



STEP OUT OF YOUR PAST AND GIVE YOUR CHILD A FUTURE *THE FUNDAMENTALS IN TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO BE HAPPY*

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The Basis of Self-Esteem

The most essential teaching which needs to flow from parents to children is a fundamental sense of innate worthiness and greatness, characteristic to every human being. Learning this at home will create an indestructible basis of self-esteem. Later on in life this kind of self-esteem does not have to be learned, defended or protected. And you do not need others to recognize it constantly. You do not have to invest a fortune in psychotherapy. You will always have a natural, unshakable feeling for what is good and right for you.

The challenge, however, in teaching this to our children is that we must learn it ourselves FIRST before we can pass it on truthfully.

Unless you practice some kind of introspection, contemplation or meditation, you cannot become aware of a state of being beyond the stories of your mind. As long as the main program in our mind is centered around our sense of limited abilities and our basic distrust in ourselves, it is not possible to learn who we really are and to unravel, what Eastern philosophers have unanimously called »our great human potential«.

Teresa de Avila, a Spanish mystic from the 16th century said in her book »The Interior Castle« that it is a person's utmost duty in life to find out who they truly are. For her that was where all learning started, where it culminated.

How much we are willing to rise above the misunderstandings of self-blame, self-doubt and self-deceit will decide how much we are able to help our children to open up to their own boundless possibilities.

Eastern traditions, such as Buddhism, Zen and philosophical Yoga, are very outspoken about the issue of self-knowledge:

If you lack self-knowledge (which does not arise out of psychological brooding but from intense awareness of our own unlimited consciousness, our own ocean of love), the world we experience will always be just a network of our past experiences. Our life then is a result of our own limited self-awareness, our own automatic inner dialogue.

What You See Is What You Get

In the early nineties two Chilean researcher found out that people are capable of changing their clear sensory perceptions in accordance with old impressions, totally independent of the actual measurable facts.

They conducted many experiments in this research and I just want to introduce one of them here. They led test participants into a room brightly lit by artificial lighting, where they showed them fully ripe tomatoes. Everyone was asked to describe the exact color of these tomatoes. Of course, all of them described variations of red as was normal for ripe tomatoes...if it were not for the artificial lighting which had turned these tomatoes into a bluish green, with no trace of red! This was measured with spectrometers and also was videotaped. Nor red at all. Then people were shown the same tomatoes in daylight. The result was the same: red as ripe tomatoes are.

The brain actually changed the input from the eyes to match its memory and did not perceive what was in front of it. Even if people were told that the color red did not appear in the artificial lighting, people were unable to see anything but this red.

Now that has powerful implications for our parenting work. We perceive our children not as they are but tainted by the effects of our own upbringing, our own history. Unless we develop the ability to step back and think and contemplate, our home will just be a reaction to our parents' home, our child rearing will be either a copy of what we went through, some variation or the opposite of it.

I am not talking about disastrous childhood experiences, but about acting out of memory without even being aware of doing so.

A Slap From The Past

In my own childhood corporal punishment was an accepted practice of child rearing. And as a boy it was considered to toughen you up if you got treated more severely and with more violence than girls were.

When we had our daughter, I was 39 and had already spent many years learning about myself. I has stepped into a process of healing the inner wounds of my childhood and understanding the human tendency to think that what we experience is the truth and not just our made-up ideas about it.

At two years of age my daughter went through a phase where she started to express her emotions very physically (must ring a lot of bells for you reading this!). And one day she slapped me, with her tiny hand and seemingly a good feel for using the power of velocity. The sting of the hit in my face brought out an amazing, fairly controlled reaction in me.

I did not react out of »how dare you hit me!?!« but I was thinking that I need to teach her that it is not appropriate to hit people. I would just give her an experience of how that felt by hitting her back, so she would know how this hurts and that you just don't do that.

Fortunately my meditation practice bore fruit at that moment. While I was raising my hand to »give her a taste of what she just did« I paused for a second, long enough to see that my big hand would be unable to let her feel how I felt when her tiny hand struck my face. I was shocked, how easy it was for me to decide to hit her, how this made so much sense to me, how normal it felt.

I was only doing what was so normal for me in the depth of my own past. Now, for many of you this is a strange situation: How does he do that? Sit back and »think«, where is spontaneity, don't we have the right to our own reaction as well?

No, I think we do not when it comes to the well-being of our children! If we want to stop reacting to our own past and offer our children a truly fresh home, full of respect, understanding and guidance, we have to know how to pause and think. We have to find ways to vigorously overcome our old pattern, or at least: become aware of them.

Growing Up For The Sake Of Love

One of my coaches once said that a child's problems always start with his or her parents. As a parent that is not easy to accept. But when we are able to recognize our issues we can start seeing the great purity and perfection in our children. We can grasp the gift they are offering us: a loving and forceful command to grow up, to evolve, to shed our misunderstandings and self-limitations!

Their powerful love lures us into this development. The question will be whether our love for our children is stronger than our clinging to our unresolved, often unconscious, wounds.

This necessary inner work can not only be approached from a western psychological point of view. We need to go beyond the fickleness and constant movement of our mind if we want to understand and experience our and anyone else's greatness. This inner state can be experienced when the mind calms down.

Without a meditation practice, where you calm the whirlwind of thoughts and emotions inside yourself life will be a pattern of repetitive limitations, events and subconscious fear. If we cannot overcome this attitude that something is wrong with us, and that someone will find out one day we are not able to teach our children how to BE.

Our willingness to evolve, heal and reach beyond our past is the most valuable investment into the future of our children. It shows them that pain can be healed, and that happiness is the natural state of someone who has overcome his inner inhibitions.

So, the question is, what can I do and how can I find a practice which will help me to »grow up«.

Of course, as we all come from different directions in life, we need different approaches to dissolve our misunderstandings, to heal our hearts.

I would look for someone who has steeped her- or himself in the practices they teach. I would try things out. This is America: you try and then you buy. Eastern traditions seem to approach these issues in a very pragmatic way, and, contrary to western psychology, Eastern psychology is based in a philosophy which extols the greatness of a human being. It is not interested not fixing you, it is trying to show you that all you need to do is to acknowledge the possibility of your own beauty, your own unlimited potential.

What often arrives here in the west is body work which is great as a tool but not as a goal. Some form of a contemplation/meditation practice has to be there as well, in order to inspire a profoundly different inner attitude. I also would look for something you can do at home, in your own space, in your own time.

This is not just a question of our lifestyle, our fast-paced lives, where taking the time to enjoy is an optional luxury. Something has happened to our way we treat and prepare our foods.



This text is a publication of Uwe Vamdev Franz. He practices and teaches yoga since 1977.
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