



*What is the way to get out of the
obsession of pain when it is too much?*

“Look at a beautiful flower.”

The Mother



Letting them Bloom

Catalysing change in education. Ideas there are many. But how are these put into practice? In this issue, we share with you some insights from L'avenir (the play-school for 2-4 year olds at The Gnostic Centre) regarding recognising the special qualities in each child and nurturing them with a tender loving care.

The Parable of the Rose

A certain man planted a rose and watered it faithfully. Before it blossomed, he examined it. He saw a bud that would soon blossom. He also saw the thorns, and he thought, "How can any beautiful flower come from a plant, burdened with so many sharp thorns?" Saddened by this thought, he neglected to water the rose, and before it was ready to bloom, it died.

So it is with many people. Within every soul, there is a rose. The 'God-like' qualities planted in us at birth, growing amidst the thorns of our faults.

Many of us look at ourselves and see only the thorns, the defects. We despair, thinking nothing good can possibly come from us. We neglect to water the good within us, and eventually it dies. We never realize our potential.

Some don't see the rose within themselves. It takes someone else to show it to them. One of the greatest gifts a person can possess is to be able to reach past the thorns and find the rose within others. This is the truest, most innocent, and gracious characteristic of love to know another person, including their faults, recognize the nobility in their soul, and yet, still help another to realize they can overcome their faults.

If we show them the rose, they will conquer the thorns. Only then will they blossom many times over. Our duty in this world is to help others, by showing them their roses and not their thorns. It is then that we achieve the love we should feel for each other. Only then can we bloom in our own garden.¹



Putting it into practice at L'avenir

Showing them the rose - something we forget to do with children in our care, especially if we are teachers. The following is a collection of little poems, written by a L'avenir teacher,² about the children under her care. Each verse has flown out of her daily observation and intimate contact with the children and depicts the special qualities of that particular child to whom it is addressed. These verses form the beginning of each individual report being sent to the child's parents at the end of the academic year this time.

*Depth in his eyes and melodious look,
Special interest in going through the book.
Likes to do everything,
But alone, spreading his wings.*

*Keen in learning, attentive child,
Balanced body; independent and reserve mild.*

*Social, sensitive,
Neat and active,
Brings perfection
In any action.*

*Neatness in work, a little talkative,
Kind at heart and physically active.*

*Very talkative but a little shy,
Enjoys playing 'I spy'.
Books and cars are his favourite talk,
Neatness in work and a straight walk.*



*Soft-spoken and innocent face,
Plays football full of grace.*

*Talkative, independent and amiable,
Naughty, caring and loveable,
Runs fast like a deer,
Without having any fear.*

*Looks like a doll, active and small.
Loves to play mostly with the ball.*

*Open, frank and a nature lover,
Very enthusiastic and a good observer.
Loves to do outdoor activity,
Watering plants, appreciating their beauty.*

*Sweet, talkative and a little shy,
Exploring things through her blinking eyes.*

*A sportive child with curly hair,
Shows enthusiasm and looks so fair.
Always gives a sweet smile,
Loves to express in her own style.*



What do the parents feel?

My first visit to The Gnostic Centre was like 'homecoming'. It had taken me two months hunting around Gurgaon for 'ghoda (horse) farm', after a friend told me of its existence. Tears welled in my eyes as I was taken aback by its serene calmness and the simplistic beauty of the place. Little knowing the chords that the following years were to strum, my first reasons to put Sanna here were simple...

Sanna at 2, was a bookworm... The sheer physical exposure that L'avenir was offering along with the complete next-to-nature environment were reasons enough for me to wish her here.

I told Anuradha on our first meet, "Please don't expect my child to be able to go on all these swings!" I still can recall her slow smile and dancing eyes as she said, "Don't worry. We will not do anything that she won't want to do."

And that marked the beginning of a series of valuable lessons learnt about parenting, education, discovery of self.

The reason I write more about Sanna is that her journey at L'avenir and ours as parents and individuals has been far greater. The benefit of better parenting was Aryan's automatically, being the younger sibling.

Sanna has bloomed!

From a touch-me-not, recoiling upon outside contact to a 'jasmine' with her special fragrance, pure, serene, delicate yet sturdy, with her place firmly under the sun. Happy, intelligent, soft yet opinionated. Receptive yet resolute!

The two years so far have been as much a discovery for us as a family as for her.

1. Happiness exists in the simplest of forms.

We welcome the morning sun as the children run to catch its rays streaming into the house.

We raise our faces to the summer rain as sunflowers to the sun.

We walk into puddles, to turn and see the footprints following us.

We dance with the shadows and sway with the breeze.

2. Children learn what they see and what they are told to learn.

We are better parents as it is us that they role model.

3. They learn best what they will to learn and not what we ambition to teach them.

We have to talk in the language of their interest while offering a new experience.

4. The world is our classroom.

Lessons exist in everyday life, around us.

Lessons in Observation:

Aryan was into spotting cars. Dad's



Safari, Anuradha didi's Wagon R, Romaan's Baleno, Yasmine's Bolero, L'avenir Omni van... We learnt colours with the colours of cars. Blue Wagon R, silver Bolero, golden Baleno; red Palio, etc.

Reasoning:

"Mummy, if *dadi* is papa's mummy and *nani* is your mummy, you call *dadi* 'mummy'... is *dadi nani*?"

Lessons in Geography:

Sanna with the globe: "Vaibhav has gone to United States and we are in India. It is night in India because sun has gone to United States and when sun comes back to India, Vaibhav will sleep because United States will be night."

Physics:

"Mommy, I fill my mug with water. Why does water come out of the mug when I put toothpaste in and why not when I put in toothbrush?"

History:

"Tell us again story of Chetak *ghoda* and Rana Pratap," while crossing Arcus every morning on way to L'avenir.

I am just beginning to appreciate the specialness of L'avenir and its mission; the depth and forwardness of the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother: and already it's time to move on.

I am sad that Sanna cannot continue further here and sincerely hope it will not be 'adieu' but 'adios'...³

Touching the Heart through the Soul

With sweet curls cascading down her back, cherubic face smiling and her round black eyes shining - she was so full of wonder of the new world we had put her in. Our little Manya has enjoyed L'avenir and made us feel humbled by the experience.

To celebrate the birthday of your daughter is a truly thrilling experience but of late we tend to spend so much time and money buying plastic gifts, which the children forget so soon. We tend to forget the significance of the

day in all the clamour of the commercialization of birthday parties. For us the way the school celebrated her birthday was a truly learning experience.

On 12th December, 2003 we stood and watched the little faces of Manya's friends - her world - and she took her Papa's hand in her little fingers and introduced him to each friend with complete confidence. We knew then that our little three-year old had come of age to face the world!! Single step for a child but a giant leap for a parent - it is very difficult to let go of those tiny fingers, a part of you always wants to hold on to them.

When the children started singing soulfully and Manya cut her cake there seemed to be such a presence - I felt it and with clouded eyes distributed the sweets that I had brought for them. That day I felt as though they were all my children and Manya looked a picture of gentle delight. I thanked the Mother for having brought Manya into her fold. Her photographs on the wall from the time she was born to now were a reminder of how time passes by so quickly. I think the story session is a most profound way to teach children about life and birth.

From this day on she seemed to have burst into a hue of colours and as Ameeta said, "She is blooming like a sunflower." Her questions are never ending and her quest to get to the bottom of things does not end. Her confidence often leaves me completely speechless as do some innocently piercing observations. She even knows when I am upset and never hesitates to hug me then - I never seize to get amazed....





I wrote this poem while watching Rhea and Manya sleeping peacefully after a hard day of play.

*I have learned from my children -
That not all days are the same.
Some days you gain
And some days you feel you lose
Some days will go perfect
And some days it will rain,
But I notice that they enjoy them both.
It is we who see the clouds and frown,
We let the weather
and all things mundane bother us.
They just seem to say -
"Pick up your bag mom
Give us your warm smile
and we're happy to be off;
We trust this world and it is because,
You have brought us up to feel that way."*



The essence of L'avenir has seeped into me too. I have been touched in ways that I previously did not think possible. One such way was the workshop for parents on physical education. I have had a fear of heights and climbing trees and all things tall ever since a small child. Where that fear came from, how it set in and manifested itself - I do not know, but I faced all this and much more at the workshop. We were supposed to walk on the parallel bars of the monkey ladder with no support and for me that was an impossible feat.

Anuradha very gently and with great reassurance got me to not only climb up, but to walk across. And with each step I felt as



though a door was opening and I was breathing free. I still recall standing atop and telling her that I cannot do this and all she said was, "If Manya was in a similar position what would you have said to her?" That changed my thinking. I confronted the little child within myself and was able to face her fears and needs. This I would say in all my years was the most educating experience. I am so thankful that Manya has the opportunity to come to L'avenir, I know for her it is her "home away from home".⁴

✍️ Courtesy: Sunaina Singh,
Sucharu Uppal and Roohi Kapur

Note: All photographs in this article are of children at L'avenir (the future), a playschool of The Gnostic Centre.



¹ Author unknown, Submitted by Charity, Singapore

² Sunaina Singh, a L'avenir teacher

³ Sucharu Uppal, a L'avenir parent

⁴ Roohi Kapur, a L'avenir parent