (and rediapering the toddler). This was usually a fun, free time, rolling around in what was left of the temple and inventing games with the clothespins and forming the soft wax of the candle into things.

Now, I would like to jump ahead about 15 or so years: last year at the Jesus' birthday celebration in Golden Gate Park, sponsored by Golden Gate Circle of students of *The Urantia Book*, there were about 12 children of many ages who built a temple, with the addition of balloons, streamers, poles, and rugs to sit on. We sat inside with several candles and a large birthday cake for Jesus. The adults were about 1/2 block away in a large circle holding communion and worshipping. As soon as we finished our ceremony with the candle, saying "Thank you, God", and cutting and eating the cake, we began to plan what we were going to do for the adults. I am sure the angels had directed me to a garage sale where I bought a full bolt of beautiful golden 60" wide material. It is at least 1/2 block long. The kids planned which rhythm instrument they wanted; who wanted to sprinkle the flower petals, who wanted to lead the "parade," who wanted to squirt the good smelling water on the heads of the adults, and who would carry the gigantic pumpkin in honor of harvest (you use what's available). Then we quietly snuck out of the temple, leaving it in total disarray. The kids held sides of the beautiful material and set up a rhythm with their instruments. I walked ahead playing an Ocarina (the only thing I know how to play and then only one song). When we got to the adult circle the children encircled the gold material around the backs of the adults sitting on the ground, enclosing them in an exquisite symbolic golden circle; some of the children threw the flower petals over their heads; others sprinkled water and still others went inside the circle and gave flowers to each adult. The pumpkin ended up in the middle and the children went and sat by their parents. It was magical and meaningful.

I am not sharing this to start a cult or to say how ceremonies and rituals have to be done. I am sharing this as an example of how rituals and ceremonies can be developed at the level of the children, with their input and can be allowed to expand, with adult guidance and organizational skills. They love it. It is a process and an attitude on the part of the adults which frees the children to do it their way, which can be beautiful, exciting, and full of spirit.

Before I go onto another factor of community for children, I would like to share one more ritual which has provided a certain feeling of community and depth of ceremonial experience at our center. We always have rats--yes, rats--those little furry cute things with wiggly noses, long whiskers, and ugly, horrible long tails. They do make wonderful, holdable pets, but one of the more valuable aspects of them is that their life span is not too long--about 3 years for most. This means that in a three-year span children can see them mate, have babies, raise them, holding them, loving them; and then in the end walk quietly and respectfully past a cage that has a hand made sign: "Please be quiet. This rat needs to die in peace." We have lost count of the number of our rats that have "gone on" (and this has been speculated on much by the children). We have had circles where the rat who has just died and is still warm is passed around very gently and reverently from hand to hand as they say their last good byes. A kindergartner can be sitting next to a 6th grader as they engage in this almost sacred ceremony. For some children, this is the first time they have encountered death, and it is awesome to see something very precious that was moving around and eating yesterday, be so still today. I have stood back and watched over the years what the children do with this situation when they are faced with death and grief; and children being very practical little beings inevitably ask, "What do we do with it now?" They know they have to bury it. So they get shovels and start digging. We actually have kind of a "rat graveyard" and some of the kids who have been there 4 or 5 years can point out where various ones are buried. I remember one group who dug for almost a whole day because the ground was so hard, but they finally gathered around a little mound with a cross on top, flowers from our garden, and a sign: "Here lies Smokey our hamster. Death by choking." They figured it was choking because he was found with his needed. The k

I remember the very first ceremony for the grandfather of all rats--MacRat, who died of old age. He was a special rat because he lost most of his tail when the kids were erecting a block building and his tail got under a block and was stepped on by a kid. Anyway he had half a tail, which increased their feeling of compassion. They not only did all of the usual ceremonial things I have mentioned, but they got a teacher who could play a guitar, asked her to compose a song for MacRat, sat in a circle, some crying while the song was sung; they sat for many minutes of quiet remembering MacRat; then each got up and threw some dirt on the box in the hole and then it got covered up, flowers, cross, the whole bit. Do you see the value of this kind of ceremony? Some of these children had been denied the right to participate in a loved one's funeral because the adults couldn't handle the idea of death and funerals, but what a beautiful ceremony they put together when given the chance and how healthy was their view of death, of even an animal.

Enough said about rats. If I'm not careful, I will be accused of upholding a rat cult!

#### SOCIALIZATION

#### WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

The best definition I found for community was in the Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, way down the list of definitions: community--shared activity; social intercourse; fellowship, communion; esp: social activity marked by a feeling of unity but also individual participation completely willing and not forced or coerced and without loss of individuality. (In order that there may be a community, there must be conscious and purposeful sharing. --Ernest Barker.)

#### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY?

"The living experience in the religion of Jesus thus becomes the sure and certain technique whereby the spiritually isolated and cosmically lonely mortals of earth are enabled to escape personality isolation, with all its consequences of fear and associated feelings of helplessness. In the fraternal realities of the kingdom of heaven the faith sons of God find final deliverance from the isolation of the self, both personal and planetary. The God-knowing believer increasingly experiences the ecstasy and grandeur of spiritual socialization on a universe scale--citizenship on high in association with the eternal realization of the divine destiny of perfection attainment." (p. 1985B)

In the Garden of Eden "The entire purpose of the western school system of the Garden was socialization. The forenoon periods of recess were devoted to practical horticulture and agriculture, the afternoon periods to competitive play. The evenings were employed in social intercourse and the cultivation of personal friendships." (p. 835C)

Socialization began very early for Jesus. We are told that during his infancy, "In the home where Jesus chanced to be there were two other children about his age, and among the near neighbors there were six others whose ages were sufficiently near his own to make them acceptable playfellows." (p.1355C) Joseph felt especially strongly about Jesus being allowed to play like other children so that he wouldn't be deprived "of the helpful experience of learning how to adjust himself to children of his own age." (p.1355C)

Between the ages of eight to ten, even though Jesus received his moral training and spiritual culture in his own home, and his intellectual and theological education from the chazan, his "real education--that equipment of mind and heart for the actual test of grappling with the difficult problems of life--he obtained by mingling with his fellow men. It was this close association with his fellow men, young and old, Jew and gentile, that afforded him the opportunity to know the human race. Jesus was highly educated in that he thoroughly understood men and devotedly loved them." (p. 1368)

When he was 8, because he did so well in school, he got to spend one week out of each month away from home visiting his uncles and aunts at their farms or fishing villages. Socialization for Jesus was not an exclusive, inbred, narrow experience. His community widened year by year, until he finally came to understand that his community was the whole of mankind.

One of the great joys of working with many children of six different ages is watching them develop as they learn the skills of socialization. At the day care center, we watch as the 4 1/2 year olds come into the program almost totally concerned with self and own needs, grow into 5th graders anxious to serve and explore the bigger world. As we watch hundreds of children mingle daily, we are given a multitude of opportunities to participate in aspects of their socialization--from problem solving and conflict resolution to self control; from organizing self and one's own stuff within a group situation to sharing one's stuff with others; from pursuing one's own interests to helping each other; from self-realization to being aware of the needs of others--striving for the balance of their own individual rights and the rights of the group. We watch as they grapple with the needs of self and the needs of the group.

#### WHAT CAN WE DO AS COMMUNITY TO GUIDE THIS PROCESS OF SOCIALIZATION?

1. Be sure that we as adults aggressively study and put into practice the excellent current understandings about how children develop. Much of what is written now is based on more than 40 years of research and study about how children learn and grow; about what is developmentally appropriate at certain ages. For example, you don't make a 2-year-old sit for one hour listening to a preacher preach. (You don't successfully make adults do that either.) Children learn by doing; they learn in teams. *The Urantia Book* is full of the ways children learn. It is the responsibility of every adult who is to be around children to gain this knowledge, look at their own background, and then look at the individual child and respect his/her needs, abilities and age.

2. Provide a safe space for children--both physically and emotionally--where children can be themselves; pursue self-realization; go to an adult for holding, clarification or mediation, and have expectations of what it means to belong to the group.

3. Create a sense of belonging by involving the child in discussion regarding the environment, the problems; respect and listen to children's ideas and concerns; create a vision for the child of his/her responsibility to make the world a better place for all children. "We are beginning right here with our own environment and here's what you can do."

4. Expose children to a wide range of other children of different ethnic groups, different ages, different socio-economic levels, different talents and abilities. This will help children from a young age appreciate diversity. We go out of our way in our day care to point out the different talents of children. Nathan draws castles that look like you could go right inside. Katie can write interesting stories. Alex can hit home runs. Susan is creative at making up dances. Becky can make puppets and put on shows. This happens hundreds of times during the day--pointing out to other children the strengths of each. Things have changed in the world of crayons now too, as far as recognizing ethnic diversity. Remember the days when there was only one crayon for skin color--flesh? Now there are crayons and paints in many beautiful tones of browns, yellows, tans, reds, which are called skin tones. Every religion and culture has its stories and fairy tales. These can be read to children daily, giving them a flavor from around our planet in cultural and religious diversity. Fortunately it is a strong mandate coming from all sectors of education to promote appreciation of diversity.

#### **REQUIREMENTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, COMMUNITY OBLIGATIONS, AND SERVICE**

## SELF CONTROL

"And the *manifestation* of greatness on a world like Urantia is the exhibition of self-control. The great man is not he who `takes a city' or `overthrows a nation,' but rather `he who subdues his own tongue.'" (p. 317A)

The first and most basic responsibility which I believe must be considered in order for a child to experience successful community is to receive a call from the adult world to be responsible for him/herself. Now, I must remind you that I am talking about school age children--kindergarten--5th grade. This would not necessarily be expected, at this level anyway, with children who are younger than about 4 1/2. I often ask the question of the younger and older children, "If you don't control yourself, who will control you?" Of course the correct answer is, "You will" (meaning the teacher in charge) or "Someone else will." If a child is lacking in self-control, (and who isn't at some level?) then we will let that child know that s/he is being watched by all of the adults and perhaps even by the group, if such watchcare is demanded because of a child's lack of self-control. We will let the child know when his/her behavior is out of control or unacceptable. The child is always given a chance to choose to correct this objectionable behavior. Children this age don't like the feeling that they are going to be watched all the time and this, put together with the possibility that an adult will control them if they cannot control themselves, is a strong call for them to exercise their own power over themselves. I often put forth the saying in an appropriate moment that, "He who control himself is stronger than a king who rules a city," and children of this age seem to be able to understand this. Children like the ide of freedom. The more they show they can control themselves, the more freedom they have to "be their own boss." Children are not "bad" if they lack self-control. They need help because their energy level is too high, they have eaten "bad" food; they have had to sit too long, etc. Often we help children control or use up their "negative" energy (energy which keeps the rest of the group from enjoying a story or listening to each other), by having them do jumping jacks 100 or 200 times. They feel much better after

## RESPONSIBILITY OF OLDER KIDS FOR YOUNGER KIDS

In our day care center, we often talk in terms of older-younger children and what this means. Another way of putting it to them is, "Monkey see; Monkey do." The older kids (8-11) really enjoy this. We have experimented with this premise. An older kid will do something like stick out his/her tongue around a younger one and watch the younger one immediately do it also. The "Monkey see; Monkey do" principle can have many helpful ramifications if you can get the older kids in a group on "the right track." At the day care center we now are reaping the benefits of working with the older kids since kindergarten. This can mean from 4 to 6 years of training. I would like to emphasize that we still have many problems, but we can ask any of the "older" kids to help out with a younger one and usually they will do so eagerly. This can be anything from tying a shoe (better yet, teaching the younger one to tie), to reading a story, to putting on a bandage.

We now have middle school volunteers who grew up in day care and have come back to work in our environment and are showing forth the fruits of years of training in taking the responsibility for the training of the younger. We can put these 7th or 8th grade kids in most areas, and give them responsibility for watching over five or six kids in their area. This could be computers, games, pool, drama, blocks, etc. Because they are older they seem to naturally have a sense of responsibility for the younger and like the position. They love to teach the younger ones what they know. And as you are well aware, teaching what you have just learned is a universe principle: "As morontia ascenders studied and worked on the worlds of the local universe, so spirit ascenders continue to master new worlds while they practice at giving out to others that which they have imbibed at the experiential founts of wisdom." (p. 342C) And on Government on a Neighboring Planet: "After the first three years all pupils become assistant teachers, instructing those below them." (p. 812C) Rarely do the older kids misuse their position; and if they do slip and utter a cuss word, we hear about it immediately from the younger, who cannot as yet handle the gray areas.

## REQUIREMENTS AND COMMUNITY OBLIGATIONS

Once again, I am going to use examples from my "laboratory" at the day care center because I think the principles represented by these examples can easily be put into operation in other arenas of community. It is interesting to watch how some of the desires for overcare of the environment comes about as a natural evolution. Each year, there seems to evolve a group of kids, usually boys, without any adult encouragement, who seem to want to take on the responsibility of watching out for problems around the day care environment. These are probably the policeman of the future. They call themselves by various names--the three that have surfaced in the last couple of years are: The Peace Patrol, Spy Club Incorporated, and Search and Rescue. Each time a club surfaces, a group following an obvious leader type will come and say they want to set up a club. I ask them to write up for me their purpose and why they want to be a club and what they are going to do as a club. Their main purposes turn out with the same theme: to keep the peace; to look for and solve problems; to report on other kids who are causing problems; to look for suspicious activities of others outside day care. What we are observing here, I believe, is a desire on the part of school age children to participate in helping their community keep order. They can and want to take much more responsibility than most adults are willing to let them have. We are underestimating, undervaluing, and perhaps negating the abilities and altruistic desires of children if we do not allow them to take responsibilities in their communities, and in the community in general. *The Urantia Book* tells us how civic responsibility works on that other planet. "Children remain legally subject to their parents until they are fifteen when the first initiation into civic responsibility is held. Thereafter, every five years for five successive periods similar public exercises are held for such age groups at which their obligations to parents are lessened, while new civic and social res

## SERVICE

"Spiritual living mightily increases true self-respect. But self-respect is not self-admiration. Self-respect is always co-ordinate with the love and service of one's fellows. It is not possible to respect yourself more than you love your neighbor; the one is the measure of the capacity of the other." (p. 1740A)

There is no question that self-esteem is a building block of success for children. Of course this foundation is laid in the home, but the wider community adds to the child's self esteem by expanding the realms within which the child can do things which make him/her feel good. Serving others is one of these realms that the adult guides should work vigorously to provide. It is not easy to find realms these days where children can really be of service, aside from perfunctorily emptying the garbage at home and cleaning the board at school. Our culture today is much geared toward making the child happy and fulfilling the child's needs and entertaining the child. This is not the way children develop compassion and a sense of responsibility toward others. All communities should find ways for its children to serve others. At our day care center, we take groups of children to a retirement home where they play games or just visit, listening to stories of war wounds and grandchildren that the elders tell. When I was working with the FOG children, I would pile these little 3, 4, and 5 year olds in my car and drive to the nearest nursing home. These old, old people just loved to look at and touch these little ones and the little ones were told they were helping the older ones to "feel life." And it didn't take much looking for the children to realize how little life there was around. They came away talking about how they made an old man smile who looked like he was going to cry; about how they gave an old lady one of their Bingo numbers so she could win and be happy.

Our middle school volunteers are so eager to serve when they come to the day care after school. We do not even begin to use this energy. A walk through the Mission district in San Francisco, giving pocket change to mothers, children and old men and women, puts a lasting image in a teenager's mind and perhaps even creates a desire to do something about it someday. Some parents think they are protecting their children by not allowing them to even see such misery, much less encourage them to do something about it. At Christmas, in our area of California, there is a very active Christmas bureau called Adopt a Family which collects food and presents and distributes them to thousands of poverty stricken families. We "adopt" 10 or so families at the center, and the children willingly give up a present or two of their own as they bring in presents for people that have almost nothing.

"Service--purposeful service, not slavery--is productive of the highest satisfaction and is expressive of the divinest dignity. Service--more service, increased service, difficult service, adventurous service, and at last divine and perfect service--is the goal of time and the destination of space." (p. 316C)

We can provide the opportunity for children to experience this "highest satisfaction" within community. When they see other children so serving, it quickens their own desires and they will model after what they see other children doing and telling about.

## FOUNDATION OF SPIRITUAL REALITIES: VALUES AND LOYALTIES

The one quote from *The Urantia Book* which has saved me from the guilt of the many mistakes I have made with children and from my own human weaknesses which seem to become more obvious when I am in the presence of children, is the quote on loyalty:

"Children are permanently impressed only by the loyalties of their adult associates; precept or even example is not lastingly influential. Loyal persons are growing persons, and growth is an impressive and inspiring reality." (p. 1094D)

In order to answer the obvious question of "What are these loyalties to which children respond?" and extend the meaning of this quote, let's look at page 2088:

"Always did the Master co-ordinate the faith of the soul with the wisdom-appraisals of seasoned experience. Personal faith, spiritual hope, and moral devotion were always correlated in a matchless religious unity of harmonious association with the keen realization of the reality and sacredness of all human loyalties--personal honor, family love, religious obligation, social duty, and economic necessity."

These loyalties are what children will be "grocking" on an unconscious level every minute they are in our presence. We do not tell them these things; we live them. They will be listening when we don't know they are listening; they will be watching our face as we have a chance to get into a movie cheaper if we lie (personal honor); they will be aware if we go out of our way to help others (social duty); they will watch how we treat each other and give support and love in our families (family love). Whether or not you have thought about religious training in the home will become more apparent as they grow day by day (religious obligation). They know, on some level how we make our money and on what we spend it. They look at how we use our free time. When we really become aware of how pervasively this truth about children responding to our loyalties must be in our everyday life, we are faced with the biggest challenge of spiritual community: living the truths and the values that are put forth in this revelation and which are operating in all genuine religions of the world.

Too often, it seems, parents, communities, churches, society have kept spiritual realities and spiritual development in a realm all by itself. "It's Sunday, or Saturday; time for your religious training. This is the time to pray, to read your Bibles, etc." Now, hopefully, students of true and genuine religion know better. They know that religion and spiritual growth is a way of life. But in order to make this a reality, we have to develop a continual and progressive consciousness about how we are living our values. What are some of these values which can be embraced in a living consciousness as we live with children in community?

## RELATIONSHIP

"Values are not conceptual illusions; they are real, but always they depend on the fact of relationships." (p.1097A) If we are to translate this into working with children in community, we must ask the question: How are we interacting with our children, and how are we teaching our children to interact with each other, which promotes the value of relationship?

It's nice to think of interaction and relationship as being a warm, loving, caring experience, and hopefully most of the time it is. But sometimes we notice that what kids around the center, and perhaps kids anywhere, are really interested in is: How do the adults solve their problems? Do the adults see problems as ways of learning things? What is the difference in the learning experience of a child when s/he observes a situation when (a) an adult getting a child in trouble because that child hit another and (b) the adult helping the two children to learn to express their feelings to each other and try to understand where the problem happened and how it can be worked out better next time? One way is punitive and isolating; the other establishes the value of relationship. This is not to say that the child who hit another won't experience a consequence. But the emphasis must be put first on the relationship between those two children and what went wrong and what can be done next time to solve the problem without hurting. These techniques lead the children to understand each other and look at each other's motives:

"You can best discover values in your associates by discovering their motivation. If some one irritates you, causes feelings of resentment, you should sympathetically seek to discern his viewpoint, his reasons for such objectionable conduct. If once you understand your neighbor, you will become tolerant, and this tolerance will grow into friendship and ripen into love." "If you could only fathom the motives of your associates, how much better you would understand them. If you could only know your fellows, you would eventually fall in love with them." (p. 1098C)

If children are encouraged to talk and listen to each other before they get in "trouble," so as to understand what went wrong, what was the other thinking or feeling; then the emphasis for the kids is not on, "Oh, Oh, I am going to get in trouble," but rather on the parties involved understanding what to do next time there is a problem. We use this technique with hundreds of children at the center. You will see even kindergarten children "talking about it" with each other. The teacher or adult stands by as a mediator or moderator, helping each to ask the questions which will bring forth understanding. This technique helps tremendously with creating a feeling a community, because it creates understanding which creates love.

## PROBLEM SOLVING AND CONFLICTS

"New religious insights arise out of conflicts which initiate the choosing of new and better reaction; habits in the place of older and inferior reaction patterns. New meanings only emerge amid conflict, and conflict persists only in the fact of refusal to espouse the higher values connoted in superior meanings." (p. 1097C)

Most of us do fine when the road is smooth, but just let a few bumps come up like spilt milk on a nice tablecloth and a problem becomes an excuse for dumping on a kid rather than a mistake from which a lesson can be learned. Children seem especially interested in problems and conflicts. When something happens around the center which is a problem we usually do not make an attempt to keep it quiet or bring it over to the corner. We want the children to see how mistakes are handled and problems are solved. We want them to hear two children telling each other how they feel. We do not want to isolate them from problem solving because it is often through problem solving that the nitty gritty of the spiritual life can come through. If "Mortals only learn wisdom by experiencing tribulation" (p. 556D), and "Success may generate courage and promote confidence, but wisdom comes only from the experiences of adjustment to the results of one's failures" (p. 1779D), then we must become more conscious of the many daily, normal and ordinary things that go on in children's lives which may help them develop wisdom from their failures, mistakes, and problems, rather than these becoming a breeding ground for fear of making mistakes and being put down for trying and failing.

Many a time I have heard a parent say in a voice, the tone of which adds, "You dummy," after something like, "What, you left your coat in your classroom again? (You dummy.)" Children first respond to body language and they are reading unnoticeable subliminal changes in our faces and bodies even before we come out with the tone of voice which puts them down for making a mistake. It is a wonderful experience for the child when a parent responds with, "Oh dear, you forgot your coat again. Let's see if we can work out a plan for you to remember it next time. What ideas do you have?" This may not seem like a spiritually developmental step for the child but the parent is teaching the child that s/he is not dumb for leaving their coat behind, and is helping the child to think about next time--what wisdom can be developed from the present experience. Things like this happen everyday which I think are the true foundation of spiritual realities for children--the true definition of morality--how we treat each other.

## TRUTH, BEAUTY, GOODNESS

There seem to be many kids in the generation now in their early 20's or so who grew up without these concepts because their parents were afraid to emphasize these concepts in their moral training. Even teachers in classrooms have stayed away from these concepts for the fear of teaching "religion." I believe that community can be furthered with children when they are called to live according to the highest; to make decisions which honor the goodness of life and each other; to seek for truth and to do good to each other. It is powerful when the call is made to groups of children, because there are the ones who heed the call and they can become the moral standard bearers to the ones who are weaker or less clear about where real strength is. We have had discussions about the "baddest people in the world," and, of course, Hitler and Hussein are on everyone's list. Then I have made a line for them in their minds and have told them that there is good and evil and that they can choose which side to be on. Some are really not sure what side to be on, because unfortunately in our society, good has been intertwined with female and wishy washy and not very much fun or exciting, so many of the more adventurous ones, especially the males, are lost to the side of the "bad," which definitely carries more adventure. We are told on page 159D that love of adventure, curiosity, and dread of monotony are traits inherent in evolving human nature. How can the adult world make Truth, Beauty, and Goodness adventurous? I am not sure what the answers are, but we must be creative and open to all possibilities and share with each other what we find out works.

Being out in nature is certainly one way to allow for a combination of adventure and religious experience. Kids will come together in community just at the thought of the possibility of having adventures together, of exploring the world and making discoveries. At the center we take periodic "backpacking trips" where we go up into the hills on a 5-mile hike with the possibilities of snakes and bulls, and high hills that one could fall down. On the last trip a few months ago most of the 50 or so of us were walking on the cow path but about 15 (all boys) wanted to climb a huge hill and walk along parallel with us on the hill. These were children of all ages. The more adventurous ones needed that extra sense of challenge. It looked to me like the hill was almost straight up and down. They loved the challenge of getting to the top and then getting down, falling and rolling and complaining about how hard it was, but they talked about the conquest of that hill all the way back to the center.

I would like to end this sharing with the call which Norman Lear gave in 1990 to about 8,500 teachers gathered at the National Teacher's Association Conference in Kansas. He began by telling teachers everywhere to pay attention to the "mysterious inner life, the fertile, invisible realm that is the wellspring of our species' creativity and morality. It is that portion of our being that gives rise to our sense of awe and wonder and longing for truth, beauty and a higher order of meaning. For want of a better term, one could call it the spiritual life of our species."

And he ended his talk 45 minutes later after about 12 interruptions of applause with these inspirational words:

"The progress of our species, I believe, requires whatever horizontal progress must yet be made. The progress requires a giant vertical leap, a leap in our inner development. We have been embarked from the beginning of human history on a search for transcendent meaning, connecting with a higher order and that is where the next great improvement in our condition, where the next bit of progress must occur.

"We must respect each other's faiths, of course, but we can't be so squeamish or parochial as to think that one of the great human imperatives of our time, the rediscovery and reinvention of a common spiritual life in our desolate modern age, can or should be suppressed. The answer is not to banish these issues from the schools, it is to fling open the doors and find new ways of learning more about each others' values and spiritual traditions and what we all hold in common as a species.

"If one were to look at a very long river, one might see flora and fauna and trees and shrubs of varying nature along the many miles of its banks. If we think of our many and varied religions as uniquely different trees along a thousand-mile river and appreciate that they are all nurtured by the same stream, can we not agree to discuss that stream openly, freely and anywhere and everywhere as a river of common values? It will both nurture all of our spiritual traditions while uniting us as a people. In that metaphor, perhaps lies our challenge.

"There is ample reason to strip away our cultural conditioning and give free rein to a fresh examination of what we regard as sacred in the universe, on earth and in our daily lives. Now, I realize that you in this hall already face enormous pressures and problems in your classrooms; and you hardly need another responsibility, but the problems and needs of the culture have thrust this upon you. A civilization cannot progress when the majority of its youth devote their interests and their energies to the materialistic pursuits of the sensory or outer world. When the young neglect to interest themselves in ethics, philosophy, the fine arts, religion, and cosmology or in the values of truth, beauty, goodness, love, loyalty and devotion, civility itself ceases.

"So wouldn't it be wonderful, if in the process of teaching, you uncover or discover a new, more spiritually satisfying notion of progress; one that relies less on a millennial faith in technology and rediscovers the center of our being. One could imagine this search taking place in other institutions of our society, but none are as suited to this task or as likely to have as great an influence as you. `In the long run,' wrote Henry David Thoreau, `men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.'

"You could not aim higher or better prepare the next generation for the world that we live in than to teach it to look deeper into itself to that place that humans from the very beginning of time have shared--the same sense of awe and wonder as they groped for meaning. I thank you so much."

And I thank you for going with me on some of my personal journeys with children. If you and I and all other adults get clear on our own values, attempt to live them, and courageously, assertively, and lovingly go forth with our younger ones into the adventurous light of God's will, then most of them will come along, eventually. And remember we are not doing this alone. Each of our children has or will have his/her own Thought Adjuster. The Universe Mother Spirit encircuits each one with the seven powerful adjutants; the Spirit of Truth is pervasive, and there are millions of angels of all types who stand by willing and ready to help bring us and our children into the everlasting community of our Father's eternal worlds of love and service. All we have to do is live the truth!