

Creating Space for Parents to Tell Their Sacred Stories

— Susan Weber

Awareness of what it is to incarnate in this time of human evolution calls for working with children and families in a new way. There have always been gifts and challenges at any time of incarnation. If we look at the painting of Sistine Madonna and the faces of the children in the clouds, we can call to mind what extraordinary courage children have in coming to the earth in our time. If they have that much courage, at least someone can be here to receive and support these children and their parents on their journey. How do we help each human being find his individual path to this personal mansion of the human physical body? The gift we can give is to offer the context and opportunities for him to find the way to who he is and what he has come to earth to do.

We have ourselves biographical moments when we feel we have aligned ourselves in knowing what our earthly task is. Sometimes we take the right fork in the road, sometimes a detour. From anthroposophy we know that each person does have a destiny and comes with pre-earthly intentions. Each human has a reason to come to the earth. What a gift it is to hold this picture, and be in relationship with the child to see his gift. Obstacles are part of the journey, making us resilient. But obstacles always want to be manageable and want to be carried in relationship with other humans. The reason we come to the earth is to meet one another. We have come to encounter one another. It is not always easy, but it is the relationships that make us human. This is the grounding anchor in the world—relationship.

How can we support parents in finding affirmation in their new role as parent? Like other initiatives that want to support healthy family life out of the resources of Waldorf education, Sophia's Hearth Family Center was created as a center that would acknowledge, respect, honor, and accept families' choices no matter what those choices were. When this center was envisioned, there was a prevailing attitude among Waldorf educators that young children belong at home. But the reality was that babies were not at home. They were in the grocery store or Walmart with their mothers; moth-

ers were working. mothers were isolated and alone with their new roles as mothers. In the past when mothers were expected to stay home, not every woman was happy with that role. Many young mothers who had prepared for professional careers were miserable. What was called into being was a center that wished to support whatever the family situation was. So Sophia's Hearth offered parent-child groups or, for working mothers, the highest quality childcare available for their needs. This, it was envisioned, would honor parent choices and validate them. We have humbly learned much through the doing of this work.

To be helpful to other human beings, we have to become more human in ourselves. As adults we have to nourish our sense of well-being because we are the imitative examples of what a human being is. We early childhood teachers have the responsibility of bringing the children into their bodies, so we have to set the example of doing this for ourselves, too. For example, we might go on a hike in nature to replenish and refresh ourselves. Eurythmy brings us into our bodies in such a way that we become more and more human. This is our assignment! We all need to be moving to feel life in our bodies. **Touch, movement, joy, and patience** are healing for all human beings. These help to buffer children and adults against the small and great traumas that may confront us. We know that Waldorf education is a healing education in its own right, and perhaps we just have to additionally fill our pockets more with the pedagogy than we have done yet. We want to feel joyful in what we do, of which we have a grasp. This commitment and attitude will help us to assist parents on their own journeys.

Another thing we can do to help the children is to put the Madonna's cloak around the parent, the adult. Cloaking the parent gives him or her a greater capacity to put the cloak around the child. We can do this by extending true interest toward the other adult. Most of us did not go into early childhood education because we were interested in the adults. But we want to meet the other adult without fear, with acceptance, and trust

in the destiny of the parent and of the child's choice to be with this parent. We may not understand, but the child is in a particular family out of his freedom. Rudolf Steiner has said it is getting harder and harder to find the right body. Sometimes children have to take other doorways in. The fit of temperament between parent and child may not be apparent to us. Parenting is hard because we will not know for decades if we have done the right things. As teachers we have to trust in the process, that things are happening for the child and parent in invisible ways that we can only get a glimmer of.

"How did my birth change my parents' lives?" It is a surprising exercise to try to imagine this. The birth of a child is an actual life crisis for every parent. Many of us do not meet the parents when the babies are tiny, and we do not have a feeling for what the parent has been through. By the time we meet them, habits and the gesture toward the child are more or less in place. Anna Lups, an anthroposophical doctor in New York state, feels that bearing a child is the initiation experience for women in our time. This thought can help us to appreciate how enormous it is for us to welcome this parent-child dyad into our care. If we can welcome the other with warmth and interest, something very special can happen. This wraps the garment around the child and parent that opens the door to new possibilities.

When we become parents, we are throwing off a garment, too—perhaps of how we were parented. We throw something off and make something new of our own. We are now in the Michaelic time where we all have to find our way in loneliness and solitude. There is an epidemic of post-partum depression for mothers, and also for fathers. If the parent is suffering, the child may manifest attachment difficulties. We are not all to become therapists, but we need to be sensitive, compassionate, and empathetic to each family's situation. How can we, as educators, bring something that is enlivening and safe and healing?

In parent-infant groups there can be a sacred space into which the parents speak their stories. This is a place for others to listen to the story. When we invite someone to tell a sacred story, the healing is there in the telling. By listening, we can put a sheath around the parents. In listening we use our higher senses, our soul listening.

There are questions we can pose as appropriate to our settings. Sometimes we are trying to get to know a parent individually. Sometimes we may be working with a parent-child group and would like to stimulate group sharing. Some possible questions may be: *Who were you before the birth of this baby?* This is an invi-

tation to share stories. *What are you most proud of in the parenting of this child? What is the most joyful thing that has happened? What role did you play in your family of origin? Are you re-enacting this in your own parenting? What do you remember about discipline in your own childhood? How does that impact your interactions with your child?*

How do we find abundance in the families who come to us and celebrate who they are? In our time we are building toward the future of humanity and constantly experience the gulf between our ideals and the reality of life. One goal for the future is community building with our families. We live in the time of the consciousness soul in which we often find ourselves working out of capacities we don't yet have. We are grateful that Rudolf Steiner has given us tools to make our way into the future. Through anthroposophy we know that we can receive help from the spiritual world. It is our striving, study, and openness to the realities of spiritual life that is sustenance for the hierarchies we wish to engage as our helpers. We have to be creative! Life and work in community is a possibility for reconnecting us with these higher beings.

The goal for us is to find a relationship to the serving will. If I can become who the parent needs me to be, I have offered an extraordinary gift. I have to set aside my concern that the family does not have a perfect rhythm (for example); I try to become the servant to them. Parents come to us out of optimism. But too often they end up feeling not good enough. We want them to feel abundance. Offering to others a serving will enables them to develop at their own pace. We generate soul warmth in which everything becomes more pliable.

Rudolf Steiner describes qualities we need to develop in our time:

When another human being suffers, I suffer.

When we are in our spiritual life, we have absolute, complete freedom. Each one's spiritual path is personal and chosen in freedom. I must not impose my spiritual values upon others. We have spiritual equality.

We also have to have freedom of thought. At festival times we want to bring universal, archetypal pictures that are rich and true. We have to penetrate to archetypes in life that are authentic and that leave a space for the parent to be active.

We must have courage when we fail. We must not be afraid to apologize. We have to have courage to reach out to the other human being. We can apply these principles to our work with parents. Doing this can bring us joy; and the spiritual hierarchies will become interested in us and come to our aid. ♦