

Our Relation to Children by C.W. Leadbeater

# **Our Relation to Children**

**by C.W. Leadbeater**

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It cannot be denied that from the theosophical standpoint the subject of our relation to children is an exceedingly important and practical one. Realizing, as we must, the purpose for which the ego [ relatively permanent self, not the personality ] descends into incarnation, and knowing to how great an extent its attainment of that purpose depends upon the training given to its various vehicles during their childhood and growth, we cannot but feel, if we think at all, that a tremendous responsibility attaches to all of us who are in any way connected with children, whether as parents, elder relatives, or teachers. It is well, therefore, that we should consider what hints Theosophy can give us as to the way in which we can best discharge this responsibility.

It may seem presumptuous that a bachelor should venture to offer suggestions to parents upon a subject so especially their own; so I ought, perhaps, to preface such remarks as I wish to make by saying that, though I have none of my own, I have always been fond of children, and in very close relation with them through almost the whole of my life — for many years as a Sunday school teacher, then as a clergyman, school-manager and choir trainer, and as headmaster of a large boys' school. So that I am, at any rate, speaking from long, practical experience, and not merely vaguely theorizing.

Before making suggestions, however, I should like to draw attention to the present condition of our relation to children in the midst of European civilization. Our children regard grown-up people (in the mass) with scarcely veiled hostility, or, at the best, with a kind of armed neutrality, and always with deep distrust, as foreigners whose motives are incomprehensible to them, and whose actions are perpetually interfering in the most unwarrantable and apparently malicious manner with their right to enjoy themselves in their own way. I should strongly advise every parent to read Kenneth Grahame's *The Golden Age*; it puts the children's point of view better than any other book which I know.

Many a man, or woman, thinks of children only as noisy, dirty, greedy, clumsy, selfish and generally objectionable; and he never realizes that there may be a good deal of selfishness in this point of view of his, and that if any part of his indictment is true, the fault has been not so much in the children themselves as in the unreasonable way in which they have been brought up; furthermore, that in any case his duty is not to widen the chasm between them and himself by adopting an attitude of dislike and distrust, but rather to endeavour to improve the position of affairs by judicious kindness and hearty, patient friendliness and sympathy.

Surely there is something wrong about such unsatisfactory relations; surely some improvement might be brought about in this unfortunate condition of mutual hostility and mistrust. Of course, there are honourable exceptions — there are children who trust their teachers and teachers who trust their students, and I myself have never found any difficulty in winning the confidence of the juveniles by treating them properly; but in a sadly large number of instances the case is as I have described it.

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## In Oriental Countries

That it need not be so is shown not only by the exceptions mentioned above, but by the condition of affairs which we find existing in some oriental lands. I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting Japan, but I hear from those who have been there and have made some study of this question, that there is no country in the world where children are so well and so sensibly treated — where their relations with their elders are so completely satisfactory. Harshness, it is said, is entirely unknown, yet the children in no way presume upon the gentleness of the older people. In India and Ceylon also, on the whole, the relations of children and adults are certainly more rational than they usually are in England, though I have occasionally seen instances of undue severity there which show that those countries have not yet attained quite so high a level as Japan in this respect.

No doubt this is partly due to the difference of race. The oriental child usually has not the irrepressible animal spirits and the intense physical activity of his English representative, nor has he his pronounced aversion to mental exertion. Strange and incomprehensible as it would sound to the ears of a British schoolboy, the Indian child is really eager to learn, and is always willing to do any amount of work out of school-hours in order that he may make more rapid progress. It is no injustice to the average English boy to say that he regards play as the most important part of his life, and that he looks upon lessons as distinctly a bore to be avoided as far as possible, or perhaps as a kind of game which he has to play against the teacher. If the latter can force him to learn anything, that counts as a score to the side of authority: but if he can anyhow escape without learning a lesson, then he in turn has scored a point. In the East, such a child as this is the exception and not the rule; the majority of them are really anxious to learn, and co-operate intelligently with their teacher instead of offering him ceaseless though passive resistance.

Perhaps if I describe a little incident which I have more than once witnessed in Ceylon, it will help my readers to understand how different the position of children really is in an oriental race. Readers of *The Arabian Nights* will remember how it constantly happens that when some king or great man is sitting in judgement, a casual passer-by — perhaps a porter or beggar — breaks in and offers his opinion on the matter in hand, and is politely listened to, instead of being summarily arrested or ejected for such a breach of the proprieties.

Impossible as this seems to us, it was undoubtedly absolutely true to life, and on a smaller scale the same sort of thing occurs today, as I myself have seen. It came in the course of my work to travel about among the villages of Ceylon, trying to induce their residents to appreciate the advantages of education, and to found schools in which their children could be systematically taught their own religion instead of being left either to the rather haphazard instruction of the monks at the pansalas, or to the proselytizing efforts of the Christian missionaries.

When I arrived at a village I called upon the headman, and asked him to convoke the inhabitants to hear what I had to say; and after the address the chief people of the place usually held a sort of council, to decide where and how their school should be built and how they could best set about the work. Such a council was generally held in the verandah of the headman's house or under a great tree close by, with the whole village in attendance around the debaters.

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More than once on such occasions I have seen a small boy of ten or twelve stand up respectfully before the great people of his little world, and suggest, deferentially, that if the school were erected in the place proposed it would make it exceedingly inconvenient for such and such children to attend; and in every case the small boy was treated precisely as an adult would have been, the local grandees listening courteously and patiently, and allowing their due weight to the juvenile's arguments. What would happen if in England an agricultural labourer's child publicly offered a suggestion to the county magnates gathered in solemn assembly, one hardly dares to imagine; probably that child's suppression would be summary and unpleasant; but as a matter of fact the situation is absolutely unthinkable under our present conditions — more is the pity!

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### **Better Understanding Needed**

But how, it may be asked, is it proposed that this position of mutual mistrust and misunderstanding should be improved? Well, it is evident that in cases where this breach already exists, it can be bridged over only by unwearying kindness, and by gradual, patient but constant efforts to promote a better understanding by steadily showing unselfish affection and sympathy; in fact by habitually putting ourselves in the child's place and trying to realize exactly how all these matters appear to him. If we, who are adults, had not so entirely forgotten our own childish days, we should make far greater allowances for the children of today, and should understand and deal with them much better.

This is, however, very emphatically one of the cases in which the old proverb holds good, which tells us that prevention is better than cure. If we will but take a little trouble to begin in the right way with our children from the very first, we shall easily be able to avoid the undesirable state of affairs which we have been describing. And this is exactly where Theosophy has many a valuable hint to offer to those who are in earnest in wishing to do their duty by the young ones committed to their charge.

Of course, the absolute nature of this duty of parents and teachers towards children must first be recognized. We cannot too strongly or too repeatedly insist that parentage is an exceedingly heavy responsibility of a religious nature, however lightly and thoughtlessly it may often be undertaken. Those who bring a child into the world make themselves directly responsible to the law of karma for the opportunities of evolution which they ought to give to that ego, and heavy indeed will be their penalty if by their carelessness or selfishness they put hindrances in his path, or fail to render him all the help and guidance which he has a right to expect from them. Yet how often the modern parent entirely ignores this obvious responsibility; how often a child is to him nothing but a cause of fatuous vanity or an object of thoughtless neglect!

## The Child and Reincarnation

Now, if we want to understand our duty towards the child we must first consider how he came to be what he is — that is to say, we must trace him back in thought to his previous incarnation. Fifteen hundred years ago or so your child was perhaps a Roman citizen, perhaps a philosopher of Alexandria, perhaps an early Briton; but whatever may have been his outward circumstances, he had a definite disposition of his own — a character containing various more or less developed qualities, some good and some bad.

In due course of time that life of his came to an end; but remember that whether that end came slowly by disease or old age, or swiftly by some accident or violence, its advent made no sudden change of any sort in his character. A curious delusion seems to prevail in many quarters that the mere fact of death will at once turn a demon into a saint — that, whatever a man's life may have been, the moment he dies he becomes practically an angel of goodness. No idea could possibly be further from the truth, as those whose work lies in trying to help the departed know full well. The casting off of a man's physical body no more alters his disposition than does the casting off of his overcoat; he is precisely the same man the day after his death as he was the day before, with the same vices and the same virtues.

True, now that he is functioning only on the astral plane he has not the same opportunities of displaying them; but though they may manifest themselves in the astral life in quite a different manner, they are none the less still there, and the conditions and duration of that life are their result. On that plane he must stay until the energy poured forth by his lower desires and emotions during physical life has worn itself out — until the astral body which he has made for himself disintegrates; for only then can he leave it for the higher and more peaceful realm of the heaven-world. But though those particular passions are for the time worn out and non-existent for him, the germs of the qualities in him, which made it possible for them to exist in his nature, are still there. They are latent and ineffective, certainly, because desire of that type requires astral matter for its manifestation; they are what Madame Blavatsky once called 'privations of matter', but they are quite ready to come into renewed activity, if stimulated, when the man again finds himself under conditions where they can act.

An analogy may perhaps, if not pushed too far, be of use in helping us to grasp this idea. If a small bell be made to ring continuously in an airtight vessel, and the air be then gradually withdrawn, the sound will grow fainter and fainter, until it becomes inaudible. The bell is still ringing as vigorously as ever, yet its vibration is no longer manifest to our ears, because the medium by means of which alone it can produce any effect upon them is absent. Admit the air into the vessel, and immediately you hear the sound of the bell once more just as before.

Similarly, there are certain qualities in man's nature which need astral matter for their manifestation, just as sound needs either air or some denser matter for its vehicle; and when, in the process of his withdrawal into himself after what we call death, he leaves the astral plane for the mental, those qualities can no longer find expression, and must therefore perforce remain latent. But when, centuries later, on his downward course into reincarnation he re-enters the astral plane, these qualities which have remained latent for so long manifest themselves once more and become the tendencies of the next personality.

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In the same way there are qualities of the mind which need for their expression the matter of the lower mental levels; and when, after his long rest in the heaven-world the consciousness of the man withdraws into the true ego upon the higher mental levels, these qualities also pass into latency.

But when the ego is about to reincarnate, it has to reverse this process of withdrawal — to pass downward through the very same planes through which it came on its upward journey. When the time of its outflow comes, it puts itself down first on to the lower levels of its own plane, and seeks to express itself there as far as is possible in that less perfect and less plastic matter.

In order that it may so express itself and function upon that plane it must clothe itself in the matter of the plane, just as an entity at a spiritualistic séance, when it wishes to move physical objects, materializes a temporary physical hand with which to do it, or, at any rate, employs physical forces of some kind to produce its results. It is not at all necessary that such a hand should be materialized sufficiently to be visible to our dull, ordinary sight. But to produce a physical result there must be materialization to a certain extent — as far as etheric matter, at any rate.

Thus the ego aggregates around itself matter of the lower mental levels — the matter which will afterwards become its mind-body. But this matter is not selected at random; on the contrary, out of all the varied and inexhaustible store around him he attracts to himself just such a combination as is perfectly fitted to give expression to his latent mental qualities. In precisely the same way, when he makes the further descent on to the astral plane, the matter of that plane which is by natural law attracted to him to serve as his vehicle in that world, is exactly that which will give expression to the desires which were his at the conclusion of his last birth. In point of fact, he resumes his life on each plane just where he left it last time.

Observe that those are not as yet in any way qualities in action; they are simply the germs of qualities, and for the moment their only influence is to secure for themselves a possible field of manifestation, by providing suitable matter for their expression in the various vehicles of the child. Whether they develop once more in this life into the same definite tendencies as in the last one, will depend very largely upon the encouragement or otherwise given to them by the surroundings of the child during its early years. Any one of them, good or bad, may be very readily stimulated into activity by encouragement, or on the other hand may be, as it were, starved out for lack of that encouragement. If stimulated, it becomes a more powerful factor in the man's life this time than it was in his previous existence; if starved out, it remains all through the life merely as an unfructified germ, and does not make its appearance in the succeeding incarnation at all.

This then is the condition of the child when first he comes under his parent's care. He cannot be said to have as yet a definite mind-body or a definite astral body, but he has around and within him the matter out of which these are to be built.

He possesses tendencies of all sorts, some of them good and some of them evil, and it is in accordance with the development of these tendencies that that building will be regulated. And this development in turn depends almost entirely upon the influences brought to bear upon him from outside during the first few years of his existence.

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### Shaping the Child's Future

It is simply impossible to exaggerate the plasticity of these unformed vehicles. We know that the physical body of a child, if only its training be begun at a sufficiently early age, may be modified to a very considerable extent. An acrobat, for example, will take a boy of five or six years old, whose bones and muscles are not yet as hardened and firmly set as ours are, and will gradually accustom his limbs and body to take readily and with comfort all sorts of positions, which would be absolutely impossible for most of us even with any amount of training. Yet our own bodies at the same age differed in no essential respect from that boy's, and if they had been put through the same exercises they would have become as supple and elastic as his, though now that they are definitely set no efforts that we could make, however long continued, could give them the same easy flexibility.

Now if the physical body of a child is thus plastic and readily impressible, his astral and mental vehicles are far more so. They thrill in response to every vibration which they encounter, and are eagerly receptive with regard to all influences, whether good or evil, which emanate from those around them. And they resemble the physical body also in this other characteristic — that though in early youth they are so susceptible and so easily moulded, they very soon set and stiffen and acquire definite habits, which when once firmly established can be altered only with great difficulty.

When we realize this, we see at once the extreme importance of the surroundings in which a child passes his earliest years, and the heavy responsibility which rests upon every parent to see that the conditions of the child's development are as good as they can be made. The little creature is as clay in our hands, to mould almost as we will; moment by moment the germs of good or evil quality brought over from the last birth are awakening into activity; moment by moment are being built up those vehicles which will condition the whole of his after-life; and it rests with us to awaken the germ of good, to starve out the germ of evil. To a far larger extent than is ever realized by even the fondest parents, the child's future is under their control.

Think of all the friends whom you know so well, and try to imagine what splendid specimens of humanity they would be if all their good qualities were enormously intensified, and all the less estimable features absolutely weeded out of their characters.

That is the result which it is in your power to produce in your child if you do your full duty by him; such a specimen of humanity you may make him if you will but take the trouble.



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### Strengthen the Good

But how? you will say; by precept? by education? Yes, truly, much may be done in that way when the time comes; but another and far greater power than that is in your hands — a power which you may begin to wield from the very moment of the child's birth, and even before that; and that is the power of the influence of your own life. To some extent this is recognized, for most civilized people are careful of their words and actions in the presence of a child, and it would be an unusually depraved parent who would allow his children to hear him use violent language, or to see him give way to a fit of passion; but what a man does not realize is that if he wishes to avoid doing the most serious harm to his little ones, he must learn to control not only his words and deeds, but also his thoughts. It is true that you cannot immediately see the pernicious effect of an evil thought or desire upon the mind of your child, but none the less it is there, and it is more real and more terrible, more insidious and more far-reaching, than the harm which is obvious to the physical eye.

If a parent allows himself to cherish feelings of anger or jealousy, of envy or avarice, of selfishness or pride, even though he may never give them outward expression, the vibrations which he thereby causes in his own desire-body are assuredly acting all the while upon the plastic astral body of his child, tuning its vibrations to the same key, awakening into activity any germs of these sins that may have been brought over from his past life, and setting up in him also the same set of evil habits, which when they have once become definitely formed will be exceedingly difficult to correct. And this is exactly what is being done in the case of most of the children whom we see around us.

As it presents itself to a clairvoyant, the aura of a child is very often a most beautiful object — pure and bright in its colour, free, as yet, from the stains of sensuality and avarice and from the dull cloud of ill will and selfishness which so frequently darkens all the life of the adult. In it are to be seen lying latent all the germs and tendencies of which we have spoken — some of them evil, some of them good, and thus the possibilities of the child's future life lie plain before the eye of the watcher.

But how sad it is to see the change which almost invariably comes over that lovely child-aura as the years pass on — to note how persistently the evil tendencies are fostered and strengthened by his environment, and how entirely the good ones are neglected! and so incarnation after incarnation is almost wasted, and a life which, with just a little more care and self-restraint on the part of the parents and teachers, might have borne rich fruit of spiritual development, comes practically to nothing, and at its close leaves scarce any harvest to be garnered into the ego of which it has been so very one-sided an expression.

When one watches the criminal carelessness with which those who are responsible for the bringing up of children allow them to be perpetually surrounded by all kinds of evil and worldly thoughts, one ceases to marvel at the extraordinary slowness of human evolution, and the almost imperceptible progress which is all that the ego has to show for life after life spent in the toil and struggle of this lower world. Yet with so little more trouble so vast an improvement might be introduced!

It needs no astral vision to see what a change would come over this weary old world if the majority, or even any large proportion of the next generation, were subjected to the process suggested above — if all

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their evil qualities were steadily so allowed to atrophy for lack of nourishment, while all the good in them assiduously cultivated and developed to the fullest possible extent. One has only to think what they in turn would do for their children to realize that in two or three generations all the conditions of life would be different, and a true golden age would have begun. For the world at large that age may still be distant, but surely we who are members of the Theosophical Society ought each to be doing our best to hasten its advent: and though the influence of our example may not extend very far, it is at least within our power to see that our own children have for their development every advantage which we can give them.

The very greatest care, then, ought to be taken as to the surroundings of children. People who will persist in thinking coarse and unloving thoughts should at least learn that while they are doing so they are unfit to come near the young, lest they infect them with a contagion more virulent than fever. Much care is needed, for example, in the selection of the nurses to whom children must sometimes be committed; though it is surely obvious that the less they are left in the hands of servants the better. Nurses often develop the strongest affection for their charges, and treat them as though they were of their own flesh and blood, yet this is not invariably the case, and, however that may be, it should be remembered that the servants are almost inevitably less educated and less refined than their mistresses, and that, therefore, a child who is left too much to their companionship is constantly subjected to the impact of thought which is at least not unlikely to be of a less elevated order than even the average level of that of his parents. So that the mother who wishes her child to grow up into a refined and delicate-minded individual should entrust him to the care of others as little as possible, and should, above all things, take good heed of her own thoughts while watching over him.

Her great and cardinal rule should be to allow herself to harbour no thought and no desire which she would not wish to see reproduced in her child. Nor is this merely negative conquest over herself sufficient, for, happily, all that has been said about the influence and power of thought is true of good thoughts just as much as of evil ones, and so the parents' duty has a positive as well as a negative side. Not only must they abstain most carefully from fostering, by unworthy or selfish thoughts of their own, any evil tendency which may exist in their child, but it is also their duty to cultivate in themselves strong, unselfish affection, pure thoughts, high and noble aspirations, in order that all these may react upon their charge, quicken whatever of good is already latent in him, and create a tendency towards any good quality which is as yet unrepresented in his character.

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## How Thought Works

Nor need they have any fear that such effort on their part will fail of its effect, because they are unable to follow its action for lack of astral vision. To the sight of a trained clairvoyant the whole transaction is obvious; he would distinguish the vibrations set up in the mind-body of the parent by the inception of the thought, would see it radiating forth, and note the sympathetic vibration created by its impingement upon the mind-body of the child: and if he renewed his observations at intervals during some considerable period, he would discern the gradual but permanent change produced in that mind-body by the constant repetition of the same stimulus to progress. If the parents themselves possessed the astral sight, it would, no doubt, be of great assistance to them in showing exactly what were the capabilities of their child, and in what directions he most needed development; but if they have not yet that advantage, there need not, therefore, be the slightest doubt or question about the result, for that must follow sustained effort with mathematical certainty, whether the process of its working be visible to them or not.

And not only should a parent watch his thoughts, but his moods also. A child is quick to notice and to resent injustice; and if he finds himself scolded at one time for an action which on another occasion caused only amusement, what wonder that his sense of the invariability of nature's laws is outraged! Again, when trouble and sorrow comes upon the parent, as in this world it sometimes must, it is surely his duty to try, as far as possible, to prevent his load of grief from weighing upon his children as well as upon himself; at least when in their presence he should make a special effort to be cheerful and resigned, lest the dull, leaden hue of depression should extend itself from his aura to theirs.

Yet again, many a well-meaning parent has an anxious and fussy nature — is always fidgeting about trifles, and worrying his children and himself about matters which are really quite unimportant. If he could but observe clairvoyantly the utter unrest and disquiet which he thus produces in his aura, and could further see how these vibrations introduce quite unnecessary agitation and irritation into the susceptible auras of his children, he would no longer be surprised at their occasional outbursts of petulance or nervous excitability, and would realize that in such a case he is often far more to blame than they. What he should contemplate and set before him as his object, is a restful, unruffled spirit — the peace which passeth all understanding — the perfect calm which comes from the confidence that all will at last be well.

It is further obvious that the training of the parents' character which is necessitated by these considerations is in every respect a splendid one, and that in thus helping on the evolution of their children they also benefit themselves to an extent which is absolutely incalculable, for the thoughts which at first have been summoned by conscious effort for the sake of the child will soon become natural and habitual, and will in time form the background of the parents' entire life.

It must not be supposed that these precautions may be relaxed as the child grows older, for though this extraordinary sensitiveness to the influence of his surroundings commences as soon as the ego descends upon the embryo, sometimes long before birth takes place, it continues in most cases up to about the period of maturity. If such influences as are above suggested have been brought to bear upon him during infancy and childhood, the child of twelve or fourteen will be far better equipped for the efforts which lie before him than his less fortunate companions with whom no special trouble has been taken. But it must be remembered that he is still far more impressionable than an adult, and the same strong

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help and guidance upon the mental plane must still be continued in order that the good habits both of thought and of action may not yield before the newer temptations which are likely to assail him.

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### Responsibility of the Teacher

Although in his earlier years it was naturally chiefly to his parents that he had to look for such assistance, all that has been said of their duties applies equally to anyone who comes into contact with children in any capacity, and most especially to those who undertake the tremendous responsibilities of the teacher. The influence of a teacher for good or for evil over his pupils is one that cannot readily be measured, and (exactly as before) it depends not only upon what he says or what he does, but even more upon what he thinks. Many a teacher repeatedly reproves in his children the exhibition of tendencies for the creation of which he is himself directly responsible; if his thought is selfish or impure, then he will find selfishness and impurity reflected all around him, nor does the evil caused by such a thought end with those whom it immediately affects.

The young minds upon which it is reflected take it up and magnify and strengthen it, and thus it reacts upon others in turn and becomes an unholy tradition handed down from one generation of children to another. Happily a good tradition may be set up almost as easily as a bad one — not quite as easily, because there are always undesirable external influences to be taken into account; but still a teacher who realizes his responsibilities and manages his school upon the principles that have been suggested will very soon find that his self-control and devotion have not been fruitless.

I am convinced that there is only one way in which either parent or teacher can really obtain effective influence over a child and draw out all the best that is in him — and that is by winning his love and confidence. It is true that obedience may be extorted and discipline preserved by inspiring fear, but rules enforced by such a method are kept only so long as he who imposes them (or someone representing him) is present, and are invariably broken when there is no fear of detection; the child keeps them because he must, and not because he wishes to do so.

But if on the other hand, his affection has been invoked, his will at once ranges itself on the side of the rule; he wishes to keep it, because he knows that in breaking it he would cause sorrow to one whom he loves; and if only this feeling be strong enough, it will enable him to rise superior to all temptation, and the rule will be binding no matter who may be present or absent. Thus the object is attained not only much more thoroughly, but also much more easily and pleasantly both for teacher and pupil, and all the best side of the child's nature is called into activity, instead of all the worst. Instead of rousing the child's will into sullen and persistent opposition, the teacher arrays it on his own side in the contest against distractions or temptations; and thus results are achieved which could never be approached on the other system.

It is of the utmost importance always to try to understand the child, and to make him feel certain that he has one's friendliness and sympathy. All appearance of harshness must be carefully avoided, and the reason for all instructions given to him should always be fully explained. It must indeed be made clear to him that sometimes sudden emergencies arise in which the older person has no time to explain his instructions, and he should understand that in such a case he should obey even though he may not fully comprehend; but even then the explanation should always be given afterwards.

Unwise parents or teachers often make the mistake of habitually exacting obedience without

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understanding — a most unreasonable demand; indeed they expect from the child at all times and under all conditions an angelic patience and saintliness which they are very far indeed from possessing themselves. They have not yet realized that harshness towards a child is always not only wicked, but absolutely unreasonable and foolish as well, since it can never be the most effective way of obtaining from him what is desired.

It often happens that a child's faults are the direct result of the unnatural way in which he is treated. Sensitive and nervous to a degree, he constantly finds himself misunderstood, and scolded or ill-treated for offences whose turpitude he does not in the least comprehend; is it to be wondered at that when the whole atmosphere about him reeks with the deceit and falsehood of his elders, his fears should sometimes drive him into untruthfulness also? Certainly in such a case the karma of the sin will fall most heavily upon those who, by their criminal harshness, have placed a weak and undeveloped being in a position where it was almost impossible for him to avoid it. If we expect truth from our children, we must first of all practise it ourselves; we must think truth as well as speak truth and act truth, before we can hope to be strong enough to save them from the sea of falsehood and deceit which surrounds us on every side. But if we treat them as reasonable beings — if we explain fully and patiently what we want from them, and show them that they have nothing to fear from us — for 'perfect love casteth out fear' — then we shall find no difficulty about truthfulness.

A curious but not at all uncommon delusion is that children can never be good unless they are unhappy, that they must be thwarted at every turn, and never by any chance allowed to have their own way in anything, because when they are enjoying themselves they must necessarily be in a condition of desperate wickedness! Absurd and atrocious as this doctrine is, various modifications of it are still widely prevalent, and it is responsible for a vast amount of cruelty and unnecessary misery wantonly inflicted upon little creatures whose only crime was that they were natural and happy. Undoubtedly nature intended that childhood should be a happy time, and we ought to spare no efforts to make it so, for in that respect as in all others, if we thwart nature we do so at our peril.

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### Children are Egos

It will help us much in our dealings with children if we remember that they also are egos, that their small and feeble physical bodies are after all but the accident of the moment, and that in reality we are all about the same age. Our business in training them is to develop only that in their lower nature which will co-operate with the ego — which will make it a better channel for the ego to work through. Long ago, in the golden age of the old Atlantean civilization, the importance of the office of the teacher of the children was so fully recognized that none was permitted to hold it except a trained clairvoyant, who could see all the latent qualities and capabilities of his charges, and could, therefore, work intelligently with each so as to develop what was good in him, and to amend what was evil.

In the distant future it may be that that will be so once more; but that time is as yet far away, and we have to do our best under less favourable conditions. Yet unselfish affection is a wonderful quickener of the intuition, and those who really love their children will rarely be at a loss to comprehend their needs; and keen and persistent observation will give them, though at the cost of much more trouble, some approach to the clearer insight of their Atlantean predecessors. At any rate, it is well worth the trying, for when once we realize our true responsibility in relation to children, we shall assuredly think no labour too great which enables us to discharge it better.

### Theosophy for Children

A word should be said in conclusion upon the subject of religious training. Many members of the Theosophical Society, while feeling that their children need something to take the place filled in ordinary education by religious training, have yet found it almost impossible so to put Theosophy before them as to make it in any way intelligible to them. Some have even permitted their children to go through the ordinary routine of Bible lessons, saying that they did not know what else to do, and that though much of the teaching was obviously untrue it could be corrected afterwards. This, however, is a course which is entirely indefensible; no child should ever waste its time in learning what it will have to unlearn afterwards. If the true inner meaning of Christianity could be taught to our children, that indeed were well, because of course that would be pure Theosophy.

Nor is there any real difficulty in putting the grand truths of Theosophy intelligibly before the minds of our children. Certainly it is useless, at first, to trouble them with rounds and races, with lunar pitris and manasaputras; but then, however interesting and valuable all this information may be, it is of little importance in the practical regulation of conduct, whereas the great ethical truths upon which the whole system rests can, happily be made clear even to the childish understanding. What could be simpler in essence than the three great truths which are given to Sensa in *The Idyll of the White Lotus*?

"The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendour have no limit.

The principle which gives life dwells in us and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard, nor seen, nor smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.

Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself — the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment.

These truths, which are as great as is life itself, are as simple as the simplest mind of man. Feed the hungry with them."

We might express these more tersely by saying: 'Man is immortal; god is good; as we sow, so shall we reap.' But surely none of our children can fail to grasp these simple ideas in their broad outline, though as they grow older they may spend many a year in learning more and more of the immensity of their full meaning. Teach them the grand old formula that 'death is the gate of life' — not a terrible fate to be feared, but simply a stage of progress to be welcomed with interest. Teach them to live, not for themselves, but for others — to go through the world as friends and helpers, earnest in loving reverence and care for all living things. Teach them to delight in seeing and in causing happiness in others, in animals and birds as well as in human beings; teach them that to cause pain to any living thing is always a wicked action, and can never have aught of interest or amusement for any right-thinking or civilized man. A child's sympathies are so easily roused, and his delight in doing something is so great that he responds at once to the idea that he should try to help, and should never harm, all the creatures around him. He should be taught to be observant, that he may see where help is needed, whether by man or by animal, and promptly to supply the want so far as lies in his power.



## Our Relation to Children by C.W. Leadbeater

A child likes to be loved, and he likes to protect, and both these feelings may be utilized in training him to be a friend of all creatures. He will readily learn to admire flowers as they grow, and not wish to pluck them heedlessly, casting them aside a few minutes later to wither on the roadside; those which he plucks he will pick carefully, avoiding injury to the plant; he will preserve and tend them, and his way through wood and field will never be traceable by fading blossoms and uprooted plants.

**Physical Training and Purity**

Do not forget also that the physical training of the child is a matter of the greatest importance, and that a strong, pure, healthy body is necessary for the full expression of the developing soul within. Teach him from the first the exceeding importance of physical purity, so that he may regard his daily bath just as much an integral part of his life as his daily food. See to it that his body is never befouled with such filthy abominations of modern savagery as meat, alcohol or tobacco; see to it that he has always plenty of sunlight, of fresh air and of exercise. So shall he grow up pure, healthy and happy; so shall you provide for the soul entrusted to your care a casket of which it need not be ashamed, a vehicle through which it shall receive only the highest and best that the physical world can give — which it can use as a fitting instrument for the noblest and the holiest work.

As the parent teaches the child, he will also be obliged to set the example in this as in other things, and so the child will thus again civilize his elders as well as improve himself. Birds and butterflies, cats and dogs, all will be his friends, and he will delight in their beauty instead of longing to chase or destroy them. Children thus trained will grow up into men and women recognizing their place in evolution and their work in the world, and each will serve as a fresh centre of humanizing force, gradually changing the direction of human influence on all lower things.

If thus we train our children, if we are thus careful in our relations with them, we shall bear nobly our great responsibility, and in so doing we shall help on the grand work of evolution; we shall be doing our duty, not only to our children, but to the human race — not only to their egos, but to those of the many millions yet to come.