

## The Response

### *An Appreciation of the Consciousness of Children and Its Implications for Social Justice and Spiritual Awakening*

Hurt and wounded people make hurtful and wounding decisions. This is the inevitable conclusion of a century of incisive psychological inquiry and several millennium of enlightened spiritual philosophy. Instead of looking at the consequences of bad decisions such as stupid wars, environmental degradation, or a seducible citizenry which can only induce palliative responses, it is imperative that we examine human consciousness itself. Appreciation of consciousness allows us to take the deliberate, responsible steps towards optimal well-being.

Very few of us take the time to investigate consciousness. Our ignorance leaves us bereft. The most precious human gift, consciousness, the ability to self observe and self reflect, is left under the tree while the glitterati of data and power call like the ring called to Gollum. Love is trivialized into sex and romance, spirituality becomes the province of the few and is confused with mysticism, and social justice looks like policy adjustments rather than the celebration of our common humanity.

It is time for a change.

### The Switch

I am certainly not the first person to realize that childhood wounds haunt us and have chaotic social and political repercussions. Nor am I unique in realizing that there is greatness throughout life and that nourishing relationships with children allows that greatness to come forward. However, I am a member of a rather smaller group who insists that appreciation of the child's consciousness is the way to participate in those nourishing relationships. And, in whole partnership with my wife Josette, I have woven together the discourses in psychology, education, philosophy and anthropology with 25 years of fieldwork with children and families and the realizations from my inner practices to offer a comprehensive insight into the consciousness of children.

That insight and its ramifications occupy the rest of this book. If I am successful in communicating it a switch will be thrown that will illuminate a way to meaningful (i.e. long lasting) responses to the most vexing problems of our times. It will place the power and responsibility for greatness in our own hands, in our relationships. It will break down the reliance on policy, on "them," and allow an authentic experience and expression of freedom, of creativity. It will begin to dissolve the most devastating pollution of all, the shame in the human mind.

Imagine what this world might look like if adults didn't spend most of their time reacting to the wounds of their childhood.

The premise of this road to social justice and spiritual support is straightforward.

- The only pollution is the pollution of the human being, the human mind. Humans make the decisions that lead to social justice. Hurt humans make hurtful decisions. Humans living in optimal well-being make just decisions.

- Appreciation of human development provides the blueprint for optimal well-being.
- Human development is a natural process. It unfolds according to natural principles.
- The field of inquiry into human development crosses disciplines. It includes the science of wholes—Emergence, Chaos theory, Relativity and quantum theory, and evolutionary biology; cultural and physical anthropology; brain research; and spiritual philosophy—East, West, North, South, contemporary and ancient. Educators have contributed mightily. Humanistic, transpersonal, and family systems discourses in psychology complement the inquiry into human development by providing rich details and direction for further research.
- Humans develop as whole beings. All human capacities including psychological, spiritual, ethical, emotional, social, intellectual, and motivation develop synchronistically and synergistically. Though on the surface this appears to complexify development beyond comprehensibility, in fact it makes understanding easier.
- Capacities are innate and humans develop in relationships to others and to environment. Human development is bi-directional—the child influences the adult and the adult influences the child.
- Creating the relationships that nurture the innate capacities brings optimal well-being and, by effortless extension, social justice and spirituality. Those living in well-being are most likely to be fair and just in society.
- Nourishment includes recognition and gratitude for one’s contributions as well as recognition of opportunity to learn from others.

### **On the Consciousness of Children**

A meaningful description of the consciousness of children must include that which is measurable, such as behavior, affect, and cognitive mapping, and the immeasurable, such as aesthetics, ethics, and spirituality. It must cover the range of human experience and expression. To be truly effective for parents, teachers, and anyone who interacts with children it must be relatively easy to understand and apply. To be the response to our problems it must include family and community. To be accepted it must be deepen self knowledge in both parent and child.

Josette and I have named our insight of children’s consciousness Natural Learning Rhythms (NLR). Natural means that which you are born with (nature). Learning means to acquire skill or mastery in life, to become competent (nurture). Rhythm refers to regularly recurring patterns and cycles between the two. Thus, Natural Learning Rhythms describes our inherent capacities (natural) to move through life and gain competence or mastery (learning) in recognizable and recurring patterns (rhythm). When we connect to a child’s Natural Learning Rhythms we can see through her eyes and feel through her heart. We consciously relate.

### **The Organizing Principle**

During childhood, consciousness unfolds in recognizable life stages. Each stage is governed by an organizing principle. The organizing principle is an innate capacity to receive, organize, and respond to the psychological and physical environments in ways that maximize well-being. In each of the sequential stages of childhood recognized in Natural Learning Rhythms, there is an organizing principle that governs the general ways in which human energy, capacities, inclinations, and interactions are structured and act.

Conscious interaction with children occurs when the organizing principle in the child is nurtured. For that reason, and because Josette and I have the social agenda of contributing to change in the world through conscious relationships with children, learning about the organizing principle, what nurtures it, and applications in everyday life comprises most of our work with others.

The organizing principle is a psychological faculty inherent in every human. It has a locus, a purpose, and the means to accomplish that purpose. The locus, or space, that it occupies is similar to that for all psychological faculties. Memory, for example, does not have a form in the same sense as a concrete pillar, yet no one denies that memory exists and occupies a psychological space. That space is known by its function; to recall something from the past is to use one's memory; to organize the world, one perceives through the organizing principle. Recall is the means memory uses. A purpose of memory is continuity. The purpose of the organizing principle is optimal well-being, and it uses the means of actualizing the biological, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual capacities of the developmental moment.

Therefore the organizing principle is a natural psychological faculty and is known in the same way as other psychological faculties such as memory, perception, abstraction, affect, and concentration.

## **Wisdom**

Wisdom is not something we put into a child—it is already there. In his book *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Abraham Maslow asks, “What if the organism is seen as having ‘biological wisdom’?” In every stage of life, there is wisdom that is present and available to the human. In every age and stage of childhood, wisdom is present and available in the child.

The wisdom we are referring to is the same as that which Gregory Bateson called “systemic wisdom.” In his book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson defined wisdom as an awareness of the interlocking circuits that connect the elements of the natural world. He said, “I use ‘wisdom’ as a word for recognition of and guidance by knowledge of the total systemic creature.”

In Natural Learning Rhythms, we refer to wisdom that is in the moment. In a state of wellbeing a person is most likely to access wisdom. Qualities of wisdom are inclusive of, but not limited to, right action in relationship to context available to a person's developmental moment in life. Wisdom is a way of knowing and acting in relationship, that optimizes the wellbeing of the organism. Wisdom shines when the organizing principle is optimally nurtured. In our view, this is what Bateson means when he states that wisdom is “recognition of and guidance by knowledge of the total systemic creature.” In a state of optimal well-being, a person can experience that which is most meaningful, beautiful, and true for their developmental stage and their moment of life.

Can the effects of wisdom be seen? Unquestionably. Expressions of wisdom can be seen qualitatively in expressions of aesthetics, friendship, ethics, meaning, love, trust, insight. None of these are explainable by an epistemology that does not include wisdom.

However, wisdom's effects are not measurable. No one can quantify love, ethics, aesthetics, trust, meaning, or insight. These qualities of human nature cannot be touched, located, or measured. We respond to those who see this as a problem with the same response posited by Einstein in his

laboratory: “Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted, counts.”

Those who come to know wisdom throughout childhood know the response to life most appropriate to their age in context. In sequence throughout the twenty-three years of childhood, they come to know their place and their boundaries, to trust themselves and others, to govern themselves, and to appreciate their connection with life and the universe. This knowledge allows wise people to meet life’s challenges reasonably and with great courage, strength, and perseverance. It allows them to be with their families and with children in ways that include firm loving boundaries, mutual respect, and generous support. It allows deep intuitive satisfaction that is beyond concepts, societal pressures, techniques and tricks, parenting as you were parented, and teaching as you were taught. It allows connection in the moment and mutual engagement. It allows families to solve problems without becoming adversarial. It allows enjoyment, care, curiosity, and novel approaches to seemingly intractable conundrums. It allows humor and humility with no loss of dignity and integrity.

Wisdom is infinitely creative. Therefore, nothing final or complete can be said to describe the child who lives with her organizing principle properly nurtured. This way of living is wisdom-based, emergent, and ongoing process of self-discovery. It is the joy of living. Wisdom-based relationships are possible for whole families. This is what Natural Learning Rhythms is all about—this deep yet ordinary spirituality that lives in families and their relationships. For families living in wisdom based relationships, the ordinary is extraordinary and the extraordinary is simply ordinary.

## **The Essentials of Natural Learning Rhythms**

What is the organizing principle of each stage of development? How can it be nourished? In this article I can only present the bare bones of NLR. The complete understanding is accessible in my book, *Optimal Parenting*, and in the many programs that the EnCompass non-profit organization offers. Nevertheless, even bare bones appreciation of the organizing principle and nourishments opens the door to the child’s consciousness and will be sufficient to suggest meaningful applications for social justice and emergent spirituality.

Josette and I, following the protocol of the profession, have chosen names for the stages which indicate their chief characteristics. Therefore, each stage ends with the suffix “being”, which means nothing essential is missing. The prefix points to the dominant characteristic of the stage. The secondary organizing principle, described below, provides the necessary conditions for the primary organizing principle to become viable. As you read, think about the nourishments the same way you think about diet. All children need protein, vitamins, etc. Yet every family has their unique way of supplying these needs and every body has its own need level. In the same way every family can supply the nourishments described below. How each family does it is their choice specific to their family culture, as it should be.

The first stage, BodyBeing (0-8), indicates that learning occurs primarily through the body.

- Rightful Place is the primary organizing principle. All capacities are used, all experiences decoded for their value in establishing where and with whom the child belongs. Only from the basis of Rightful Place can the environment be optimally explored and ingested.

- The secondary organizing principles are the ability to create boundaries and to develop personal strength. Only by knowing boundaries can the child know her place. When she knows her Rightful Place she is strong and able.
- The nourishments that nurture the child to access and develop these capacities are: loving touch, security, flexibility, warmth and nourishment.
- The language of BodyBeing children is sensation. It is the medium by which they both receive and transmit information.
- BodyBeing's key attributes include egotism and the ability to make "sensation-based" maps of both the physical and psychological environment.
- All the marvels of this age, such as language, fine motor skills, the ability to make the body adapt to its social and physical environment, naturally unfold when the organizing principle is nourished.

FeelingBeing (9-12), the second developmental stage, indicates that learning is primarily through feelings.

- Trust is the organizing principle of FeelingBeing. Learning centers on the ability to decipher personal feelings and the feelings of others. Social and interpersonal relationships are paramount.
- The secondary organizing principle is Reciprocal Cooperation. This refers to cooperation of all parties. If others are not trustworthy the child often resists cooperation.
- The nourishments are: feeling mentors, honesty, fairness, adventure, adaptability, and justice
- The language of FeelingBeing children is feelings. The key attributes of this stage are community relationships, awareness of personal mortality, awareness of conscience, and the ability to be inspired.
- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields a deep, trusting connection with self, family, community and nature.
- When a child trusts, she has an excellent ability to easily perceive the feeling world of others in any given situation and she cooperates in the name of genuine relationship.

IdealBeing (13-17), the third developmental stage indicates that learning takes place through the exploration of ideals.

- The primary organizing principle of this stage is autonomy. Autonomy means self-governance and includes social ability and skill in relationships. It is not about isolated individualism.
- The secondary organizing principles are identity construction, freedom and personal power. The child is taking responsibility for the development of self.
- The nourishments are sensitive respect, the ability to express and act upon ideals, peer contact, respect of personal space and challenges within the realm of success. Sensitive Respect means that we support the child's idealistic exploration into her core nature. It also means that we respect the identities that are "tried on" during this search. Sensitive Respect includes boundaries when the exploration might be harmful.
- The language of this stage is inquiry. Inquiry is the best tool elders have for understanding the child's ideals.
- Key attributes include an unceasing exploration of self, intense insecurity, and a growing awareness of personal responsibility. IdealBeing children try on many identities and experiment with them until a match with their core nature is satisfied. An identity naturally drops away when the child decides it is not serving their nature. They often swing between freedom and responsibility, between ideals and shadow exploration, between assertion and insecurity, between risk taking and the need to experience success, between individuation and peer conformity.
- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields a solid sense of self, which provides the power and freedom to forge ahead in the now recognizably uncertain world.

The fourth developmental is ReasonableBeing 18-23). This name reflects that learning takes place through an ability to participate in multiple perspectives without losing connection to oneself.

- The primary organizing principles are interconnectedness, humor and humility.
- The secondary organizing principles are intentionality, incisiveness and systems creation.
- Mature Recognition is the nourishment for ReasonableBeing. It has four aspects: recognition of commitment; recognition of equality; recognition of achievement; recognition of recognition. The last refers to the ability to self observe and to accept ourselves as responsible for the meaning of our life. It is the basis for a comprehensive self knowledge.
- The language is dialogue. The dialogue is toward holistic logic and often has informed research as a basis. Research can be into anything, i.e., travel, relationships, academics, etc.
- Key attributes include a fully mature relationship to both past and future and the ability to know and monitor the well-being of the capacities developed in the previous three developmental stages. ReasonableBeing children also have the ability to crunch data into systems and through those systems operate on and change the world. They explore all forms of knowing, from the scientific to the artistic to the spiritual. Genuine reasonableness acts only in accord with the developed capacities of the three previous stages. It is not merely intellectual.
- Ultimately, the proper developmental diet yields self-knowledge that is interconnected with all aspects of the known universe. This both provides self-confidence to create systems and leaves the child humble and aware of how extraordinary life is.

## Sidebar: Summary Chart

### NATURAL LEARNING RHYTHMS – WHOLE-CHILD DEVELOPMENT

---

**BODYBEING**—Begins at conception and ends at approximately 8 ½ (depending on the child and the context)

- ◆ **Organizing principle:** 1<sup>st</sup>—**Rightful Place**, 2<sup>nd</sup>—**Boundaries and Strength**
  - ◆ **Language:** **Sensation**—(BB children experience the world through sensation)
  - ◆ **Key Nourishment:** **Loving Touch with Acceptance**
  - ◆ **Secondary Nourishment:** **Security, Warmth, Nourishment, and Flexibility**
  - ◆ **Meaning Making Moment:** At approximately 2 ½ or 3 a new ability appears to use language symbolically. They can then engage more complex communication and creativity in both discovering and ascribing meaning.
  - ◆ **Poison:** **“Perceived” Physical Threat**—anything which threatens security
-

**FEELINGBEING**—Begins at 8½ or 9 and ends at approximately 12½ (depending on the child and the context)

- ◆ **Organizing principle:** 1<sup>st</sup>—Trust, 2<sup>nd</sup>—Reciprocal Cooperation
  - ◆ **Language:** Feelings and Emotions
  - ◆ **Key Nourishment:** Feeling Mentors—adults who have a relationship to a spectrum of feelings.
  - ◆ **Secondary Nourishment:** Fairness, Relationship, Caring, Adventure, Honesty, Adaptability, and Justice
  - ◆ **Meaning Making Moment:** At approximately 10½ a new opening appears to that which lies beyond physical life and which often expresses itself in experiences of transcendence. There seems to be a relationship between this and feelings of religious devotion generated from within the child, not as a consequence of external morality.
  - ◆ **Poison:** Hypocrisy—does not imply perfection, only a working relationship to Truth.
- 

**IDEALBEING**—Begins at 12½ or 13 and ends at approximately 17½ (depending on the child and the context)

- ◆ **Organizing principle:** 1<sup>st</sup>—Autonomy (self-governance), 2<sup>nd</sup>—Identity Construction, Freedom and Responsibility
  - ◆ **Language:** Inquiry into the child's Ideals
  - ◆ **Key Nourishment:** Sensitive Respect—support a child's identity search that express core nature
  - ◆ **Secondary Nourishment:** Adventure, Active activities, Peer Sensitivity, Self designed challenges within the realm of success, Identity exploration opportunities, Opportunities to express their ideals and work with them.
  - ◆ **Meaning Making Moment:** At approximately 15 years of age the child experiences the clarity of their ideals along with a movement toward identity, personal power and freedom. Young people see the potential greatness of things that can be done in the world and their identity can be part of and contribute to that greatness. Meaning feeds into the identity choices.
  - ◆ **Poison:** Ridicule—means to disrespect with derision the child's identity choices.
- 

**REASONABLEBEING**—Begins in Doubt at 17½ OR 18 and ends at approximately 23

- ◆ **Organizing principle:** 1<sup>st</sup>—Interconnectedness, Humor, and Humility 2<sup>nd</sup>—Intentionality, Incisiveness, and Systems Creation
-

- ◆ **Language:** **Dialogue**—toward holistic logic which has informed research as a basis.
  - ◆ **Key Nourishment: Achievements,** **Mature Recognition—of the child’s Equality, abilities for Commitment, and the ability for Recognition of self.**
  - ◆ **Secondary Nourishment:** **Comparison, Recapitulation, Inquiry, Exploration, Experimentation, Suggestion, Investigation, Discernment.**
  - ◆ **Meaning Making Moment:** At 18 or 19 the awesome and humbling experience of the vastness and mystery underlying all life is cognitively accepted. This includes a greatly expanded appreciation of time/space. The search for the depth of meaning, both individually throughout life, arises and begs to be answered. All values are scrutinized for their eternal qualities.
  - ◆ **Poison:** **Condescension**—and all Imposed Hierarchies
- 
- 

## Social Justice

Oppression towards children inevitably arises with neglect of their consciousness, and attendant developmental needs. We shall take up the question of the consequent injustices to children later. It is better to appreciate the gifts children bring to social justice first. When the gift of the child is appreciated, the psychological immune system develops in health. Recognition of the child’s gifts brings relationship and learning. Recognition of the gift of the child obviates the injustices. Appreciation of the child’s gifts heals wounds. Unfortunately, the gifts of the child are too often ignored. Neglect of children’s contribution to social justice reeks of chauvinism and is a reaction generated by the adult’s unresolved childhood issues and conditioning.

Those children who experience themselves as socially valuable throughout their childhood have the greatest likelihood of facilitating the transition to a socially just world. It will not be those who are seen only for the contribution they might make as adults or for their ability to learn cultural customs and skills. Such chauvinism sees the child as an adult-in-the-making, not a child-as-she-is. That opportunity belongs to children whose social importance is acknowledged in each moment of their lives.

The rest of this chapter provides a modest taste of the some of the gifts and opportunities that children bring. Subsequent chapters go into greater detail about relationships that support optimal well-being in each stage of childhood, the gifts of each stage and age, and the wounding that occurs through neglect of the developmental needs. I will also give detailed attention to the consequences of this neglect for social justice and spiritual support.

BodyBeing children (0-8) accept the elders in their lives. This simple acceptance has far-reaching consequences. It bonds children to parents and grandparents. For most families the bond happens effortlessly, as it naturally should. That bond of attachment is healthy and appropriate and will effect the formation of future relationships through the child's life. That bond bonds society. It is that critical first step in which there is complete acceptance that one's well-being is connected to the well-being of others. Crucial for rightful place, the bond develops throughout the BodyBeing years and continues throughout life. It provides the basis for trust and is a sterling example of interconnectedness in every stage of life.

Parents bond to the children as well. In perfect tandem, parents feel fulfilled when they unconditionally accept the child. They have accepted a responsibility that includes the eternal freedom to love. For many parents, this moment serves as the actualization of substantive values crucial for optimal well-being in Reasonable development. Socially, it is a commitment to co-create a world where the child can live in well-being.

Extended family, school, and home communities comprise the social environment of FeelingBeing children. They explore interpersonal dynamics as they learn how to decipher their own feelings and the feelings of others. They embody the values, norms, and ethics of society. Their most extraordinary gift is that they are co-creating the social context as they live. Adults have only to observe them carefully to see how social relationships form.

As they embody the creation of social relationships, so FeelingBeing children (9-13) reflect the society in which they live. They empathically feel the feelings of others and focus on the mentorship of the trusted elders in their life. Therefore, careful observation of FeelingBeing children yields direct information on the current social moment. Adults can use this information to restructure their own relationships toward a more just society.

Ethics is defined as the "science of morals," and mores are those social customs that call forth quality of character. FeelingBeing children living in optimal well-being are nourished, not needy. They live in abundance, in being, and not in deficit. Through reciprocal cooperation, they continually bring attention to responsible ethics in the community and society through their questioning. They cooperate in the spirit of trust, and trust is the cornerstone of character.

FeelingBeing children's innate capacity for relationship and ethics manifests as environmental sensitivity. They do not have to be taught the importance of ecology; they must learn by living it. Pollution makes no sense. Neither does prejudice, which is pollution in interpersonal relationships.

FeelingBeing is the leverage point for creating a just society. This is at once a cause for optimism and heartbreak. So little awareness and resources are devoted to the developmental stage of FeelingBeing; so many resources in every sphere of human endeavor are wasted because of this neglect. Can our society at least begin to appreciate the social contribution of FeelingBeing children? Can we allow this age child the moment to engage the feelings attendant to fairness, justice, and ethics? Are we ready to abandon the imposition of morality? Can we accept their trust as a sacred gift and cherish it through the wisdom of trustworthy relationships?

Typical of the black-and-white nature of the teen years, IdealBeing teenagers (13-17) are either richly rewarded for their societal contribution or vilified for the challenges they bring. If the

contribution matches social norms and mores, there is reward; if it highlights the shadow, there is vilification. The shadow represents all the unresolved issues in the adult that have been disowned (e.g., wildness, greatness, and/or negative aspects). This confusion, which adds to the misperception of teenagers, stems from adult's evaluating the teen's contribution based on performance or results rather than understanding the contribution of the teenager herself.

The first right of an autonomous person is the right to choose. Few people cling to this right more stubbornly and more capriciously than the IdealBeing teen. The right to choose is defended against every assault, reasonable and otherwise. Every parent with a teen in this stage of development knows this. How often have we stood by with a seemingly better way to do something, hearts hurting as we watch the teen struggle yet unwilling to take our advice? Many parents find this difficult to bear, as I did until I realized that stepping into the right to choose is the first step on a long, perilous journey and absolutely necessary for human society and evolution. I can think of no way to ease into it. You either take responsibility for choosing or you don't. Once you do, then the learning is in the playing and struggling with it. Underneath the choices themselves, the right to choose is affirmed time and again by IdealBeing teenagers.

The right to choose is the basis of a democratic society. It is the definition of liberty itself. The right to choose translates easily into the right to vote. The question can only be asked, not answered: How would society change if teenagers had adequate time to learn how to choose before they were praised or ridiculed for those choices?

Loyalty is a matter of honor and dignity is a commitment simultaneous to trust and to meaning. IdealBeing teenagers defend each person's right to be loyal to their own ideals. Loyalty is a more complex expression of the bonding of BodyBeing and of the just and fair community of FeelingBeing.

The emergence of ReasonableBeing (18-23) brings compassion, insight, and meaning to social justice. Humans are interconnected with one another and the environment. Obviously, pollution and prejudice have no purchase. Desiring substantive values ReasonableBeing individuals question social systems. Is the allocation of resources fair? Do we recognize that damaging a part damages the whole? Can self centered activities lead to social justice?

Due to their appreciation of the past, ReasonableBeing individuals have the ability to reflect on their own lives and remedy wounds. This means that they can enter adulthood optimally and contribute to social justice. It also means that reasonable acts are only those which do not violate any of the organizing principles. If an action damages Rightful Place, Trust, Autonomy or Interconnectedness, then the act is unreasonable and socially unjust.

Natural Learning Rhythms suggests a new approach to social justice: Include children in the social justice discourse. Celebrate their gifts to society. Parent and educate them with dignity so that their natural capacities for social justice have the right environment in which to flourish. Natural Learning Rhythms asks the question, what kind of society would emerge if the adults were able to enjoy optimal well-being during their childhood?

The age of BodyBeing begins the social process with bonding, play, and innocence. The emergence of FeelingBeing moves to a new awareness with growing knowledge of ethics, justice, and fairness.

Together, they establish the foundation of belongingness and interpersonal relationship, so necessary for social membership. IdealBeing emerges from this foundation by urging the teen toward the right to choose and the importance of loyalty. This establishes individual liberty, a powerful addition to social membership. A citizen belongs and therefore enjoys the right of freedom of choice. These are the qualities—bonding, play, innocence, ethics, fairness, justice, right to choose, and loyalty—that ReasonableBeing children get to play with. As ReasonableBeing emerges, new qualities of the human also emerge—interconnectedness, tolerance, meaning, and the realization dawns that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness must include all people.

## Spirituality

Is it fair to say that spiritually adept people embrace social justice?

In Natural Learning Rhythms, spirit refers back to the unchanging wholeness, the ground of manifestation. Its source is the source of all manifestation, of events and entities. However, giving spirit attributes such as the source, does not say what spirit is. In Natural Learning Rhythms there is no attempt to say spirit is a *what* or a thing. Rather, the word spirit is a placeholder, or an arrow, indicating this incomprehensibility (which the great philosopher/physicist David Bohm called *the implicate*), which inheres source as one of its attributes. The relationship between spirit and its forms was well described by William Blake: “Eternity is in Love with the Productions of Time.” There is no discontinuity between source and entity, between spirit and life, between eternity and time. Not only is there no discontinuity but the relationship between source and entity is Love.

Always and everywhere, every entity inheres spirit, including humans, in every moment of our lives. There are increasingly complex capacities to apprehend spirit throughout life. Spiritual capacity unfolds in stages in the same way as all capacities do. Just as nourishing sensory, emotional, physical, and social capacities of each stage leads to optimal participation in these capacities as adults, so it is with spirituality. Imposing adult criteria for spirituality on a BodyBeing child is chauvinistic and gratuitous.

Spirit has nothing to do with religion. It has nothing to do with belief. For those wishing a comprehensive erudite inquiry into spirit I refer you to the body of literature describing the Perennial Philosophy. Contributors include great people from diverse cultures in spiritual philosophy, philosophy, anthropology, biology, physics, the arts, psychology and of course, spiritual traditions and practitioners.

For humans, ethics and meaning reflect spiritual development. What we value is what we hold sacred. What we hold sacred is what is meaningful to us. If we cannot live in accord with our values and meaning we become alienated. Social justice loses importance. We can only seek healing or diversion.

Children nurtured by wisdom-based relationships effortlessly actualize the spiritual capacity in each life stage. BodyBeing children know their Rightful Place. Boundaries are critical loci of learning. Strength permeates their unceasing explorations. They engage the world with delight; the magic of life needing no other invitation than the assurance of belonging. Consciousness resides in the body, not in rationality.

Each stage is a new birth and is marked by a dramatic psychological event. At nine years of age the child becomes aware of personal mortality. She has knowledge that she dies. The body centered egotism of the first stage dissolves. Awareness of personal death calls forth the profound questions of love and the possibility of existence after death. The following years, FeelingBeing, organizes around Trust. If properly nourished the child, at around 11 years of age, has the possibility of feeling transcendence—of feeling connection to Great Nature. FeelingBeing competence means the full actualization of Trust. Etymologically, trust comes from the same root as truth. In other words, there is feeling relationship to truth which is known through trustworthy relationships. Love births in these relationships. Consciousness resides in the feelings, in the heart, not in rationality.

Autonomy, the organizing principle of IdealBeing teens, brings the imperative of consciousness of oneself. Ideals are projected; identities are tried on and at approximately sixteen years of age the child begins to awaken to his own greatness. To the child, greatness means that he can succeed in this world; that there is place, opportunity, and receptivity for the manifestation of his intelligence and talents. Love of self—which is often perverted to selfishness only when a child is malnourished—and idealistic purity in the search for Truth reveal the powerful spiritual thread. Consciousness resides in this profound connection to self.

ReasonableBeing births in questioning and doubt. With doubt, new questions are asked about the meaning of life. The transitory, idealistic projections of IdealBeing cannot account for the complexities of the world. Organizing to optimize interconnection, ReasonableBeing children are able to see the whole in a part, to give meaning to the past and the future, so appreciate the elegance and precision of manifestation and the Universe. They begin to seek values that last through time and are willing to commit to actualizing them. They are now capable of accepting paradox. They love others and themselves. Romance is the gateway and the pathway to self knowledge. Giving is receiving. Love needs no reason, yet is oh so reasonable. Truth is not attainable yet can be known through participation. There is no separation between consciousness and child.

Actualizing the spiritual expression inherent in development is simply natural sanity. Wisdom-based relationships call it forward. And, perhaps the most amazing fact of all, we have only to nurture the organizing principle to live this life of optimal well-being in *Truth* and *Love*, as spirit.

## **The Dance of Mutual Development**

Hurt adults make hurtful decisions. But what if simply through the act of caring for the child's developmental needs, they could heal these hurts? Welcome to the Dance of Mutual Development and its magnificent contribution to social justice. By providing the appropriate developmental nurturing for children adults can heal the unresolved issues from their own childhood hurt. As past hurt heals, the adult can reconnect to wellbeing and then he or she will naturally move to social justice.

Adults who live in wellbeing open to spiritual insight. What if, once healed, providing the nourishments allowed direct spiritual experience? Welcome to the Dance of Mutual Development where the opportunity to experience devotion, service, love, and truth resides in wisdom-based relationships.

Let us be more explicit for many have a difficult time comprehending the value of the Dance of Mutual Development. Providing the developmental nourishments, committing to optimal well-being in the organizing principle with children, will provide a context for reconnecting to wellbeing in the adult and heal old childhood wounds. Once healed, providing the nourishments leads to spiritual awareness. For many of Natural Learning Rhythms practitioners the healing happens when we parent and the spiritual opportunity when we grandparent. Of course this can happen at any time of life, we are simply articulating how it can happen in parenting. This happens for anyone who cares for the development of children. Perhaps that is one way in which wisdom can emerge with older age.

The following chapters will specify how the Dance of Mutual Development can occur with children in each stage.

## **The Bigger Picture**

In Natural Learning Rhythms, development is emergent. Natural Learning Rhythms maps the emergence of consciousness in children. Others have mapped the evolution of consciousness in the species. Is there a correlation? Does the development of the child's consciousness go through the same stages as the evolution of species consciousness?

If the answer is yes then the importance of parenting and education takes on radically new dimension and importance. It brings new meaning to the long childhood of humans. The direction can now be seen as actualization of the increasingly complex human capacities—Place (belongingness), Trust (relationship), Autonomy (individuation), and Reasonableness (interconnection). Such complexity of consciousness cannot be accomplished easily. The world and its inhabitants provide the necessary classroom.

More critically, students of the emergence of consciousness agree that participation and choice are necessary for the next structure to emerge. What kinds of choices can we expect from malnourished people? What kind from those who live in optimal well-being? Our evolution as a species lies in our own hands. There is no one coming to save us. If we choose optimal relationships with children we self create a world conducive to more complex and integrated expressions of consciousness.

### Emergent Structures of Consciousness

We rely primarily on the works of Gebser, De Chardin, Wilber, Kegan, Koestler, Steiner, and Aurobindo for information on the emergence of consciousness. We present it as a synthesis but encourage you to investigate this pivotal subject yourself.

The term "structure of consciousness" refers to a human mode of perception. The structures have unfolded over long periods of time. Individuals can access structures that are not yet actualized in the general population. As the value of more complex structure becomes known, more humans can and do access it. More and more resources will then be dedicated to it.

We propose the following: as ontology recapitulates phylogeny in the formation of a human fetus, so child development recapitulates the evolution of consciousness. For the moment let's play with the notion as if it were true; as a child goes through stages of development she also moves through the structures of consciousness .

Here is a brief description of each structure of consciousness and its correspondence to NLR.

*Archaic:* Using the image of a fetus immersed in amniotic fluid, one imagines a being that is not-knowing, pre-rational, and boundary-less. This is the archaic structure of consciousness of unity without awareness of self as an entity.

*Magical:* BodyBeing children (0-8) relate to the world as a magical extension of their body. The only place that they know is the place they are; the only time is this sensory moment. Everything else appears and disappears magically. The egocentricity of the stage should never be construed as egotism, for the child perceives the world an extension of herself.

*Mythical:* FeelingBeing children (9-12) have the capacity for empathic relationship. Rules of the community (tribe) become important, and values and morals form. Conscience, the organ that evaluates trust, develops. Beauty, ethics and morality awaken. Mythic societies emphasize these capacities and personify them in the myths they live by. Synchronistically, FeelingBeing children love myths. The classic myth motif of the hero facing the challenge of death and then returning to the community with a jewel aptly mirrors the awareness of personal mortality at the beginning of this stage of development and the opportunity for awareness of transcendence at around 11 years of age. The actualization of the ability for free-flowing imagination has the lack of fixed space that is central to the mythical structure. Gods in myths can be anywhere. During this stage of development children are connected to the time sense of the cycles of nature, another characteristic of mythic cultures.

*Mental:* IdealBeing (13-17) and the mental structure begin with an assertion of will towards an individuated self. Under the aegis of autonomy, freedom, and personal power, the child steps into self referential choice. Able to differentiate her social self from her inner self she begins to engage reflective self-awareness. Awareness of time intensifies. There is a future. There will be greater freedom and greater responsibility. Yet, the teen's idealistic projections still have mythical attributes. IdealBeing is an age of honor and chivalry, of projected greatness and wells of despair. Time intensity and meaning exist but the complexity of the mental structure arrives only with ReasonableBeing.

*Integral:* The key is time-freedom. Time-freedom is achieved through integration of all previous all previous structures and their attendant temporal forms. This integration is one of the capacities of ReasonableBeing. The integrated individual has the actualized the capacity to form substantive values that endure through time, to step into the perspective of others, to engage the process of making new-meaning throughout life in relationship to the context of his world.

Time freedom is one of the natural outcomes of development if all the former developmental stages are nurtured. It is during ReasonableBeing that the child has the ability to integrate all former stages of childhood into a whole-life perspective of self and then integrate that self with the world.

The Integral structure cannot be mentally thought through or imagined – it is emergent and can only be elicited or awakened. What is needed is simultaneous care and dispassion—a gradually maturing equilibrium of all former consciousness structures—to prepare for a leap forward. Integral participates in the whole, integrity, transparency and spirituality. It brings the disruption of the merely systematic, the incursion of dynamics, the recognition of energy, the mastery of movement, the

supersession of patriarchy, the renunciation of dominance and power and the acquisition of intensity and clarity. Isms have no place in Integral.

Integral will become the species norm when we break the attachment to the known of the mental structure. This is difficult. The mental structure has brought science and technology and freedom from myth. However, it relies on thought and there is no check on its arrogance. It is not reasonable. It not only denigrates the magical and mythical structures, it also threatens our existence. The mental structure often fails to nurture Rightful Place, Trust, Autonomy, and Interconnectedness.

We humbly suggest that Natural Learning Rhythms be considered as a giant step towards the deliberate activation of the Integral structure of consciousness.

We shall leave the context of the emergence of consciousness as we explore each stage in depth but return to it in the final chapter as a frame for summarizing and as a catapult to new questions.

*Ba Luvmour is the Executive Director of EnCompass ([www.EnCompassFamilies.org](http://www.EnCompassFamilies.org)). where he and Josette have pioneered whole family experiential learning programs. His latest book is *Optimal Parenting*. In addition to running programs, Ba consults with individual families, advises organizations and speaks on NLR. The Knowledge Academy of Bend has hired Ba to create a school based on NLR.*