

Week 1. GETTING STARTED !



PARENTING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

When we consciously take on, and welcome spiritual and psychodynamic work as part of our integral parenting practice, we are blessed and challenged with many ingredients that can make the experience one of the most *radically transformative ones available to a human being*. Indeed, parenting in this way can be as challenging, fulfilling, and meaningful a practice as any other, offering many opportunities to evolve, to embrace wider and deeper, to become more integral as individuals. How so?

- As a parent we are faced with the *great responsibility for a vulnerable, dependent other*, which calls for utmost integrity in our intentions, communications, and actions.
- Responding to the pretty much *full-time demands and needs* that infants and young children bring with them requires that we stretch and tap into resources we did not know we had, such as extreme patience, flexibility, physical resilience, and discriminating wisdom. This also provides a great squeeze on our ego... life is suddenly not so much about “me” anymore, but about my child, offering an intimate invitation to go beyond our personal self.
- Given the absorbent nature of a young child’s mind and the deep emotional imprinting that happens at this early age, we are called to face ourselves and to become more *conscious of our own shadows for the sake of the child*.

- Young children are developmentally self-centered and impulsive. We can easily *be triggered* by this in ways we may have thought we were immune to—thereby discovering our own shadows and growing edges.
- By paying close attention and witnessing the miraculous growth of a young human being, we begin to understand that perfection is not a state to achieve, rather, *life is a dynamic unfolding* to ever higher, wider, and deeper realms of existence.
- We are *humbled many times over*—making many mistakes, having no choice but to carry on and do better, and being engaged in an endeavor that is generally neither egoically gratifying nor professionally enhancing.
- To facilitate and encourage our child’s well-being and integral development, we are asked to *bring love, presence, and discernment to all situations*.
- Because the healthy development of a child requires that she be met with both nurturing support and stimulating challenge, we ourselves need to *balance what we offer*: if, for example, we tend toward being too lenient, we need to balance this with firmness and boundaries; if we tend toward being too strict, we need to include a more embracing perspective and posture. This asks of us to go to places within ourselves that may be foreign and uncomfortable, that stretch us and help us grow.
- The incredible *delight* in witnessing a young child be and grow provides access to higher levels of commitment, stamina, and motivation than we usually think are possible. Thus, we also get to *experience our higher selves*, and can get inspired and informed by this.
- The central role that the *parent* plays means that we as parents need to go beyond technique, method, or belief, and *become that which we wish to see our children model and be exposed to: an integral person and perspective*.
- To be present to and strengthen, next to her ego (which is the main task at hand for the early period of life), our *child’s deeper nature—her soul and spirit—*

we need to *awaken the deeper layers of our self*, gradually disidentifying from our own ego, and discerning who we are and where we are coming from in each moment.

- In caring so deeply for another, we discover a *motivation beyond our self-centered relationship to life*. Especially with infants and very young children, we are challenged to place our own personal desires and agendas aside in order to be present to what is beneficial to the child and the whole.