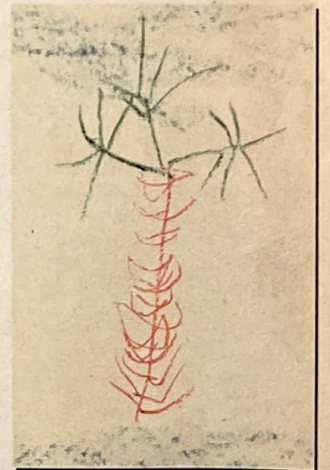


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## In this issue:

LifeWays

First-Grade Readiness

Transitioning to a  
Waldorf School

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## Transitions in consciousness

**W**e are always in transition—moving. Some phases of movement, however, are relatively rapid and these we notice as transitions. Three types of transitions are important to homeschooling and family life in general. These three are waking and falling asleep, beginning and ending of school days at home, and the nine-year transition in relation to the Waldorf curriculum. All of these transitions are really transitions in consciousness. At our current point in evolution, human beings are probably never fully awake and rarely fully asleep, but certain moments in our changing consciousness are distinct and noticeable.

### A sunrise experience

It is dark, about 4:30 in the morning on a day in late April. Another family has spent the night at our house so we could meet the sun at dawn. We wake the children and dress with just a few whispers and then walk out into the dry California hills in the dark; chilled air all around. Without talking we follow a path up to a ridge and then follow the ridge to a small flat area which overlooks the canyon below. On the walk along the ridge we hear the first single birdcalls. At first they are so faint I cannot be sure I hear them. I look at the other mother, she nods—we did hear the birds! By the time we reach our little overlook and sit down, the birdsong is so rapid, vibrant, and frequent it seems to fill the whole canyon. We can see where the darkness is lightening on the horizon so we sit facing that way and wait. The children are sleepy and quiet; the younger ones fall back to sleep. But each moment the sky lightens. Before the sun rises, but when the sky is light, we look behind and below us to a small plateau overlooking the canyon. At first just one or two deer step onto the plateau, then a whole herd fan out and grazes. They can see us, but they do not run away. After grazing for awhile they disappear, vanishing silently over the edge of the plateau and down into the canyon. We turn back to the sun and as it slowly grows

above the horizon and becomes so blinding and bright, we cannot look at it. We make our way back home in this bright light casting huge shadows over the dry brown grass.

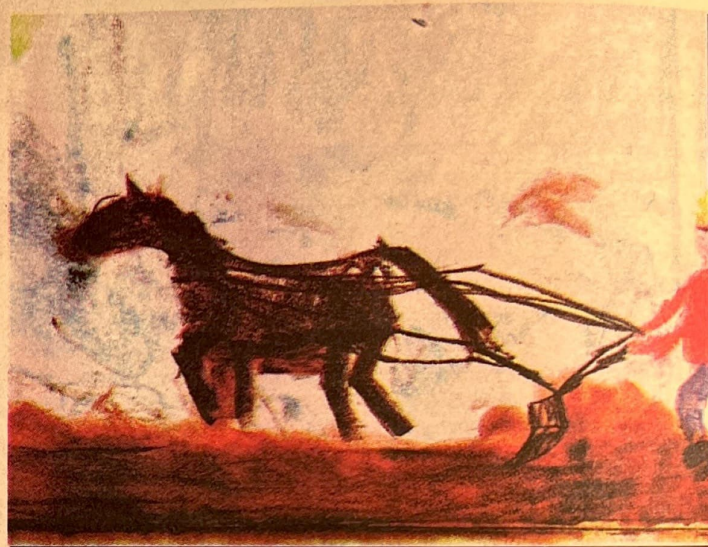
This experience of the transition from darkness to light threw into sharp relief the difference between a sort of twilight- and a day-consciousness. In the darkness I felt my consciousness to be spread out, diffuse, receptive. When the sun was finally there, and so overwhelming, I felt the beginning of the usual day-consciousness—focused, linear, very aware of time and the outer world. We had, by waking early and experiencing the dawn, consciously experienced the transition from God within us to ourselves within God.

### Sleep and waking

Every morning we gradually go through the transition in consciousness from the world of sleep to our waking life, and every night we go the opposite way. (See Steiner's chapter on sleep in *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, and Audrey McAllen's *Sleep* for more detailed descriptions.) When we go to sleep we go to the soul/spiritual realm where we feel and think without our bodies, which are resting. What we experience in the day we take into the sleep world where these experiences help or hinder us in being renewed and in strengthening our moral purposes and intentions. We often have the answer to a question when we wake. Children presented with a form drawing one day who practice it in various media can, after sleep, draw it accurately the first time into the main lesson books the next day. What a miracle this seems to our focused day-consciousness.

Waking and sleeping are the daily phases of incarnating, or coming into the body, and excarnating, or going out of the body of the soul and spirit. What does this understanding of consciousness have to do with our parenting and teaching? What does it matter how our children, or we, go to sleep or wake up?

My first child, until she was nine weeks old, screamed and cried every



Claire's Farmer Ploughing a Field with a Horse

time she woke from sleep. She cried for at least half an hour before she went to sleep at night until she was several months old. Clearly this transition was difficult for her. She needed sleep and took naps until she was well over six years old, but she only gradually came to be able to enter sleep and wakefulness in a calm way. Her need for sleep and my task of managing transitions to help her brought me to the realization that she needed to have school at home. I observed that her day went much better if she was allowed to wake up quietly on her own, and then I noticed the same was true for me. We could not accomplish this relation of sleep and waking if we had to fit our lives into the schedule of a school. So sleep was the reason I found the courage to start homeschool for my daughter Claire, in kindergarten. She is now in the middle of third grade, and her younger sister, Sara, is in kindergarten at home.

### Transitions into and out of school at home

I knew from the beginning that I would use the Waldorf curriculum and work out of Anthroposophy, so I became immersed in rhythm. I had to become aware of the rhythm of the day, of the seasons, and of the festivals. And, because we had school at home, I

had the added challenge of marking the transitions into and out of school. The day in our consciousness begins when we wake and ends when we go to sleep. Within this rhythm lies the beginning and ending of the day's activities and within that rhythm the beginning and ending of school. When one does not school at home, the transition to school is clear. One gets into the car, or on a bus, or walks to another building and the child is left there with another adult, their teacher. When the parent is the teacher and school is at home, the day goes smoother, especially for young children, if schooling is a solid block of time clearly marked at the beginning and end. Then the transition into the type of work and attention needed in school, and the change of role for the parent—from parent to teacher—can be accomplished.

In order to make my transition into the role of teacher, I must make a shift in consciousness. To do this, I first work in the classroom, opening the curtains, moving desks, and generally readying the room. Then, I stand facing the window, and do Eurythmy (a practice of movement to express speech and music) and say my prayer for guidance in teaching the children.

Perhaps the most helpful step I took in first preparing for school was to

The morning verse for the first four grades as given by Steiner is:

*The sun in loving light  
Makes bright for me each day.  
My soul in spirit power  
Gives strength unto my limbs.  
In sunlight shining clear  
I revere, O God  
The strength of humankind  
Which Thou so graciously  
Has planted in my soul  
That I with all my might  
May love to work and learn.  
From Thee flow light and strength.  
To Thee rise love and thanks.*

I end with the following verse:

*In every seed that will be a tree  
There lives an image of all it will be.  
When I find the image of the best  
I can be  
My heart and soul are then free.*

My children spontaneously add the word "Amen" after both of these verses.



Claire's Adam and Eve in Paradise

purchase a small copper bell with a beautiful tone. For four years now my ringing of that little bell has marked the beginning of the school day. The children most often do not come running when I ring it; usually they call out, "We're not ready yet!" But eventually they come, smiling and ready for school. Another step was to make the entrance to the schooling area clear—to make a doorway in which I stand to greet them first and then let them enter into the area in which we will work.

For Kindergarten with my older daughter I always ended the school day with the same pattern. We sat in the 'rainbow house'—a play structure made of wooden stands and clothes dyed in rainbow sequence. I sang a song about the fire fairies, lit a candle and then told, or acted with puppets, a fairy tale. Starting in the First Grade we added a verse at the end of the story. We always end with putting out the candle, saying, "Story candle burning bright, thank you for your golden light." The extinguishing of that light with a snuffer told the children the school day was over. The verse at the end of the day mirrors the verse used to start the school day, and, thus, tells the children in a deep way that the school day is over. (See boxed verse, above right.)

**The nine-year change**

I had to change the verse at the end of the school day toward the end of the Second Grade when my older daughter was 8 years old. I had been saying, "In every seed that will be a tree, there lives

an image of all it will be. When I find the image of all I can be, my heart and soul are then free." She listened to that one day, looked thoughtful for a minute and then said musingly "All I can be...what if I am bad?" I realized she was experiencing the first inklings of the 9-year change in consciousness. I changed the verse to "the best I can be" and she was completely satisfied.

Steiner's work on the changes in consciousness over the course of a lifetime, as well as the changes in human consciousness over the course of evolution, forms the basis of the Waldorf curriculum. Steiner described the change in consciousness that children experience around their ninth year that is related to the deepening incarnation of the human spirit. (See *The Kingdom of Childhood* and *The Education of the Child* by Steiner. The change is also beautifully described by Waldorf teacher Hermann Koepke in his book *Encountering the Self*.) At about age nine children begin to become more aware of earthly life and less aware of the flowing sea of sounds and images that the young child experiences. Nine-year-olds are more aware of time and place, of their own body, of social life, and of individuality. They begin to experience inner vs. outer and, thus, they begin to feel separateness and loneliness. The contrast between the nine-year consciousness and the kindergarten consciousness (mood of the fifth) is illustrated by the following conversation, started by my older daughter.

Claire, enthusiastically: "How about if we are sun maidens, and we sleep in hammocks full of flowers, and we're learning to fly through the air?"

Sara, consternation, pause, serious tone: "But we *are* sun maidens..."

Claire, taking this in stride: "No, I mean sunbeams."

Sara, long pause, wrinkled brow.

Claire, finally galloping off: "Ok, let's be ponies."

Sara, galloping after: "OK. But we are sun maidens."

The life transition of beginning to come down to earth at about age nine is met beautifully by the curriculum of the Third Grade as given by Steiner and developed by Waldorf school teachers. The stories for the Third Grade are taken from the Old Testament, beginning with the creation, life in paradise, and the expulsion from paradise. These stories of the beginning of human life in this incarnation of the earth as a planet, form the basis of all aspects of life we experience now. The Old Testament stories tell of the beginning of agriculture, house building, measurement, and the exile from paradise followed by the searching for ways to continue the human connection with God and heaven. The people of that time were losing a certain instinctive consciousness of the spiritual world. They were searching for a home on earth and learning to live on the earth without completely losing connection with God and paradise. What could be more perfect for a nine-year-old to learn about?

The nine-year transition to earthly life is met by experience with work on the farm and in the garden: work with the physical earth, in agriculture and with tending animals and preparing food. Our family lives in a densely populated suburban setting so finding farm and gardening work for my third grader was a challenge. One decision I made before beginning third grade was that I would bring biodynamic farming and gardening into the lessons as frequently as I could. In addition, I arranged for all of us to have gardening lessons from an experienced biodynamic farmer, Peter Dukich. Mr.

Dukich learned from Ehrenreid Pfeiffer who had been instructed as a young man by Rudolf Steiner. Steiner had given in a course of lectures on agriculture indications for new practices and a new consciousness in relating to the earth. This work became known as *biodynamics* because it concentrates on awareness of and work with the life forces of the planet—in soil, plants, and animals. With biodynamic practices, human beings work to connect the earth with heaven by transforming the earth, enhancing life forces in soil and plants. This transformation has been needed since the fall—since we ate too early of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and, consequently, had to toil on the earth, outside of paradise. The work of transforming the earth in this way, through biodynamics, could only come about, however, at the present time. Now we can work on developing our abilities to perceive and connect with the spiritual world in our day-consciousness of our own choice.

Claire's first gardening lesson lasted over two hours and in that time she learned how to turn the soil with a spading fork, plant seeds, and cover and water them, in a bed about three feet by six feet. She turned the soil steadily and slowly, and made rows in the soil, as she learned that the soil is alive and needs light and air. She planted the seeds (turnip and radish) by tapping them out of the seed packets and she moved down the rows. She used the hoe to tap the soil over the seeds and then put dried plants down to

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## Transitions in consciousness

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hide the seeds from the birds. Finally she watered the bed. Did the seeds need anything else? No—they do not need food (that is, compost); only growing plants need that. In school later Claire composed a conversation between a farmer and the soil and drew a picture of a farmer ploughing a field with a horse.

In the beginning of November we visited two biodynamic farms in the Sierra Nevada foothills. At the first farm we made a biodynamic compost pile. First dry leaves and twigs are formed into the bottom layer so air can circulate. Then layers of dung, humus, and dry plant matter are formed into a series of layers. The last layer is mulch to help keep in the warmth that

is generated. Kitchen scraps can also be included in the pile. Finally biodynamic preparations are added which bring about the transformations in the compost—where heat is transformed into warmth and the materials are transformed into living compost. This compost can work in soil to bring about the metamorphosis of soil into plant where a plant seed has been buried and tended. Claire and Sara did not see the preparations made, but they did participate in adding them to small holes in the compost pile. In the spring we will return to this farm and see the compost pile when it has finished working and is ready to be added to the soil where wheat, barley and pinto beans will be grown by hand.

At the second farm we collected cow dung for the compost pile, and sprayed a manure preparation on the garden beds and grassland. We did this work between herding cows and riding in a horse-drawn restored wooden wagon over the 75-acre ranch. As Sara began saying on this trip, "Lots of work is lots of fun!" That pretty much sums up our experience on the trip.

Back home after these visits I told the stories of the expulsion from paradise and the beginnings of agriculture. Then we prepared two small beds and planted grains and fiber plants. We turned the soil and added biodynamic compost, which we had obtained from Mr. Dukich. Then we planted little patches of rye, oats, barley, millet, buckwheat, and wheat. (The wheat seeds were from the first farm.) We also planted flax. Then Claire drew a little map of the beds so we would remember what was planted where. As I watched Claire confidently use the spading fork to turn the earth I realized this is exactly what she needs at this time. She needs contact with the physical earth and to be around adults who are conscious and careful in their work with the earth.

At a later gardening lesson, Mr. Dukich taught Claire how to transplant trees. One important point was that when the hole is dug for the tree, the topsoil is kept separate. After the tree is placed in the hole, then the topsoil goes in first to give the richer soil to the roots. Also, at that time compost is added, again for the roots to easily take up the food. Mr. Dukich has made compost for over fifty years and in the last two years he has been working on a further development of the compost. He grinds the finished dried compost in a metal meat grinder, by hand, to a powder. The grinding releases life forces from the material through the rhythmic physical work of the human being. The powder actually has tiny reflective particles that are the manifestation on the physical level of the nonphysical light that it carries to the plants. One mixes the powder with water to feed plants more quickly than when dry compost is mixed into the

soil. Claire and Sara have ground compost, too, and they love it. As Sara grinds wheat in Kindergarten, Claire grinds compost in the Third Grade.

### Conclusion

As I gradually wake up to my own self and consciousness I can be more awake to what is being asked of me. My children require me to be their teacher—what a blessed task and calling! However, then I must wake up to where they are in their consciousness and what they need—each morning and night, each school day, and with each changing school year. What a miracle and gift the Waldorf curriculum is; without it I would be at a loss to know what to bring to them. In Kindergarten children can still experience life in a sea of floating images, at one with the world. By Third Grade, the waking to earthly life can be eased and supported with stories of the Old Testament and by productive work with plants, food and fibers. Children prepare, in family life and school, to take up their destinies by developing their abilities. In this year 2000 which, in a way, is a year-long transition into the 21st century, life seems to intensify and transitions to become even more important than before for maintaining balance. May we all find our sources of strength. ♀

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