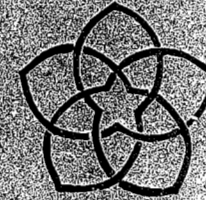




**EDUCATION: From Before Birth to Maturity** is a collection of teachings by Sufi Inayat Khan which created much interest when first heard by his pupils. Throughout these pages the reader will find a wealth of knowledge and insight into the upbringing of children, and a greater understanding of the young soul on its journey to maturity.

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# EDUCATION



from before  
birth  
to maturity

Sufi Inayat Khan

GINNY  
HOPE YOU ENJOY  
THIS BOOK -  
IT'S GIVEN ME  
SOME GOOD IDEAS  
TO THINK ABOUT

Don

6-29-83

**EDUCATION**  
FROM BEFORE BIRTH TO MATURITY

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## Part 1

# THE EDUCATION OF THE INFANT

IT IS never too soon in the life of a child for it to receive education. The soul of an infant is like a photographic plate which has never been exposed before, and whatever impression falls on that photographic plate covers it; no other impressions which come afterwards have the same effect. Therefore when the parents or guardians lose the opportunity of impressing an infant in its early childhood they lose the greatest opportunity.

In the Orient there is a superstition that an undesirable person must not be allowed to come near an infant. If the parents or relatives see that a certain person should not be in the presence of an infant, that person is avoided, for the very reason that the infant is like a photographic plate. The soul is negative, fully responsive, and susceptible to every influence; and the first impression that falls on a soul takes root in it.

In the first place an infant brings with it to the earth the spirit with which it is impressed from the angelic spheres and from the plane of the jinn; it has also inherited from the earth qualities of both its parents and of their families. After coming on earth the first impression that an infant receives is from the environment,

the surroundings, from those who touch it and move and work in its surroundings; and the impression after coming to the earth is so strong that very often it erases the impressions that an infant has inherited from the higher spheres, and also the heritage from its parents. This happens because the mind that has been formed of the impressions which the infant has brought from the higher spheres is not yet positive. It is just like a pot of clay which has not yet gone through the fire; it has not yet developed.

The qualities that an infant has inherited from its parents are also in the same negative state; and they are perfected after the child has come on earth. Therefore the first impression that falls upon an infant after coming on earth is all the stronger. The first process in making pottery is to mould pots of clay, and the second process is to put them in the fire. When they are put in the fire they become strong, they become positive; before they are put in the fire they are negative.

In the same way a photographic plate is first negative; afterwards, when it has undergone a certain process, it becomes positive. And that is the process through which the soul passes in its infancy; it then goes through a certain development. All that it has brought from the higher spheres and from its family becomes developed, becomes positive or solid, in other words it becomes condensed; because that is the time when the spirit is being formed and is becoming positive. If an undesirable impression has fallen upon an infant at that time, no matter what education is given later that first impression remains concrete and solid. Nothing can erase it because infancy is the moment when the soul is becoming positive.

In educating the child the first rule that must be remembered is that one person must educate it, not everybody in the family. It is a great mistake when everyone in the family tries to train the infant or to take care of it, because that keeps an infant from forming a character. Each one has his own influence and each

influence is different from the other. But most often what happens is that the parents never think of education at all in infancy. They think that is the age when the child is a doll, a toy; that everyone can handle it and play with it. They do not think that it is the most important moment in the soul's life; that never again will that opportunity come for a soul to develop.

Should the father or the mother educate the child? A man's life demands all his attention in his work; the mother is born with the sense of duty towards her child, and therefore the mother has the first right to educate it. The mother can also quiet the child in the first days of its life, because the child is a part of the mother, and therefore the rhythm of the mother's spirit is akin to the rhythm of the child's spirit. The soul that has come from above is received and is reared and taken care of by the mother; and therefore the mother is its best friend. If there is anything that the father can do, it is to help the mother or the guardian to educate the child. If the child in its infancy were given entirely into the hand of the father, there would be little hope that it would come out right; because a man is a child all his life, and the help that is needed in the life of an infant is that of the mother. Nevertheless, later in the life of a child there comes a time when the father's influence is equally needed; but that time is not in infancy. As the Brahmin says, the first Guru is the mother, the second Guru is the father, and the third Guru is the teacher.

That one person who takes an infant in hand in order to train it must first establish a friendship with it. There was in India a Madzub, a sage, who used to live among elephants. He used to share his bread with them and sleep near them. At the same time there were those who were appointed to take care of the elephants. They controlled them with their spears and with their commands. Very often the elephants listened to them; but when an elephant was mad it would not listen, and often a keeper was killed at such times. The elephant would not recognize the

keeper when it was mad. But this sage had a friendship with all the elephants, with the mad and the sober and with every one of them. He used to go near them and pat them and look at them and talk with them, and he would sleep near them unconcerned; yet they would never touch him.

What does this show? It shows that there are two ways of controlling. One is the way of mastering, and the other is of becoming friends. By mastering you will diminish the will of the person you master; by being friends you will sustain his will-power, and at the same time help. In the one case you make of the person a slave; in the other case you make out of that person a king. In training an infant one must remember that his mind-power, which means will-power, must not be diminished, and yet an infant must be controlled.

There are five different subjects in which an infant must be trained in the first year: discipline, balance, concentration, ethics, and relaxation.

When once friendship is established with an infant the guardian is able to attract its attention and the infant will respond to the guardian. And that must be the necessary first condition; that condition must first be produced before beginning education. When once an infant begins to respond fully to the guardian, then discipline can be taught; but not by anger, not by agitation, as the guardian very often does; for an infant is often very trying, and is sometimes more stubborn than any grown-up person can be, and most difficult to control.

The best way of teaching the infant discipline is without agitation, without showing any temper or annoyance, only repeating the action before it. For instance, the infant wants something which it should not have, while the guardian wishes that it should play with a particular toy. This toy must be given continually into its hand; and when the child throws it away, or when it cries, give it again; and when the child does not look at

it, give it again. By repeating the same action you will bring the infant automatically to respond to you and to obey. It is a wrong method when the guardian wishes to control an infant and wishes to teach it discipline by forcing a certain action upon it. It is repetition which will bring about discipline. It only requires patience. For instance, if the infant is crying for its food or for something else when it is not the time for it, one should attract its attention towards something else, even against its wishes. The best thing is repetition.

Balance can be taught to an infant by bringing its rhythm at the moment when it is excited by a certain action, to a normal condition. For instance, when an infant is very excited, then the rhythm of its action and movement is not normal. By clapping the hands, or by rattling, or by knocking on something one can make the rhythm of the infant change to one's own rhythm; because any noise will attract an infant, and a noise made in a certain rhythm will influence its rhythm according to it. However excited the infant may be, begin by making some noise in its rhythm, and then bring it to a normal rhythm. For instance, if a rattle or something similar is first moved with the infant's rhythm, and then moved gradually in a slower rhythm, the infant will come naturally to that rhythm. The excitement will abate; the whole condition of the infant's mind, the blood circulation, the movements, the expression, everything will change to a normal rhythm.

There are three rhythms. There is a rhythm of passiveness, where the child is not active at all. That means the child is not well or there is something wrong with it, something that should not be. There is a second rhythm where the child is active but not excited; that is the normal rhythm. And there is a third rhythm where the child is excited. That excitement must be brought to the second rhythm, where the child was active but not excited. This can be brought about by giving a child what it likes. If it



does not like one toy, give another toy; and if not that toy, another toy, and yet another toy. In this way do everything to occupy its mind, so that for some moments it will keep to one thing.

The excitement of an infant is the changing of the rhythm; for the infant has no control over its own rhythm. It goes on at a greater and greater speed, until it cries or laughs. And the laughter or the cry is just the same. On the one side the infant will laugh and on the other side cry, because its rhythm is not normal. It can only be brought to a normal condition by the guardian's effort. But if one gets agitated or does not like the infant or is displeased with it, then one cannot help it.

Should one stop an infant from crying? It is better to distract the mind of a child that is crying than to let it cry, but at the same time it is very natural for a child to cry sometimes. If the child does not cry, it means that there is something lacking in it, that the child is not normal. One must use discretion in how much one allows the child to cry and when to stop it. One can allow it to go as far as a certain rhythm; when it has reached that rhythm, then it must not cry any longer; that is the time to stop it. But when a mother, annoyed with the infant, stops its crying the moment it begins, it has a bad effect on its nervous system. And very often a guardian will put the child into the cradle or somewhere else to cry by itself. But that means leaving it in the same rhythm, and that does not help. In that way the child will become worse and worse, and more and more nervous every day.

And now regarding the concentration of an infant. Toys with different colours, fruits, flowers, things that attract an infant should be brought before it, whatever attracts most; and then one must try and attract its attention to that particular object, let it play with it, let it look at it, be interested in it. In this way the guardian can develop in the child the faculty of concentration, which will be of the greatest importance when it is grown-up. If this quality is not developed, it will be very difficult for the

child to concentrate when it grows up. Besides that, one brings a great interest into the life of the child when it begins to concentrate. And the child concentrates without knowing it. Give it any beautiful thing it likes to amuse itself with, and if its fancy is taken by it, if it is absorbed in it, the child will concentrate naturally upon it. It is good for the child, for its soul and its body, because concentration is all the power there is.

Regarding ethics: this important word is used here, but in reality, the greatest ethics or morals that one can learn in life are friendliness, which culminates in generosity; and it is never too soon to cultivate this seed of morals in the child. When you give something to an infant which it likes, and with friendliness and sympathy and love you ask the child to give it to you, that brings about the feeling of giving and at the same time the feeling of friendliness. Very often the infant is not willing to give, but that means it is not trained to do so. You do not need to force it out of its hands, but by having patience and repeating your wish that the object may be given you, in the end the infant will give it. It may be that the first three or four times, if the child is very tenacious by nature, it will refuse, but in the end it will give it to you; and in this way it is taught the essence of morals.

Should one teach an infant that there are certain things it owns and other things which do not belong to it? Whatever an infant sees, whoever it belongs to, the infant owns it, and owns it as its birthright. It has not yet awakened to this world of limitations, of divisions. All that is there belongs to it; it really belongs to the infant. It is our consciousness of duality that makes us poor. The infant is rich, richer than anyone in this whole world. The infant has the riches of God; because, as everything belongs to God, so, too, everything belongs to an infant. And therefore there is no desire on the part of an infant to own anything: the infant owns all things. It is experience of the world that gives the child, as it grows, the desire to own, because then it becomes limited; then

there are things which belong to others and certain things which belong to the child, and this means limitation.

Sometimes people think, 'Is it not wrong in a way to make a person generous in this wicked world, where everyone wishes to snatch away everything from everybody he sees? And especially all the simple people who are giving, who are generous, they are the ones who do not take, but others do.' The answer is that a selfish person is his own enemy. He thinks that selfishness is profitable, but his own action works against him. It might seemingly give him success. By selfishness he might earn riches or by a tenacious quality hold on to position, rank or something else; but at the same time he is defeating his own object, he is making himself weak. Besides in the end, whatever be one's experience, one will come to the realization that from those who pursue the world, the world runs away, and those who turn their backs on the world, the world follows. The spirit of all morals and ethics is friendliness, learning to sacrifice and learning to serve; and that last lesson can be given first to an infant.

Finally we come to relaxation. The infant can become very troublesome to the guardian and to others if it has not learned relaxation properly. But relaxation is learned by an infant much sooner than by a grown-up person. One only needs to put the infant in an even rhythm, to give it calm and quiet surroundings, to place it in a comfortable position, to make passes over the child to give its nervous system rest, looking into its eyes with sympathy and with the thought of its going to sleep, producing by one's own thought and feeling and atmosphere a restful and peaceful atmosphere for an infant so that it can experience relaxation.

It is very necessary for these five different subjects to be taught in infancy. Besides that, regularity should be observed in everything concerning an infant. In its food, in its sleep, in everything there must be regularity, because nature is rhythmic. The four seasons come regularly; the rising and the setting of the sun, and

the waxing and the waning of the moon, all show that nature is rhythmic. By observing the rules of regularity with an infant one can build a foundation for a soul to grow up most successfully.

