

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

The Spiritual Preparation of the Adult

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When speaking about spiritual preparation of the adult, I am not referring to religion; I am talking about the intangible parts of development: those psychic, emotional, intellectual aspects of human development. Spirituality, the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things is what I am referring to. Psychic would be too narrow a term to describe what spirituality really means.

Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling, or sense, or belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature.

There are five different types of Spiritual practices that promote ongoing recovery:

- 1.prayer
- 2.connecting with nature
- 3.yoga
- 4.attending a spiritual or religious service
- 5.meditation

Human Spirituality is composed of three aspects: relationships, values and life purpose. Five characteristics of spirituality are: meaning, value, transcendence, connecting with oneself and others, and becoming (the growth and progress in life).

Montessori tells us that there are three important preparations for the adult:

- 1.technical
- 2.scientific
- 3.spiritual

In order to develop the third one, we need the other two. We have observation as a major tool in the scientific preparation.

Montessori talks about the transformation of the adult. This transformation is not something we do; it is something that happens to us. It happens through the direct influence during the Training course of the hands-on experience with the materials; It is the effect of giving the Montessori theory while the practice in the prepared environment goes on. It is also the influence of the Director of Training modelling for the students, as well as the social cohesion that arises among the adult students while building their own unique social organisation.

One of the main aspects of the spiritual preparation of the Montessori adult is observation. While learning how to observe, the adult connects with his own childhood or adolescence, depending on the level of training, and goes inside his or her inner core causing an awareness of oneself.

At the same time the fact of not having expectations will make us see the child in a completely different way, as they really are and not as they should be based on our wishes and preconceptions. Observation will give us the tools to see the child and also to see ourselves. Not to have expectations on ourselves also makes us more conscious and helps us to accept and acknowledge who we are.

Observation makes us more confident of the child's abilities, of his needs and capacities and to see him without prejudices or judgments. We can let him follow the guidance of his inner teacher.

The spiritual preparation of the adult continues throughout life. Preparation to become humble in front of the child will help us. Observation plus humility will allow us to see the child with a different lens. We will realise, after learning how to observe that we were not ready to see the child in his magnificence. You will stop correcting the child's "mistakes" because it is your arrogance that makes you act that way.

"When I am in the midst of children, I do not think of myself as a scientist, a theoretician. When I am with children, I am a nobody, and the greatest privilege I have when I approach them is being able to forget that I even exist, for this has enabled me to see things that one would miss if one were somebody – little things, simple but very precious truths. It is not always imperative to see big things, but it is of paramount importance to see the beginning of things. At their origin there are little glimmers that can be recognised as soon as something new is developing. They become a bright light that will bring us a much better understanding of the complicated labyrinth that the social life of the adult represents". Education and Peace, p. 81

While the child is constructing and developing his will, you will be working with yours. I am referring to the will to open up to the practices that will help you in your transformation as a Montessori adult. Becoming a model to your students involves control of movement; This refers to the way you move, the way you hold yourself, your handling of materials and tools, your showing grace and courtesy at all times, and your love and patience to deal with complicated situations. We have to embody this new person we want to become so that we will be suited to do the best work we can with our children and adolescents. Our goal is to build an authentic relationship with them.

To empower our spiritual development, we also need the intellectual part. Both go together; both are needed to complete the whole.

Montessori tells us that in a Montessori adult there is no room for anger and pride. Our own deviations are a great obstacle to the development of the child. Anger and pride cause blindness and prevent us from seeing the needs of our students. They interfere greatly in our awareness of our surroundings and how to react. Many times, we react in a way that causes children to be fearful of us. Fear is a feeling that causes the individual to step back.

The Montessori adult needs to be willing to accept and help the child and the adolescent to show himself without fear and to guide him in his development. We need to spend time just being with them, helping, working, observing, presenting, etc.

Let's talk about a sense of humour. This plays an important part in the adult personality. We need to cultivate our sense of humour because it helps us enter the world of the adolescent. They themselves are very funny; they are fun, inventive and spontaneous and make us laugh even at times when we need to show a serious face.

The level of spiritual development that you acquire will allow you to give the child the freedom to work, choose, self-direct and show his internal discipline. An insecure adult with a low self-development tends to be authoritarian, insecure, proud, and insensitive to the child's needs.

We know that concentration comes from the freedom to put your hands on materials that are interesting to you, that you chose with your own free will. We also know that concentration is the path to personality development and normalisation. Only through our spiritual development can we reach Montessori's understanding of education. This understanding says it is not about teaching a curriculum but giving the child the necessary means for the development of the personality while he walks towards independence. We should remember that Montessori is not about didactic materials, teaching technique or academics. Montessori has a vision about each individual person in the context of human development.

Concentration occurs when the activity coincides with the natural laws active and connected to the interests of the child. The mind then will direct the body and the whole person will work together. As a result, the personality develops. That is when the "New child" emerges. Normalization then becomes visible in the self-discipline, concentration, obedience and continuous work of the child. The child is then highly receptive to the adult and connected to the exploration and care of the environment. Children also show consideration and generosity towards others; they like silence and show joy and happiness when working. Montessori calls the social aspect of the prepared environment "Cohesion in the social unit. Even though the child works mainly individually he is aware of others and enjoys their company. The elders take

care of the young and make themselves available when needed. Montessori realised that this phenomenon showed the true nature of the human race revealed in the human child. This is the “Secret of Childhood”.

The idea of a “new adult” seems to have two different avenues. In order for us to see the new adult, we need to work through all the planes of development until we can see the triumphal entry of the adolescent into adulthood like a valorised human being, a “new adult”.

On the other hand, for this to happen we need adults that can go through a spiritual transformation; they need to be a reliable, loving and firm adult. These children need this kind of adult to go through the whole path of development from birth to 24. This transformation will lead to the “new adult” that Montessori talks about. For this transformation to take place Montessori asked us to be “trained”, to go through a training program that can be hard, thorough, and sometimes daunting.

“The teacher is thus the hope, the consolation, and the guide of the child who is trying to elevate himself. In order to realise this task allotted to her, the teacher finds herself in a more elevated place, a place really difficult to be in. It is wise for the teacher who wishes to undertake this new task, of leading the child to a superior life, to realise the difficulties that she must meet. Sometimes, the teacher in our schools succeed very quickly and very easily. Very often she succeeds in practice, only after long experience. This depends upon the nature of her spirit. She may need a long period of training in order to change her spirit and give it another form. This comes with practice, contact with children, and experience. After all, the teacher needs to know for herself”. Creative Development, Volume Two, p. 104, 105

This “new adult” will work for the social proclamation of the rights of the child, for the scientific understanding of the true nature of the child and for greater opportunities to include all children in this amazing education that aims at helping life.

Help to life is the first and most important and fundamental principle of Montessori’s work. Preparation of the adult is an ongoing task throughout our life. We have the opportunity to see the child as our teacher. We are then able to learn from him by observing him with love and interest. We will then learn what he needs, how we can help and provide in a way that is useful to him and not to me and what we should give. We should understand that what we learn from the child is not only to his advantage but to our advantage and to the advantage of humanity as a whole.

Learning from the child is learning through love, and this is the best way to learn. A loving teacher is a teacher that gives with open arms and shows himself when he has been able to establish a bond of trust. Then he is completely transparent and shows himself in an authentic way. This is a reciprocal act; we take from the child his unconditional love and we give it back through our spiritual development.

A complete, continuous and careful preparation is necessary if we want to understand the role of service that we need to give the child. Our responsibility is to give protection and nurturing according to the stage of development from birth to maturity. We adults are the most important element in the Prepared Environment. The importance of our relationship with the child and adolescent cannot be overemphasised. But we have to learn how to serve according to each individual need and according to their age. How we support and protect a child looks different from the needs of an adolescent, but the role of the Montessori adult never changes. The principles are the same no matter what age we are serving. We need to have faith that the child will show herself to us and we will become her most trusted companions in our adventure within the prepared environment. It doesn't matter if it is an Infant Community or a Children's House, an elementary environment or an Erdkinder. Montessori advises us to create an image of the child that will be but is not yet there. The work of the environment and the adult will do the magic! We should believe in The Secret of Childhood.

Montessori says that spiritual preparation should come first. After that, the technical and practical preparation will flow because the spirit will accompany the mind instead of the mind wanting to take over as it usually does. When the spirit of the adult is developed, it is easier for the adult to accept the role of service to the child he is entitled to give. This puts the adult in a position of humility and grandeur; then we will have the privilege to see the evolution of human life. This is the reason why we have to study the natural laws of development from birth and augment our capacity for observation.

Our adolescents come to us as the result of this development, and we need to know how that came about and what comes next. Our vocation has to be based on love; love gives us the strength, the motivation, vision and energy so we can see and treat the adolescent with respect and dignity as a special being. Montessori says that serving the child is serving the human spirit. This work is what will give the adult great happiness, but this happiness will only come through working with the adolescent day by day, side by side. We need to be present when needed and disappear when the group of adolescents have established their own work energy.

“The respect for the child’s activity, which we call non-intervention, is justifiable only when something substantial has already intervened in his life – that is, when he has acquired the ability to direct all his attention on something and dedicate himself to it, when he revealed all his interest (not just his curiosity). The respect is not justified when the child’s good energies are dispersed in disorder”. The Child in the Family, p. 65.

The Montessori adult will be elevated to a higher level of consciousness, different from what he previously knew. This change can come gradually and almost imperceptibly, or it can be very obvious and dramatic; it depends on each individual. Then the adult gets to know this different kind of love, not love as the affection that one person feels for another nor personal love but the love of a genuine and unconditional service to humanity.

Montessori says, “It is the art of service to the spirit, an art that can be practiced to perfection only through working with children”. She asks us a question: Might there not be a new being in whom we may place all our hopes? The answer is yes, The child.

“All humanity that works for the common good, even though it may be unaware of it, is creating the new world that must be the world of peace. The great efforts of men who have laboured, made discoveries, studied, and suffered – all the work of mankind will be seen to have had one common purpose in the world that will be the world of peace”. Education and Peace, p. 109.

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