



{ parent-theses }

~ a quarterly journal for parents produced by John Allison ~

Number 3, Spring 2010 ~ Sleep

Editorial ~ the sleep issue

The baby's crying.

This must be one of the worst experiences we can have — to be tired, craving a break from it all, to maybe have some sleep ourselves... And the baby's crying.

There is another experience we might have... That wonderful silence when the baby is asleep. It comes as a gift... Then we have a dilemma — whether to rush about doing all sorts of stuff we think is important, or to rest...

This issue is about sleep and babies. About your sleep, and your baby's sleep — because both are important aspects of a family's well-being. There would be no books or articles about sleep — and certainly no such thing as sleep clinics — if there were no problems with sleeping. But adults increasingly report that a good night's sleep is elusive — and then the baby comes along...

You might want your child to allow space for your needs — but babies don't work like that. It isn't their brief to meet your needs in this regard. The solutions however may not come out of preoccupation with the problem, but rather out of appreciating the wider world of having a child in your life. I think here of a guiding aphorism for my life, from Dag Hammarskjöld's diary *Markings*:

To say Yes to life is at one and the same time to say Yes to oneself... Yes — even to that element in one which is most unwilling to let itself be transformed from a temptation to a strength.

Parenting *is* exhausting, especially when a baby is not sleeping (actually, your baby will be sleeping, but perhaps not as you would wish!). But we can exhaust ourselves further through our versions of 'no-saying' and 'me-saying'. There is a path towards reality that proceeds from wonder, via reverence, through an awareness of wisdom-filled harmony with the world, to self-surrender. This is a path of conscious loving, of devotion to the truth of the world. We still are likely to be tired, but renewed strength may come when we can say Yes.

~ John Allison

Sleep my little one sleep

Sleep my little one sleep
the ocean of night is so deep

but you have a shining boat
across these waters you float

its sail is filled with dreams
while overhead your star gleams

leading you through this night
towards the morning's light

Sleeping is part of living. It seems strange to have to say this, yet it appears that many people increasingly tend to see sleep as a simply utilitarian function that cuts in when they are too tired out from living. "Keep on going until you drop" is the mantra for this way of daily life. Some people believe this is how babies would carry on if left to their own devices.

But sleep is best prepared for, as a part of each day's living. Research shows that sleep is necessary for the 'digestion' of the day's experiences. "It always looks different in the morning," an old saying tells us — and very often it does... In this article we want to consider the importance of sleep for healthy living, and how we can begin to understand infant sleep.

Rhythm and sleep

We are learning more and more through neurological and physiological research that our lives have much to do with rhythm. Some rhythms are easily observed — our pulse, our breathing — which become even more obvious when we are stressed or exhausted. In addition to these readily observed rhythms, technology reveals the hidden rhythms of the brain, and also the complex patternings of our bio-rhythms.

Sleep is one of the fundamental rhythms, and is essential to our feeling of well-being. We all will know the distressing experience of a bad night's sleep. We also probably recognise that the consequences of a sleepless night are made worse by fretting over it, thinking we will be a wreck in the morning if we can't get some sleep. And indeed we are. We might have worked out that the loss of one night's sleep is OK, provided we make up for it the next night. But we've probably also experienced the awful feelings associated with several nights' broken sleep...

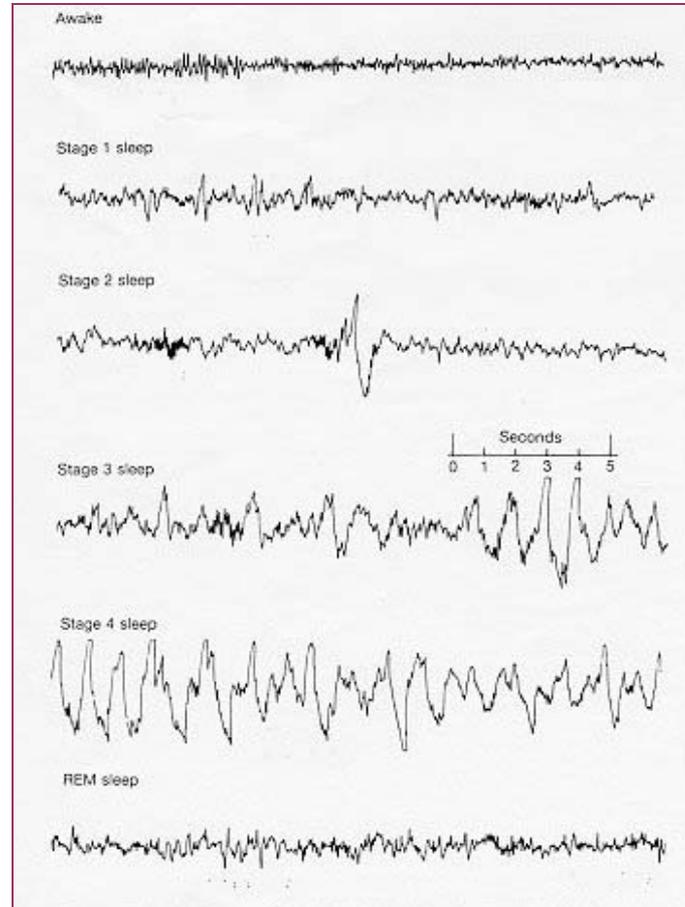
It is a simple — and sensible — step to imagine that our experience of health and well-being is based on a harmonious inter-relationship of all these rhythms. Dissonance disturbs, and keeps us wakeful — and this might be great at those times when we want to be sharply wakeful. Whereas harmony... well, harmonises, soothes, calms...

We have a sense of well-being that tells us when our rhythm of sleeping and waking is working for us. We simply feel better. Overall, we adults need to spend about a third of our lives asleep. That's a lot. Yet while scientific research is constantly discovering more and more about changes in the brain and body during sleep, we still understand surprisingly little about the need to sleep, or why we will feel restored, both physically and emotionally, by a good night's sleep.

Sustained sleep deprivation can have serious consequences. In fact it is used to break down a person's resistance during interrogations. Both our grip on life, and our grip on ourselves, is supported by sleep. It seems that as well as restoring the body, sleep is necessary in order to process our experiences — we know how things can look better in the morning after a good night's sleep. In fact, healthy sleep consists of several phases, repeating several times in the course of a night.

The stages of sleep

The invention of the electro-encephalograph (EEG) has enabled scientists to study sleep in ways that were not previously possible. Researchers have demonstrated that sleep progresses through a series of stages in which different brain wave patterns occur. In the normal sleep patterns of adults there are five stages; these usually progress in the same sequence and then repeat. A complete sleep cycle takes about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours, usually ending in a brief waking which, however, may not be remembered.



In stage 1, experienced as light sleep, you may drift in and out of sleep and can be awakened easily. Compared with the waking state, your brain wave patterns are slower. Beneath their lids your eyes move relatively slowly, and muscle activity slows down. However, during this stage, you may wake with a start, often with a sensation of falling.

In stage 2 the movement ceases and the slower waves seen in the first stage continue, with occasional spikes of rapid activity.

In stage 3, very slow brain waves alternate with smaller, faster waves. A transition into stage 4 takes place, which consists almost entirely of extremely slow rhythmic waves. These two stages together constitute the period of deep sleep. There is no eye movement or muscle activity. It is very difficult to wake someone from this deep unconscious sleep. Deep sleep is peaceful and restful, and is thought to be the time when we grow and heal. It is also the phase in which some children may experience bedwetting, sleepwalking or night terrors. Therefore we can see that deep sleep is very significant.

The final stage in a sleep cycle is known as REM (rapid eye movement) sleep. In the REM period, there is a lot going on. Your breathing becomes more rapid, irregular and shallow, your eyes flicker rapidly, and your limb muscles are temporarily paralysed. The brain waves increase to levels similar to when you are awake. Your heart rate increases, blood pressure rises, men may have erections, and the body is less able to regulate its temperature. This is the time when most dreams occur and, if wakened during REM sleep, you can recall them, or at least notice that you have been dreaming. Recent research links REM sleep to learning and memory. Taken all together, the phenomena of REM sleep suggest that we process many of our day's experiences during this time.

Infants spend almost half of their sleep time in this REM stage. Adults spend nearly half their sleep time in stage 2, about 20% in REM sleep, and the other 30% is divided between the other three stages. Older adults spend progressively less time in REM sleep.

The value of briefly considering this scientific research is that it shows that while what you experience as sound sleep is probably normal, what your baby experiences as sleep is also probably normal. The difficulty for you both is that your sleep rhythms and your child's differ.

A closer look at infant sleep

It's relatively easy to observe two distinct phases of sleep in babies: *quiet* sleep and *active* sleep. In quiet sleep, babies lie still and breathe deeply. They occasionally jerk or 'startle'. Quiet sleep is similar to non-REM sleep in grown-ups. It can be light or deep.

Cycles of quiet and active sleep last between 30 and 50 minutes in babies. Some babies and children fall deeply asleep very quickly; others sleep lightly, fidgeting and muttering for up to 20 minutes, before falling into deep sleep.

All children usually wake briefly at the end of each sleep cycle. This is a normal part of healthy sleep. Some babies cry out when they wake and need help to settle again. This also is normal. Sometimes parents feel they must go to their baby the moment their baby cries out; at its extreme, hyper-vigilance (lying awake waiting for your baby to wake) is exhausting. Yet independent sleepers can put themselves back to sleep; not all parents even hear their babies when they wake. Any one of these scenarios is normal.

You can see that every situation can be different. It's likely you are reading this article with interest because you are not enjoying some aspect of this difference. The real challenge is to understand what is needed for you and your baby. Yes, your needs are important, just as your baby's needs are important.

Exploring difference

The amount of time a baby spends in each phase of sleep varies depending on age. At birth, full-term infants spend at least half their sleeping time in active sleep. Each sleep cycle lasts on average only 40 minutes or so (compared with the 90 minutes of a grown-up). This means that, biologically, infants sleep more lightly and have more brief awakenings than grown-ups.

Babies don't know they are supposed to sleep at night! As one grandfather remarked dryly to his daughter, who was trying to regulate her baby's sleep pattern according a well-known strict regimen, "Hasn't your baby read the book yet?" It takes time to consolidate most of a baby's sleep into the night-time. Under 6 months, babies sleep on and off throughout the day and night. This is natural. Only gradually will they move towards a pattern of 2 - 3 daytime sleeps of up to two hours each. They might still wake at least once at night. From about 6 months, they are likely to have their longest sleep at night.

Whenever we refer to what is 'natural' we are also aware of exceptions. If your baby doesn't fit any of these patterns, please don't think it's their fault — the baby isn't right or wrong, it's just the way it is. Observing this, you need to decide how you will shape your baby's patterns into your shared family world. And how much that world will be shaped to accommodate the baby. If we are to consider that sleep is a part of life, then we need to consider life itself. It can be helpful to try and imagine what life is like for a baby.

Adjusting to our world

Imagine your baby in your womb, late term. Adrift in a fluid world, cushioned from shock yet able to move, aware of muted light and sound, all nourishment on tap, no excretion issues, experiencing your body's movements, the rhythmic pulse of your blood, the beating of your heart, the heave of your breath, the gurgling of your digestion. The surges of your emotion... Pause, and think how rhythmic movement and repetitive sounds lull your own senses... Think of the sea...

This is the world of your unborn baby.

In the following poem, Louis MacNeice imagines the unborn child as fully conscious and able to express its experience:

I am not yet born; provide me
With water to dandle me, grass to grow for me, trees to talk
to me, sky to sing to me, birds and a white light
in the back of my mind to guide me...

I am not yet born; rehearse me
In the parts I must play and the cues I must take...

That's good advice from the mouth of a babel! "Rehearse me in the parts I must play and the cues I must take..." Adaptation needs coaching, practising, adjusting. You will be aware of the approaches to parenting that impose a rigid regimen on the baby; on the other hand, there are those methods which submit fully to the lead of the baby. One recommends absolute control; the other recommends absolute support. We think it is a matter of control *and* support.

MacNeice's poem in full is actually a bleak work, depicting some of the darkest aspects of our world. 'Rehearsing' becomes a matter of survival. But the essential point is that babies have significant experiences, which affect them throughout their lives. However we look at it, birth is a huge adjustment.

For the nine months of pregnancy, you may have more or less gone about your life while your baby has gone about its own life — the mutual accommodation may have been more or less satisfactory. You may have been unwell at first, but then the middle period hopefully will have been abundantly full of life and growth, while towards the end you may have looked towards giving birth as a relief at last from the physical discomfort of the full-term babe.

Birth is a shock for the baby. The world seems impossibly loud, and utterly arrhythmic (non-rhythmic) — full of disjointed, jarring sounds, very bright light, and other strong sensory experiences... The child has to get used to these, you say — yes, but in good time, we respond... And you also need time to recover from what is probably the most arduous physical work you have ever done — giving birth...

It is about continual adjustment; and if you thought that now, with the birth, life might return to normal — that you might 'have a life' — perhaps your baby will appear to have other plans! Have you prepared for this? This is an important question, for it is in the nature of modern life that expectant mothers are likely to remain 'on the go' for as long as possible. Circumstances or attitudes keep them working up until birth.

Obviously, a mother knows she is pregnant and will think about it. The father may also think about it. But preparation for birth is a 'project' — it involves more than 'thinking about' and more of 'thinking through'. Imagining scenarios — for those words of the poet apply to parents as well: "Rehearse me in the parts I must play and the cues I must take..."

Maternal Reverie

Recognising that a baby cannot yet 'think thoughts' and therefore cannot digest its complex experiences, the British psychologist Wilfred Bion proposed this term — 'maternal reverie' — in the 1960s for the capacity of the mother to think *for* her child. Without going into the complexities of his psychoanalytic theories, we can say that in essence maternal reverie (or parental reverie) is an act of imagination — learning to understand the child's experiences, to 'digest' them, and find a suitable response.

Imagining your child in the womb is one example of maternal reverie. Your reflections might result in you giving yourself more time to rest, so that your unborn baby then experiences less stress. Choosing to rest instead of living to the point of exhaustion is good for you. And so you begin to habituate the baby to quiet times in your daily life, not only to your sleep times. Like the 'slow food' movement, a 'slow parenting' method has real benefits beyond purely functional outcomes.

As an ongoing practice, in practical terms, this means reflecting about what actions will ease this transition from the womb to the world. One aspect is about birth — another is about sleep. We have noted that sleep is a time in which recovery and transformation, growth and healing occurs. Therefore, what practices will enable sleep to do its work?

~ John Allison and Bettye Palmer

Sleep and Transitions ~ developing awareness of rhythm and form

Love does not rule
More importantly, it shapes.

~ Goethe

Today I received a phone call from a sleep-deprived, desperate mother. "I don't know what's happened, my baby has lost all her self-soothing skills, she takes ages to settle, then wakes frequently during the night, I can't believe it and she is nearly 12 months old!" What a familiar story this is, and what a distressing situation to be in. But is it unusual? There are so many books available, both mainstream and anthroposophical, that seek to address this topic. Usually they have enticing titles, with promises of a foolproof solution. While books are valuable of course, and helpful for gaining insight and a broader perspective, is this where the solution really lies? The situation is complex.

Rudolf Steiner spoke of the two great rhythms a child needs to master: the rhythm of sleep, and the rhythm of breathing. Both take a while to consolidate. Helping your baby/child to establish healthy sleep habits is a gift for their life. In a way this is stating the obvious; most parents understand that sleep is important both for the baby and themselves. We all need the life-renewing benefits of sound sleep. Sleep is even more important for a baby and young child.

Why then are sleep disorders so prevalent?

There are some obvious reasons: the noisy, over-stimulated aspects of modern society, and the culture of busyness we can all fall prey to unless we are very conscious. The effects of these vary from individual to individual. One of the realities of life today is that most women work right up until almost the due date of the baby's birth; or at most they have six weeks to a month at home. During pregnancy most of the focus is on preparing for birth with little time for thought about life after birth. As a result this transition is often sudden and dramatic.

When parents come to the Gabriel Centre to discuss preparation for birth, more and more my focus is on 'inner preparation'. This is not just for the birth but for life afterwards. I encourage women (it's mostly mothers I see at this stage but sometimes fathers too) to consciously find time for quiet contemplation — quiet contemplation and 'being'. As a society we are not very good at 'being'; our whole orientation is much more towards 'doing'. Sometimes, prior to having a baby, a woman has never been on her own before, so suddenly to find herself on her own with a baby can be overwhelming, no matter how much she has been looking forward to this event.

Very often today's mothers have grown up encouraged and determined to control their own lives. This desire for freedom often extends to parenting also; the expectant mother may think a baby can just be had, and then managed along with all the other tasks... This can become a source of great conflict.

Alongside this reality lives another truth that is not always recognised today, the contemplation of which can point to a more sustaining orientation to motherhood. A woman who reflects during pregnancy, on images of the archetypal Divine Feminine and considers what it can mean to be a mother today, as well as connecting with her baby during this quiet time, is nurturing her soul and paving the way for the transition to mothering and parenthood. Joan Salter expresses it well in *The Incarnating Child* when she says, "Thus is motherhood a high exalted task, one connected with the deepest and most profound issues of life". Tell this to a sleep-deprived mother and she may not be convinced. However, I think there is a key here to providing an orientation to mothering that is meaningful and strengthening.

Birth is an arduous journey — the baby needs time to recover from this and so do the parents, particularly the mother. Development is a long, slow process for human beings and babies need time. A baby needs the first six weeks at home and for it to be a time of quiet recovery from the birth, and adjustment to being here. The mother needs time to recover from the birth also and to establish feeding and to get to know her baby. The father needs this time for recovery and the couple needs the time to adjust to becoming parents. Are parents able to slow down sufficiently to allow for this? The best experience for the new-born baby is to be enfolded again into that familiar world of the mother's body rhythms, held close to the body in her arms or in a simple sling that allows steady movement, facilitating a transition in the relationship...

There are some key areas that can influence how a baby settles and sleeps. Here I am talking about an otherwise healthy baby who is unsettled and hard to get to sleep, not one that has a specific condition requiring other professional help.

Expectations and acceptance

All mothers/parents have an idea of what they think their baby is going to be like and how he/she is going to behave. Even though most parents know that babies have erratic sleep patterns in the early months, they are secretly hoping that their baby will be different. *Their* baby will sleep through the night almost from the beginning. Is this realistic? Very few babies sleep through from the beginning. This is normal. In fact, sleep patterns are often not fully established until about the age of three. This doesn't mean regular sleep patterns can't be established — in fact it is important that they are — but that the situation can change is normal. Disruption can come at times of new development; teething and illness are obvious examples, but developmental milestones are sometimes preceded by a period of disturbed sleep. Knowing that these changes are normal is helpful in understanding a baby, leading to acceptance and a reduction in expectations.

To swaddle or not to swaddle

It makes good sense to swaddle a baby in the early months. They are used to being in the confined space of their mother's womb, cushioned and protected by the amniotic fluid. Swaddling helps babies feel secure and they are more likely to relax into sleep more readily. Conversely, unwrapped babies are more likely to self-startle themselves awake at the slightest noise, and this can make them more restless and nervy.

Healthy sleep habits / Rhythm

Rhythm is the cornerstone of a healthy life for a baby and also for ourselves, although as adults we often lead very arrhythmic lives. All healthy life processes however unfold rhythmically and are a form of 'breathing' — expansion and contraction, sleeping and waking. To begin with, babies and young children are unable to establish rhythms themselves, and so rhythm is part of shaping the space for the baby/child. This helps provide security and predictability for a child's life and as a result they are more likely to be relaxed and easier to settle.

It is important to create a sleep space for your child that is warm and inviting. To slow down in the evening, so there is a different quality to this time of day. This helps prepare for the transition to sleep. Along with this quieter mood, and an important part of the daily rhythm, is an evening going-to-bed ritual. This may be something as simple as a bedtime song, closing the curtains and saying goodnight to the day, lighting a candle, perhaps a simple story, a lullaby and a verse or prayer. One mother I know used to walk through the house with her baby in her arms and quietly said goodnight to all the familiar things in the house. By the time they reached the bedroom (it wasn't a big house!) both mother (it worked equally well with the father too) and child were relaxed, and the child easily moved into sleep.

When a couple comes to parenting they often have quite definite ideas/ideals about how they are going to do things. Baby carrying / Attachment Parenting, completely merging with their baby, is a popular approach and is at one end of the spectrum; at the other end is Gina Ford's controlled method. Holding fast to ideals and ideologies can prevent parents from really seeing the situation they are in. However, most parents in reality find themselves somewhere in between these approaches.

One of the key elements influencing a baby's ability to sleep is the mother's /parent's attitude. Mothers particularly come in for a lot of criticism; they're too attached, not attached enough, too domineering, too permissive, etc. The reality is that being a mother, being a parent, is one of the most challenging roles in life. Parents want to do the very best for their child, and they often think everything that has to be gentle and harmonious. While this is important, children also need clear limits. As M. Glockler & W. Goebel state in a *Guide to Child Health*:

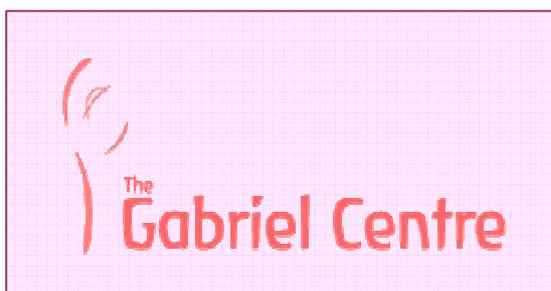
Children become increasingly unhappy, disagreeable and unsatisfied if they never encounter firm limits or sincere intentions.

It takes considerable courage and consciousness to be able to stand in the midst of despair, sleep-deprived and exhausted with a crying baby, and ask, "What is this situation asking of me?" or to be able reflect on "What is not working?" It doesn't mean that sleep issues are the parents' fault; however, reflecting on this question can provide insight which leads to clear action.

It is often in such moments of desperation that, if surrender can take place, an insight can come. To develop the ability to pause, observe and reflect, asking questions (as per examples given), then to act out of clear intention... Then a shift can occur. This is where the 'gold' is for parents, where their potential for growth and development lies. When this happens, it is wonderful to experience mothers (parents) steadily growing in confidence and knowledge in their parenting.

~ Bettye Palmer

[I am grateful to Vicki Kearney, editor of *Star Weavings*, newsletter of the Australian Association for Rudolf Steiner Early Childhood Education, for permission to reprint this article. Email Vicki at avenuesforchange@gmail.com to enquire about subscriptions.]



Continuing Joan Salter's foundational work, Bettye Palmer's experience and expertise in childbirth preparation and early parenting is informed by many years of close working with mothers, parents and families, and by her own parenting. Contact Bettye at the Gabriel Centre — ph (03) 9876 3011 or 0400 995 041.

Sweet Dreams

We have all heard it said that the morning is wiser than the evening; and certainly have been advised to sleep on a question, or dilemma, or a challenging life decision. But in truth, sleep in our time is an elusive gift. We are a culture of the sleep deprived, the sleep obsessed, often drugging ourselves into sleep and again, in the morning, drugging ourselves to conscious awakening. We live in a timeless time in which one can live daily life all through the night: working, shopping, exercising at the gym, communicating via fax or email. Night and day are intertwined and confused; the traditional picture of the rhythms of the cosmos — the rooster rousing us with his cock-a-doodle-do, the farmer at work with the rhythms of the suns rising and setting are unfamiliar to most of us. And we, on the other hand, are pummeled with the model of technology — the machine that needs no rest, the pressure that if we only tried harder, we human beings could successfully mimic the machine and work ceaselessly.

And so we are confused, and our children are confused, and we are all tired! We learn early on, as new parents, what a large task it is for our children to learn to wake and sleep in an earthly, fulfilling and restorative rhythm. We gently cradle the baby in our arms, rocking or singing a lullaby, trying to guide her into sleep, but this is no easy task. How confusing today's world must be to the little one: darkness is not quite complete, with electric light shining brightly; activity rarely ceases in our homes; we adults may work at night or at day, or even a little of both. And so, the child is offered so few natural cues, and imitation of us as adults in our daily rhythms is not a natural support, either.

At the same time, sleep is crucial for the infant and young child, a time during which it is developing its body with all its might. If the daytime is over-filled with sense impressions, the child will be affected not only in the effort of going to sleep, but throughout the entire night, and we know well how greatly the night itself affects the day to follow.

So — what can we do for our children, to offer sleep as a gift to receive comfortably? Our first task is to examine our own relationship to sleep. How do we feel about it? Do we feel guilty for sleeping, or anxious about the effort of falling asleep, or do we carry a confidence in the goodness and healing of sleep, happy and relaxed as we approach our own bed times? Do we have a sense for the transition between day and night, for the qualities of the evening, that special transition time? Perhaps the first step will be to develop a fresh relationship to sleep and the night within ourselves, one that is confident and positive, recognising that we must not feel sorry for our children that they must let go of the day and sleep, but rather, feel grateful for the day that has passed. Then our children can feel this as well.

Secondly, we can create a picture of the environment of sleep. To sleep well, we all need quiet, warmth, and a feeling of protection. For the child, this might mean a special soothing canopy or veil over cradle, crib, or bed; a wool or quilted sleeping sack, or a cozy hot water bottle. For the infant, or in some cases even an older child, swaddling

creates this sense of protection. Eating also relates to sleep, as the liver takes up its restorative work in preparation for the day to come, and wants to rest from the act of digesting heavy foods. Thus, a heavy meal in the evening can disrupt sleep.

For our children, a living, dependable ritual for bedtime that is unwavering creates this sense of warmth and protection as well. First, we put all in order by tidying away the playthings of the day: now it is time for the dollies to be tucked in, the cows to go into the barn, the toy train to park at the station. We can prepare for the morning by laying out the clothes. Then perhaps comes the bath, then the lighting of a candle and a story, finally concluding the day with a poem or prayer and a kiss. Our calm centredness as parents can work miracles at this moment! This is not the time for recorded lullabies or stories or songs, but rather the moment to send our children to sleep with the loving human voice of those who love the child most dearly as the last sound.

It may be helpful to observe as carefully as possible: how many impressions can this child tolerate during a day in a satisfying way? How can we arrange the child's day to limit the impressions to this manageable quantity, being ever mindful of the quality of the impressions? For it is the rhythm of the day that creates the support for the night's sleep. It is often observed that an overtired child will have difficulty sleeping, but that the more a child sleeps, the more he will sleep! Sweet dreams!

~ Susan Weber

[Susan Weber brings to her work as the director of Sophia's Hearth Family Centre <http://sophiashearth.org> many years' experience as a school teacher and administrator, Waldorf early childhood teacher and training coordinator, and adult educator.]

Finding Inner Calm

Quiet I bear within me.
I bear within myself
Forces to make me strong.
Now will I be imbued
With their glowing warmth.
Now will I fill myself
With my own will's resolve
And I will feel the quiet
Pouring through all my being
When, by my steadfast striving,
I become strong
To find within myself
The source of strength
The strength of inner quiet.

~ Rudolf Steiner

In the Toolbox ~ preparing for sleep and calming during the day

This activity is a wonderful way for the parent and child to spend time together. It is especially useful for children who are sensitive to touch or do not have a sense of their boundaries. They are often helped by firm, not light, pressure or massage. The basic idea has origins in the work of Jean Ayers [*the pioneer of sensory integration - Ed.*] and has been augmented by teachers and parents. This activity is very calming and works well when combined with a night time ritual that includes lighting a candle, telling a story, and having a foot or back massage with a calming oil.

The child lays face up on one edge of a blanket with her head not on the blanket. Gently roll the child over, pulling the blanket with her so that she is face down and firmly stroke and press along the child's wrapped body. Use your whole hand, not the finger tips. Begin at the head and move toward the feet. Press the sides, back of her legs and feet. Roll the child over again so that she is face up and stroke along the sides and include the feet. Continue rolling and pressing. Say the first two verses of the poem as you do so...

The child may remain wrapped for awhile. When ready, unroll the child slowly or have them unroll themselves. If using the final verse of the included poem, the child can flap their wings like the butterfly.

Poem for the Blanket Wrap

Little caterpillar
Are you in a hurry?
Going round the garden
In your coat so furry.

Soon you will sleep
Wrapped in silken thread,
While dreams of rainbow colours
Are dancing in your head.

Then you will awaken,
Stretch and find your wings,
Fly on your path of colour
Reminding us of spring.

~ Mary Jo Oresti

[President of the Association for a Healing Education <http://www.healingeducation.org>, Mary Jo Oresti has found that teaching has taken her on a remarkable 30 year journey in Waldorf (Steiner) Education. Mary Jo has a Masters degree from Marygove College, a Waldorf Teaching diploma, and has studied Chirophonetics.]



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