



# Care of the Vital

*This section on L'avenir brings you insights and practical ways to work with young children, derived from the on-going work at the Gnostic Centre's playschool (L'avenir). This time the focus is on education of the vital.*



Serious matters.... at L'avenir

A very important part of our being is the VITAL - the seat of all desires, energies of action, life force within us. One can imagine that if the Vital went on strike, or refused to collaborate, what chaos would result! But, that is exactly what happens in each one of us most of the time. How many of us can say with confidence, 'I am in complete control of my emotions, my desires and my energies of action'? At the same time, all our daily interactions, our responses to life situations challenge the Vital; our dreams and aspirations need the force that the Vital carries within itself for fruition. Neither can we do without the Vital, nor can we make it work the way we want to... this is a tough situation. For this reason perhaps, The Mother states:

"Of all education, the education of the vital is perhaps the most important and the most indispensable. Yet it is rarely taken up and followed with understanding and method."<sup>1</sup>

If we wish to educate the Vital, it is important that we understand its nature.

## *Characteristics of the Vital*

- Seat of impulses, desires, enthusiasm, dynamic energy, passions, revolt, violence
- It is the life force
- Pursues its own satisfaction
- Can destroy everything or withdraw its collaboration, if not listened to



- Tyrannical despot, never satisfied, its demands have no limit
- With its collaboration, nothing is impossible
- Transforms thoughts into dynamic will and action
- Nothing can be done without the vital

The importance of the Vital would be amply clear from the above. So, how does one educate the Vital? The Mother has identified the key areas of Vital Education as given below.

## *Key Areas of Vital Education*

- Education of the Senses
- Development of Aesthetic Sense
- Character Development

All the above aspects are taken up with children at L'Avenir, through various activities and daily interactions. The points given below have been derived from the Mother's writings on Vital Education, as well as practical work with the children. While at one level they focus on the child, at another level they are equally relevant for practising oneself.

## *Did you know...*

- The aim of life is progress and not mere happiness?
- It is difficult but not impossible to change human nature?
- Development of the senses is closely associated with character development?
- The starting point for character development is self-observation – the knowledge of the character to be transformed?
- The second step is to develop in oneself the will for progress and perfection?
- The best way to deal with the vital's revolt is by remaining quiet and refusing to act?
- Everyone possesses two opposite tendencies in the character, which are like the light and the shadow of the same thing?
- Feelings come from outside and spread through contagion?



Painting session in progress... at L'avenir

- The difficulties of one's nature are the promise of the future realisation?
- The most effective way of moral and value education is the living example of the parent, teacher, adults?
- Stories can be a powerful tool in the development of morals, values and character?
- The business of vital education is to develop in the child a conscious will that will encourage the movements of light at the expense of the shadow?
- The will can be developed just like the muscles – through constant practice?
- Education of the vital should begin as early as possible?

## *Education of the Senses & the Aesthetic Sense*

### *Do's & Don'ts*

- Expose the child to the best sensations – in terms of visuals (nature, paintings, beautiful objects...), sounds (music, nature...), tastes (simple and appetising food), touch (textures), smells (fragrance)
- Make the exposure rich and varied (nature excursions, museums, concerts, books, toys...)



- Take care to avoid all vulgarity
- Encourage precision and accuracy of the senses first
- Then build upon their power and sensitiveness
- Add to it artistic taste and refinement
- Encourage artistic pursuits in their most noble forms – painting, sculpture, music, dance
- Create in the child a love of beauty for its own sake

#### *Ask yourself...*

- What am I doing with my child to develop his/her senses?
- What am I doing to develop his/her aesthetic sense?
- How much space do I give to artistic pursuits in my life?

## ***Character development, moral & value education***

#### *Do's & Don'ts*

- Treat the weaknesses of character as the shadows of light that is hiding behind
- Concentrate on the light – the positives, rather than the shadow (the negative)
- Help the child to develop a strong will power – first upon simple things and gradually upon greater and greater things
- Encourage the habit of self-observation from an early age
- Support and nurture the natural urge for progress and perfection that all children have
- Encourage in the child a love of progress rather than happiness
- Help the child to channelise his/her energy creatively (arts, physical culture, leadership...)
- Do not pressurise the child to progress at an unnatural pace – follow the law of graduality and gradually replace the lower emotions with higher ones, the common habits with more enlightened ones
- Create opportunities for the child to practise positive qualities – in real life situations
- Help the child to accept his/her mistakes without feeling ashamed or upset – frankly and without fear

- Create a relationship of trust and sharing with the child – showing by your example that everyone has weaknesses but the important thing is to sincerely try and overcome them
- Tell lots of stories – from history, from mythology, from various cultures – stories that set an example of nobility and heroism for the young mind
- Help the child to widen his/her mind
- Encourage a habit of reflection and silence
- Never compare your child to another – only compare the child with his/her own potential
- Be a living example for your child – through your daily actions

#### *Personal Checklist*

- I do not compare my child with others
- I am aware of the strengths and limitations of my child's character
- I focus more often on the positives in the child's nature rather than the negatives
- I do not pressurise my child
- I feel pressurised about my child's behaviour
- I feel pressurised about his/her learning
- I love, trust and respect my child
- My child loves, trusts and respects me
- My child is afraid of me
- My child accepts his/her mistakes readily
- My child is frank with me
- I tell stories to my child
- I tell stories that will set an example of heroic qualities in his/her mind
- I share about my life and experiences with my child
- I consciously work to overcome the weaknesses of my character
- I consciously try to be a living example – in my daily actions and attitudes – for my child

#### *Ask yourself...*

- What helped most in forming your character?

*- Compiled by Yogita*

<sup>1</sup> The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Education*, p.107, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry