



Parenting: The Inner Story



“The child was in the ancient patriarchal idea the live property of the father; he was his creation, his production, his own reproduction of himself; the father, rather than God or the universal Life in place of God, stood as the author of the child’s being; and the creator has every right over his creation, the producer over his manufacture. He had the right to make of him what he willed, and not what the being of the child really was within, to train and shape and cut him according to the parental ideas and not rear him according to his own nature’s deepest needs, to bind him to the paternal career or the career chosen by the parent and not that to which his nature and capacity and inclination pointed, to fix for him all the critical turning-points of his life even after he had reached maturity. In education the child was regarded not as a soul meant to grow, but as brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould by the teacher. We have travelled to another conception of the child as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own who must be helped to find them, to find himself, to grow into their maturity, into a fullness of physical and vital energy and the utmost breadth, depth and height of his emotional, his intellectual and his spiritual being.”¹

Sri Aurobindo

The above passage presents two conceptions of the child and the role of the parent:

1. The child as ‘brute psychological stuff to be shaped into a fixed mould’ by the parent. The parent as the author of the child’s being, having the right to make of the child what (s)he wills.

2. The child as ‘a soul meant to grow’, ‘as a soul with a being, a nature and capacities of his own’. The parent’s role is to help the child find him/herself and his/her capacities, and to help him/her grow into the fullness of his/her physical, vital (emotional), intellectual and spiritual being.



At a conceptual level most of us would accept the second idea and perhaps even want to act from it. How often do we actually act from this idea and what might be the implications in our daily interactions with the child, were we to do so? The following activity may help you to bring to light your own attitudes towards your child.

ACTIVITY:

Carefully observe yourself in your interactions with your child over the next few days and make a note of your own psychological assumptions. Did your action stem from an intention to mould or was it in response to the child’s own needs? The child’s response to your action can be a helpful indication, besides your own self-reflection. Did your action bring harmony between the child and yourself or did it lead to alienation (in a small or large degree)?

You may record your observations in a journal and see if any patterns emerge or it leads to some further questioning. For instance, how would you explain the following observations of a parent:

My Action as a Parent	My Underlying Attitude Towards the Child	Consequence/ Child’s Response
•Forced her to drink milk	Mould	Angry rebellion
•Stopped him from watching TV	Soul meant to grow	?

Would freedom necessarily mean ‘letting the child be’ in all circumstances, just as (s)he wants to be? Would moulding always be in an obvious forceful fashion? Could freedom too become an imposition? How could one distinguish between the child’s needs to grow into the fullness of his/her being and the child’s whims, fancies, momentary desires, set habits? The Mother points out a way:

“There is another quality that must be cultivated in a child from a very young age: that is the feeling of uneasiness, of a moral disbalance which it feels when it has done certain things, not because it has been told not to do them, not because it fears punishment, but spontaneously. For example, a child who hurts its comrade through mischief, if it is in its normal, natural state, will experience uneasiness, a grief deep in its being, because what it has done is contrary to its inner truth.

For in spite of all teachings, in spite of all that thought can think, there is something in the depths which has a feeling of a perfection, a greatness, a truth, and is painfully contradicted by all the movements opposing this truth. If a child has not been spoilt by its milieu, by deplorable examples around it, that is, if it is in the normal state, spontaneously, without its being told anything, it will feel an uneasiness when it has done something against the truth of its being. And it is exactly upon this that later its effort for progress must be founded.”²

☐ **Compiled by Anuradha**

¹ Sri Aurobindo (1970) *Social and Political Thought*, p.605, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry

² The Mother (1972) *Collected Works of The Mother*, v.4, pp.24-25, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry