

## Week 3. THE “WE”: WE’RE IN THIS TOGETHER!



### EXCERPT FROM ARTICLE:

#### *An Integral Approach to Parenting in the First Three Years of a Child’s Life*

by Miriam Mason Martineau

An example to illustrate how our children have their own ways of making sense that sometimes seem quite elusive to us, but that are worth seeking to understand:

“A few weeks ago in the middle of the night, my (*then 3-year old*) daughter, Adonia, wakes up and seemingly out of the blue insists that she needs her red socks. I try a variety of approaches: distraction, logic (mine anyways—that it is middle of the night and time to sleep; also that I don’t have a clue where those socks are), other solutions (I could get her another pair of socks, we could look for them in the morning...). Nothing works, she insists more and begins to cry inconsolably, an unusual reaction for her. I am at loss, all I know is that what I am doing and where I am coming from are not helping. I need to reach to a different level of consciousness, and in my foggy middle-of-the-night state, everything seems to be pulling me down, literally, into the horizontal mode of being, rather than up. Stephan, my husband, hears her cry, and shows up all cheery and friendly. I catch myself thinking, “You don’t have a clue what’s going on—she is being unreasonable, and nothing seems to be working”. I also register somewhere in the back of my mind that his cheery, awake approach is much more conducive to finding a solution than my outwardly calm and inwardly exasperated one. Well, as he chats with Adonia and she continues to cry and insist, I roll over and take the chance for some time out. As I lie there listening to her, I come to the conclusion that this is not a moment to hold firm a boundary and help her deal with the unchangeable, but rather, if possible, to find those darned socks. I also have some time to search my brain for where those socks could be, and in a moment of illumination remember putting them in the laundry basket. Off I go, and indeed, there they are. God, that was easy. She snuggles up with them and falls asleep.

This minor episode is one of the many daily ones where I as a parent am asked to reach into my vertical growth as opposed to (or in addition to) my horizontal capacities. I had to get out of the state of “Leave me alone, I just want to sleep and forget about these red socks” to “Wait a minute, by the sound of her voice, tears and insistence, there is something else going on that is more important to her than simply trying to will through an unreasonable idea.” And I remembered that we had danced around the living room that day, had a grand time pretending to do ballet with all the swoops, swirls, and leaps included—and that all the while she had been wearing her *red* socks and her little red, black and white slippers. It dawned on me that perhaps she was requesting those particular socks as a way to bring that fun time close and be ready to go at it again in the morning. True enough, first thing the next morning she put her socks and slippers on, and off we went for another round of wild dancing.

Another helpful indication to me that something other than, or at least in addition to “just a stubborn idea stuck in her head,” was going on was the fact that even whilst Stephan arrived on the scene with a fresh breath of presence and compassion, she still insisted on the red socks. This showed me that it was important for her even when someone was engaging with her in an awake, non-reactive manner. I have found that when I am reactive it is so much harder to tell whether a situation is staying unresolved due, in part, to my contracted input, or because of something else. From a calm, non-reactive stance, experiences (easy and hard ones) are often viewed and interpreted quite differently than from an egoically involved perspective; and more accurately too, as we get out of the way and can actually perceive *what is*, rather than mixing our own conditioned responses and desires into our discernments.

Commitment to grounded, self-aware, and non-reactive interaction on a parent’s side is one of the most potent and transformative gestures we as parents can make toward building a trusting and healthy relationship with our children. This can be likened to tending to healthy soil in which our children can grow in—an essential component of integral parenting, which in the language of the Integral map refers to a healthy Lower-Left quadrant, or We-space. As I aspire to consistently respond to my child in this way, I am humbled many times over, there is always more to learn.”