

Crafting a Health Home Rhythm Series

This is a series we did for our blog in 2013.

Part 1 ~ Teachability

The other day, someone told me, "If Dr. Wayne Dyer can be called the father of intention, then Melisa you are the mother of rhythm and the guardian of the will." Maybe I am. It sounds a bit silly. I have written about rhythm so much over the years that it becomes second nature to talk about and sometimes I worry that younger moms think "yeah well that crazy Melisa doesn't know how busy my son is!" or "she must have easy children!" Now those that have been with us for years know that NEITHER is the case!

I do think that God has a sense of humor - or maybe it is a sense of teaching us what we ask for. The summer before I conceived Sariah, I had been praying to find deeper ways to connect with the families I work with. I felt like I still had so much to learn about humility and empathy. I learned so much through our own recent struggles. Between having a sensory sensitive infant that is now a CRAZY busy toddler and a teen son that decided he wanted to try living with his birth father, humbling is the least of my lessons! Unconditional love, strength through prayer and acceptance of things that cannot change are on that list too.

These last two years had me learning new ways to tweak my rhythm and new ways to learn how to do things that I thought I had a really good handle on before. During this time, I also did a lot of reflecting on how my older three children were different from my little ones. Did having a different father **really** make the difference? Did marrying someone that was emotionally healthy really change the way our home felt and our children acted? Did the time I spent working on my own poo really help? These were questions swimming in my mind while I carried Sariah in my belly and wondered where this would all take me.

So many things go into crafting a healthy home rhythm. If you are starting from scratch, I am hoping this series will help. If you are an old hat at it like me, maybe you will find a few gems in here anyway and if you are somewhere in between, I hope you find peace where you are.

Keys things to cultivate (we will touch on these in our series)

- Teachability - you have to be in a mind frame to receive direction in order for this to work. (Part 1)
- A good working relationship with the Divine. (Part 2)
- A commitment to your partner and theirs to you. Don't run! We'll talk about this! (Part 3)
- An understanding and respect for proper authority. (Part 4)
- Commitment to the task at hand - it will not be easy, but it will be so so worth it. (Part 5)

- Good mental health - this doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean striving - DAILY. (Part 6)
- What's your plan? Let's lay it out. Why is this so important? How have you done cultivating the other steps? How do you want it to feel? Nuts and bolts without the fluff - the fluff can come later! (Part 7)
- The fluff (Part 8)

Let's start!

Teachability. Are you teachable? Now of course you are shouting at me that you are! Stick with me. Being teachable means that you are willing to take what you will learn or already know about rhythm and how important it is for your family and actually use it. Otherwise... stop reading. Being teachable doesn't mean you are perfect, it just means you are WILLING. Willing to take it on. Willing to stumble and end up with egg on your face and get up and try again. Willing to talk to or learn how to talk to Source (God, the Universe, whatever YOU call it.) Willing to look at your partner in a new way. Willing to ASK for what you really need. Willing. Are you? GREAT.

To be teachable, you have to start with some knowledge. Now you may already know this stuff, but it is a good refresher - even for a five time mommy like me - so read anyway.

A hundred years ago Steiner wrote about the development of the human brain. Science is just now catching up. The OFC or orbitofrontal cortex is located behind the right eye in the right hemisphere. It is in part responsible for "a child's future prospects for healthy social and emotional functioning." That part of the brain is where we get our commonsense thinking and also the ability to read other people's signals. Those of us with children on the autism spectrum know that this is some of what is missing in our children so guess what?? They need rhythm even more than our typical kids! This area also works with empathy, the ability to bring feeling to intellectual thought and to moderate emotion with rational thinking. It is the part of the brain that helps us understand our experiences. It is an important part of the brain!

"During the child's first three years, the OFC neural networks develop in direct response to the nature of his or her primary attachment relationships with other human beings. The real physical and emotional presence of others, connections with them, and empathy experienced from them are nourishment for the OFC of the infant and toddler." (Parenting the Young Child by Marcy Axness, PhD)

That is a mouthful. If our children gain direct responses to these things during the first few years - we better make them good ones! That doesn't mean perfect - it means striving. I find that intent, prayer and overall emotional striving of the parents is a huge help in bridging gaps that may have begun during these years. The key is to be teachable and get busy.

We also want to understand that our children need predictability and consistency. This is best formed through a good daily, weekly, monthly and seasonal rhythm. They also need authority -

we'll talk about that more in another segment, but for now, if you are giving too many choices, asking if they want to do something or giving into tantrums, that is where we start. You are the boss Mama! I promise you are. Own it. That doesn't mean you aren't nice. It doesn't mean you aren't loving. It doesn't mean you aren't the AP crunchy granola NVC mommy you are striving to be. It just means you are in charge. Remember Mary Poppins? Those children LOVED her... she was in charge. They obeyed because they knew she took care of them, loved them and did what was best for them. Now you don't have to be Mary Poppins (although I sometimes feel like her with the giant Bohemian shoulder bag I carry!) be yourself, love them... don't let them walk on you. You shouldn't be striving for a child centered home - you can be child informed, that is different. Child centered is not healthy for anyone.

Ok... so, are you teachable? I hope so.



Part 2 ~ Connecting to the Divine

Now many people want to know what on earth God has to do with their child and their rhythm and their ability to homeschool. Everything. We are living in a time when reliance on the Spirit is seen as weakness and we are sold the lie that science has it all. Steiner could feel this lie even in his own time and spoke tirelessly of the connection between the spirit world and science. We have to come to a place that reveres both. Many of us have been indoctrinated in the public school system where God wasn't allowed so it will take time to bring those pieces together for you. What I am asking from you right now is just that you will follow part 1 and be teachable.

A friend asked me last week, "You really do pray about almost everything, don't you?" She is a dear friend and we go to church together. She was impressed by my willingness to just hand it all over to God. Really though... what is our choice? We can fight about it. We can scream and yell about it. We can ask all of our online buddies what they would do. We can beg our husband for answers. We can call Mom. BUT at the end of the day, when you are laying there exhausted, nursing that wild toddler down for the night, it is just you, that baby and God. It doesn't even matter to me what face you put on God. It can be Goddess, it can be a dual relationship, it can even be the teachings of Buddha. It all begins with that acknowledgement that there is something bigger than you. Something that stands guard. Something that we strive for. You might be really mad at God. I can't solve all of that in this blog post, but I will attempt to work some of it out.

In one of Steiner's works he said something BRILLIANT - OK, he said a lot of brilliant things, but this one is just amazing to me...."If we do not develop within ourselves the deeply rooted feeling that there is something higher than ourselves, we shall never find the strength to evolve to something higher...You can only acquire right knowledge when you have learned to esteem it."

He goes on to say later... "Our civilization tends more toward critical judgment and condemnation than toward devotion and selfless veneration. Our children already criticize more than they revere."

Let me back up a bit. I know many of our regular readers expect I will talk about God - that's just what I do - but if you are new to our work, this conversation might put you off at first - try to stick with me, then take my suggestions and ponder them. Keep what works for you and toss out the rest.

Who is God? What is God? And why should we connect?

Who is God? Well that is an interesting question, because there are almost as many answers as there are people. How can that be? Well we are all individual, and so our relationship with God will be individual. You may not even call it God. You may call it Source, Goddess, Divine Light, Inner Light, Jehovah, Elohim, Brigid, Ostara... IT DOES NOT MATTER TO ME WHAT YOU CALL IT. It is all God energy. When we seek enlightenment where are we seeking it from? Our inner light? Our higher self? God? It is all the same energy. Religion has given God a bad name for many people. If you are one of those people then you have your work cut out for you. Inner work is a huge part of being able to bring the fullness of Waldorf to our children.

Waldorf teachers begin their day in meditation for their children in the classroom. They are even directed to seek the words of the Apostle Paul: "Not I, but the Christ in me." So right now, I am not talking to my Christian readers, more to my readers that struggle with the Christian undertones that are laced through Waldorf. For some, it is very hard to separate the religion from the man when we discuss Christ. My impulse is to help you see that you can think of the intention of the Spirit rather than the rigidity that humanity has given it. There are few that would argue that Jesus was a great teacher - even non Christians see his important role in human transformation like unto Buddha or other great spiritual leaders. When we get stiff or upset at the discussion of Christ energy or the Christ Impulse, we should stand back and ask ourselves why. Did someone upset us? Did something happen to you as a child? It could be nothing major or even as simple as not coming from a religious home and now you are floundering about where to begin. Or maybe you had a bad Sunday school experience that left you feeling nothing but guilt when you thought of Christ energy. Or maybe you are mad at God. That is something I find often too. Maybe you feel like God has let you down in some major way and you are not ready to forgive. Or maybe it is something that I haven't even thought about. Maybe you believe you are an atheist? That is fine too. So I wonder... what keeps you going? There is still a higher place you must be striving to, otherwise why are you rising, contributing, loving life each day?

I am here to say that it is OK if you have been or are currently in any of the places I describe. I am also here to submit that those feelings must be changing in you because you actively have sought out Waldorf education. An educational method that is very much anchored in the spiritual connections in life. I often say that this education is more for the parent/teacher than it is for the student - I believe this with all my heart. As we heal our own past, we can't help but bring that healing to our children. So I submit to you this.... let it begin. Let the peace that passes understanding begin right here and right now. When we can step back and see the Divine energy

in life, tap into it, be a conduit for our family then we can begin to see our rhythm take hold and shape, we can see peace in our home, we can be confronted with our human self and know how bring forth our Spirit self. It takes practice and time. Are you ready?

Some won't be ready and if you are one, it is ok. I do have a thought for you... you have two choices. 1. believe there is something bigger, higher, yet attainable or 2. to continue to be frustrated, uncomfortable and mad. It makes me think of something I am reading - I am reading a book called "The God Who Weeps" - in the book, the author refers to the parable of The Ass of Buridan. In the parable, the animal starves to death because he is confronted with a decision he can't make. He has two equally pleasing piles of hay and he dies of indecision because he can't bring himself to pick one pile over the other. I love how the author brings this parable into humanity's struggle to make a decision about the existence of God.

From the authors (Terryl Givens and Fiona Givens):

"In the case of us mortals, we are confronted with a world in which there are appealing arguments for a Divinity that is a childish projection, for prophets as scheming or deluded imposters, and for scriptures as so much fabulous fiction. But there is also compelling evidence that a glorious Divinity presides over the cosmos, that His angels are strangers we have entertained unaware, and that His word and will are made manifest through a scriptural canon that is never definitively closed...There is, as with the ass of Buridan, nothing to compel an individual's preference for one over the other. For most of us, at least, there is neither a choir of heavenly heralds proving God exists, nor a laboratory of science equipment proving He doesn't. Rather, we find a persuasive body of evidence on both sides of life's competing propositions. Only in the case of us mortals, there is something to tip the scale. There is something to predispose us to a life of faith or a life of disbelief. There is a heart that, in these conditions of equilibrium and balance, equally "enticed by the one or the other," is truly free to choose belief or skepticism, faith or faithlessness...The call to faith, in this light, is not some test of a coy god, waiting to see if we "get it right." It is the only summons, issued under the only conditions, which can allow us fully to reveal who we are, what we most love, and what we most devoutly desire. Without constraint, without any form of mental compulsion, the act of belief becomes the freest possible projections of what resides in our hearts. Like the poet's image of a church bell that only reveals its latent music when struck, or the dragonfly that only flames forth its beauty in flight, so does the content of the human heart lie buried until action calls it forth. The greatest act of self-revelation occurs when we choose what we will believe, in that space of freedom that exists between knowing that a thing is, and knowing that a thing is not...This is the realm where faith operates, and when faith is a freely chosen gesture, it expresses something essentials about the self."

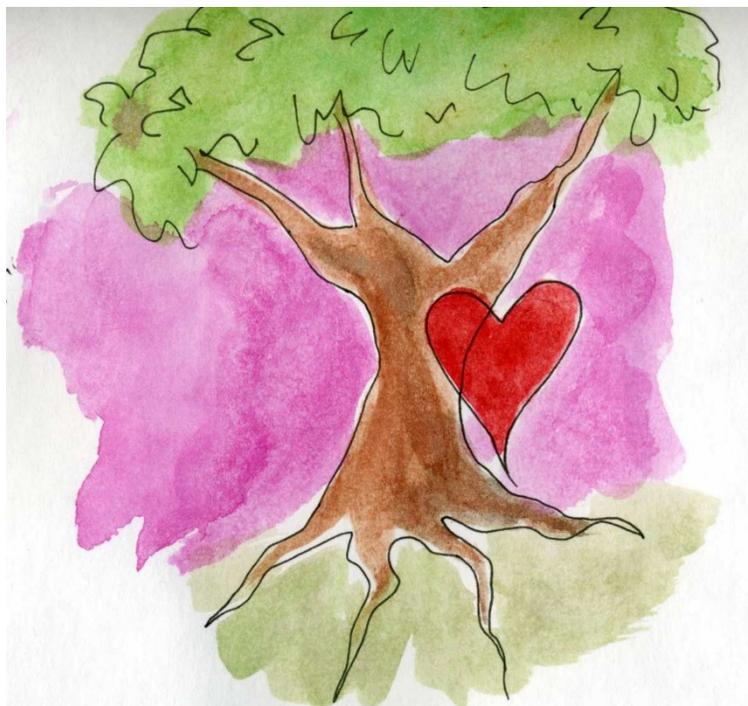
So again, how does this relate to your rhythm, your schooling, your parenting? In our journey with parenting and teaching our children, there are many times when we are faced with indecision - many times when we feel like that Ass. Should I go this way? Or that? Should I move forward or slow down? Should I pick this battle with my children right now or preserve the relationship? These are questions that are best answered in a conversation with God. That

conversation for you may be like it is with me, on my knees in prayer, or it may be while hiking and having an open dialogue, or it may be in a place of worship, or it may be while sitting in lotus pose seeking enlightenment. It can be any of those or something altogether different. The method of connecting is intensely personal. I use all of them, depending on where I am, the questions I am asking and the time constraints on my prayer. Seek ways that feel comfortable for you. I often think about prayer and meditation as two pieces that go hand in hand. Prayer is the thanking and asking piece and meditation or pondering is the listening place. Sometimes we are in active listening or meditation mode and other times we are in passive mode. Passive mode works best when we have taken the time to thank and ask - the time to open up and turn our hearts to God's peaceful, loving, understanding and knowledge-seeking energy. As moms, usually busier than we let on, passive meditation and pondering can become your lifeline to God. I will often lay down at night and offer a prayer, either something I am struggling with or something I am seeking to understand, I open myself to that beautiful energy that lives within me and by morning I have direction that I couldn't comprehend the night before. Prayer works. When we seek to soften ourselves and ask for help, prayers are heard and doors are opened.

Hopefully I haven't lost you! I hope that my readers that have been struggling with the concept of supplication or daily prayer can come away from this post with an eye on how you can help your parenting and teaching to begin from this place each day.

How will it help your rhythm? When we actively seek help from the Divine or enlightenment from our higher self, we are opening, humbling ourselves, admitting we can't do it all. Admitting we need help. How is that helpful? Well, how do you react when your child asks sincerely for help? Are you willing to help a child coming to you with an open heart? Or do you turn them away and tell them to figure it out? Maybe sometimes we know that our child can come to the answer but they are struggling so we give them just a bit of knowledge to open that door. But if they come to us angry, demanding help, demanding that we fix it - are we then happy to help? I don't know about you, but as a parent, when my child asks in sincerity of heart and spirit, working to control their own will by asking, I am so eager, so happy to guide them. God is no different. Sure he'll help us if we are tantruming, but often we are shouting so loud that the still, small God voice can't come through! We have to quiet ourselves.. Humble ourselves. Become that selfless being Steiner spoke of. Recognize gratitude. Recognize love. Recognize duty. We have to be in that place in order to model it for our children.

So my challenge this week is CONNECT! If you haven't ever done it or haven't done it in a long time, beware - IT WILL FEEL WEIRD AT FIRST! Give it time, keep going. If you feel like you are talking to yourself - keep going. If you feel like you are faced with even more obstacles - KEEP GOING! When we are faced with making positive change, the polarity of the negative might seem like it is pulling at you harder than ever. Telling you that you can't do it, it isn't worth it, God doesn't exist, you aren't worthy, you don't need this, you don't need to get up early.... DON'T LISTEN TO IT!!! I am here to tell you that you ARE worthy. You CAN do it. God DOES exist (in whatever form you see him/her/it.) You DO need this. KEEP GOING.



Part 3 ~ Working with Your Partner

This might be the hardest post of this series. I have spent days in meditation trying to decide exactly the right words to say. Before I begin, please do not assume offense on anything. I always try to come from a loving and unbiased place, so if you hear judgment in what I write, come back and read it again because that is not the intent.

My single friends. I want to talk to you first. I was a single mom for a time. During that time I didn't want to talk about or really hear from

those with a healthy marriage. It wasn't my reality. I only wanted to deal with my reality. My reality was not a lot of sleep and what seemed like a constant stream of conflict with my ex-husband and all the while trying to homeschool and figure out how to make money. It was a lot of pressure. If you are in this spot, my heart goes out to you. In reflecting on that time, I am also reminded of the very sweet things. The fact that I didn't feel like I had to be **on** for anyone, I could be myself with my kids, recover from my unhealthy relationship with their father and figure out how to just be me. I am very thankful for the inner work I was able to accomplish during this period. My best wishes for you are that you enjoy the time, get to know you and draw closer to the Spirit. Take care of yourself and don't be afraid to ask for help. Love yourself. Recover from your marriage. Have fun! Be open to love. Make your **perfect** man list and squirrel it away some place safe. Discover who you are in the wake of this part of your life ending.

Now here is the part that hopefully won't make you hate me. Forgive. I believe that forgiveness comes on many levels - almost like an onion. It takes a long time to get to the core of it all. I have been through times when I thought I had totally forgiven the situation, only to be humbled by another tearful, burning layer of the onion. It takes time - it doesn't have to take you as long as it took me! I wasted a lot of time being angrier than was necessary. As I got to deeper and deeper spiritual understanding, the forgiveness came. Some came with age too. With each layer of forgiveness came incredible amounts of peace. We need these layers of forgiveness to keep our hearts from hardening. We have to be open for our children. We have to be healthy and stable (more about that in another post.) During this forgiveness process, I also began doing something that was incredibly hard for me. I began thanking God for my experience. I have been working through a spiritual piece and it gave me pause and reminded me that we are to be thankful for all things - not just the good. All things are for our pruning and learning. You know what? Sometimes that just plain sucks! But the farther I get from the past, the more I know it to

be true. My experience has helped me to help others. My experience has helped me to learn to love unconditionally. My experience has brought me strength that I didn't know I had. So there was a dark gloomy night several months ago when I was pondering this idea of thanking God for what I went through. I was really struggling. Really struggling. The struggle allowed me to hold on to the pain and that last little bit of forgiveness that I just didn't want to let go of. As I lay in bed, my house quiet, my dear husband and babies all asleep, I heard God call me. The still, small voice was sweet and comforting. "Come, let me take this burden from you." I hadn't even been thinking of it as a burden. I gave up my poo about it long ago. But there was that little bit. So I slid down to my knees and sobbed. Amazingly, through the thanking and the sobbing there was warmth and complete comfort. I crawled into bed and had the most amazing sleep. Four hours seemed like 40. My prayer for you is that you have peace. Don't wait.

Now to my friends who are part of this partnership or marital institution. How are you doing? Let's talk about your happiness and being on the same page. In the thirteen years I was married to my former husband, I would say very little of that time was spent living as healthy contributing adults. Much of it was spend fighting or acting very much like siblings. If you wonder whether or not you are acting like siblings, ask yourself... do I get jealous when he buys something for himself or gets to spend time alone? How about vice versa? Does he get mad if you do? If the answer to that is yes, then you might be living as siblings.

Marriage today is often not what I believe God intended. Now I am not going to go into roles like cooking, cleaning, who works, who takes care of kids, because that really is NOT what I am talking about when I think of a God centered marriage. A spiritual marriage means both people love and respect each other, understand boundaries and are willing to be your help meet. Forever. None of this until death do us part stuff. Forever. When you look at things from an eternal perspective then it is a bit easier to forgive some things and harder to forgive others. Being on the same page means that if you were asked the same questions about a topic, you would likely give the same answer or at least know what the other person would say. It doesn't mean you always agree. Marriage is HARD work and BOTH sides have to be willing to work, be willing to bend and be willing to be humble. We have to be willing to admit when we are wrong and willing to fix things. That is healthy marriage. How are you doing? Still with me? Or are you upset that this isn't where your marriage is? Thinking it is unobtainable? Not so.

Being in a healthy marriage that has very little - usually zero - conflict means I have learned a thing or two about being humble. So has Erik. We have also both learned a lot about patience. Love. Charity. Faith. It takes having an open dialogue. That means you TALK. You talk about your feelings; you talk about your mutual desires. You make plans TOGETHER. You go to the hardware or comic book or sporting goods store for him and he comes to the fabric, crafting and heaven forbid the Waldorf store with you. Talk. I am continually amazed in the families that I work with, how many of them admit to having crazy awesome sex but no deep conversations. You have to talk to be on the same page. Again, that doesn't mean you have to agree.

What if you are not talking? What if you are on the brink of divorce? Can you save things? I am NOT a proponent of divorce. I do however know that sometimes things are just not fixable. Either

someone cheats or someone is abusive or things just prevent you from walking forward. It happens. Most of us never think we will be in that place. It happens. Walk through it and then read the first part of this post.

If you are committed and love your partner and you really want it to work, then there are things to do. First, don't try to change your partner. Well at least not by telling them you are going to change them. I.e. "I discovered this awesome thing called Waldorf and we are going to throw out all the plastic and only buy wool and wood and by the way the TV is going too. You will love our changed lives!" Back up the truck Sally. Your husband is wondering what was so bad with your old lives. Take it slow. If you are passionate and gung ho and you have a pattern of throwing yourselves into new things then let him have time to breathe. In my experience, unless you discussed it extensively before marrying, he didn't know you were going to breastfeed until they were 5 and sleep with them too. Now you are talking about throwing away things he worked hard to buy and taking away his way of decompressing from the day. Now... these ARE very important things of course, I am a huge breastfeeding, family bed, no TV advocate! I have just learned something my mother has been saying for years...

You get more flies with honey than you do vinegar.

What does that mean? It means get a journal, keep a blog, talk to your friends, join an email list or Facebook group about Waldorf. Then BREATHE. Slowly bring it to your husband. Make his favorite meals for dinner, make changes you can without involving him, i.e. no TV during the day while he is gone, getting your rhythm in order, eating better, sifting through the toys and taking ones to donation that you are seeking to replace, etc. take small yet deliberate actions and casually mention these things. Things taken on slow stick. Do not overwhelm yourself.

I submit that if Waldorf is a huge problem in your home, it is NOT the only problem. If there is already a lot of discord, Waldorf will just be another thing to drive a wedge. You want to get to the heart of that wedge.

Here is something else I know - your husband loves you and likely doesn't get up in the morning thinking how he will work to make you mad. OK, some men will, but the vast majority just wants to relax after work, have food in their belly, kids that are happy and sex regularly. How do you balance that with your needs? Carefully, honestly and thoughtfully. You have to TALK. Men are problem solvers by nature. So talk in that language. "Honey, if we can get these kids to bed we can be alone." or "Honey, I know it is hard when I want to go to bed early, but what if I wake you up at 5am for some alone time?" There isn't a healthy man on the planet that will say no to sex at the crack of dawn. He will be very willing to help you in all things if you can lay out the issues/problems/situations without blaming or freaking out. So tell him what you are trying to

accomplish and then let him help you trouble shoot things. Tell him you need alone time - see what he can do to help you.

Thank him. We love it when our kids are thankful. It feels good to have someone thank us. In so many situations, Dad is working crazy hours for his family, he needs to hear the words...Thank you. He needs to know that while he is out working for the man that you and the children are happy and thankful. Of course he should be happy to do it, but still, thank him. This is one of those things that unless you discussed it before marriage, he may have thought Jr. was just going to daycare and you were going to continue to work. Things have changed and he has adapted. Thank him for being flexible and love him for doing it. Now maybe you are in a situation like Erik and I where you both contribute, thank him anyway. Tell him how much you appreciate him. It softens him. Warms his heart and helps him to reciprocate.

Pray for him. Struggling or not, pray for him. If you are struggling then prayer is an important part of your daily desire to make things better. Asking God for a humble heart for you both is a very sweet thing. Rather than asking his mind be changed, ask that he turn his heart to his family and ask it to be softened and his neck to not be stiff. If you are trying to get him to understand Waldorf then be specific, pray his heart be opened and that he will listen. Also pray that you can be humble in the process. So many times I have sought prayer for my own gain, only to be humbled and reminded that isn't appropriate. We all have our free will and we can all make our own choices. It is better to ask for peace and love and see what flourishes from there. Be specific. If you are lobbying to homeschool, then ask that he be open to hearing what you have to say. Listen to him. What are his fears? His concerns? They may seem silly to you, but they aren't to him. Help him work through them. You were likely sold emotionally on Waldorf, he won't be sold that way, he needs logic. Pray for him. If you are just starting this prayer journey then use this as practice!

Have sex. I always thought it was a lie that sex is an important binder in a relationship. I was wrong. Intimacy is SO important. I thought it was a lie because I didn't enjoy it in my first marriage. It was creepy and controlling. That is NOT NOT NOT a healthy sex life. I remember when I was in the throes of trying to save my marriage. I had moved out of the bedroom and was staying in the guest room. I had gotten a great book by Carol Tuttle, Remembering Wholeness. I was on board with all of her suggestions and then I got to the chapter about your partner and I stopped. I read one line "Have sex with your husband and enjoy it." WHAT?? I was NOT on board with that. I took that to my therapist and we started making my exit plan. I do believe that when the intimate side is off then it is a sign of something bigger. I contrast it with my now happy marriage - after almost eight years, I still want to be with him as badly today as I did then. It isn't just the rustic Norse god thing he has going, it is the fact that he loves and cares for his family. He would walk through fire for all the children, even the ones he doesn't share genetics with. While I strive to be the virtuous woman in Proverbs, he is her husband, he is proud of us and loves his part in our home. That is the biggest turn on. Of course life with five children, one of whom is a co-sleeping toddler makes us not together as often as we would like, but this is a season. We find other ways to be intimate. We hold hands, we kiss - anyone around us knows we are a bonded pair. If intimacy is missing, find a way to get back to it because YOU want to. If

you don't want to and there are greater things at play, control, power, etc. then you have to examine that on a different level.

His journey with God. You have to remember that his journey with God is his own. You are exploring inner work and working on your relationship with God, he will have to take the steps when he is ready, you can't force it. You can pray for him, but you can't force it. You also can't get your feelings hurt because he isn't ready. Pray. When I met Erik, he was already a spiritual person, but that doesn't mean I don't pray for him. If I am struggling with something that he does or a decision he is making that I am not on board with, I pray. I pray that either my heart be turned to him or him to me because I savor peace above all else in our home. In eight years, I can count all our fights on one hand and none of them involved yelling and screaming or the children even knowing. A very stark contrast to my first marriage.

The ultimate family goal is coming together in prayer. You may be miles and miles away from this and it is ok. You are probably again wondering what it has to do with rhythm. A lot. Coming together in prayer at the start and close of each day is very sweet. It is a very grounded way to start the day. If your partner prays but isn't there with you as you start your day, then ask that he take a moment at X time and put his intention with yours. That time being the same time the rest of you are praying. If prayer isn't comfortable just yet, then bring a verse together or a moment of silence to think about each other or an intention for the day... there are MANY ways to give thanks and praise!! Do not be hung up on the *right* way. Just do it :)



Part 4 ~ Holding the Space & Proper Authority

"How do we as parents, in today's complicated, frantic world, create an atmosphere of regularity, consistency and stability? How best can we nurture our young child's capacities for peace, creativity, ingenuity? The answer is simple, though not always easy. We do it by supporting their life-building will energies with the basic elements of Waldorf early education: physical and emotional warmth; a wholesome, nourishing diet;

an atmosphere of beauty and reverence; consistent daily rhythms; calm, loving authority and guidance. While each of these elements is important, appropriate rhythm and authority are particularly crucial in developing what Steiner called the "will energies." They also are particularly challenging to manifest today. " ~ Marcy Axness, PhD (Renewal Magazine, A Journal for Waldorf Education)

When I work with families, one of the hardest things for moms to come to terms with is how to hold the space and proper authority. Most of us either come from a family of overbearing parents and too much authority with spanking and verbal abuse OR we didn't have enough authority. Either way, we are often left grasping at what to do once they aren't in that super cute baby/toddler place! I have been practicing AP (attachment parenting) for the better part of 17 years. With a short stint in floundering when my oldest was young, I knew right away that I didn't want to be as strict and loveless as my birth father, as frustrated as my dear mother or as permissive as my ex-husband's parents. Being AP was safe. I am a huge supporter of attached parenting and what it has done to bring awareness to parenthood for both men and women. Many of us struggle though when we search to find the answers for parenting our children as they start getting their own opinion! How do we raise obedient children in a loving, non-coercive way? How do we (and our partners) walk away from unhealthy parenting models that we may have grown up with? It should be so easy. We should just be able to say something like "I don't spank" and that should do it all right?

Where do you stand? How do you transition from parenting the 0-3's to the 4+ and the 6+ and oh goodness the 9+ and then those teens! So much of what we do comes down to confidence. If we believe our children will respect us then they will. If we believe we can homeschool them, then we can.

A few years ago I was working to help a friend with a cottage school she was starting. We visited several Waldorf kindergartens in northern California so we could see the kindy teachers in action. In watching them, I could finally put into words what I had been practicing for years. Holding the Space. There is an energy to holding the space. There is confidence that the children - even adults - will feel, it is the Light in your good energy and it gets them to strive to their highest self. Ok... we don't say that to a child! (I can use these terms with my big kids because they *get it* they feel their energies and they know when it shifts from years of working together on owning your space and your emotions.) So I watched these kindergarten teachers weave in and out "Johnny, it is time to clean up" ... "Suzy, come and help me with the snack." I observed what they didn't do. They didn't say "Johnny, do you want to clean up now?" or "Suzy, do you want to help me with the snack?"

We are living in a time when it seems the norm is to give children 14 options. The truth is that young children really don't need them. Neither do our big kids. When we parent with confidence and we hold the space, it isn't an icky thing - we are coming from a place of love and our children WANT to please us, they want to do what we do, so being a good example should be our gold standard. That doesn't mean we don't mess up. Sometimes we mess up royally, but we fix it and we move on. One spanking - ten spankings probably won't emotionally scar your child for life - it may have you in a place of guilt, but it likely won't scar them. What scars children is an ongoing fear of being beaten - not a tap on the bottom. OKAY OKAY... I hear all my anti-spanking people starting to formulate that I am a spanker - NO, NOT SO. Have I spanked? Yes. Was it my proudest parenting moment? No. Do I work each day to be centered so I can live up my goals as a parent?

Yes. None of us are perfect! For most of us, myself included, each day is a trip down the road of Humility, with a few stops along the path of Patience.

Children get upset. They have tantrums. They push boundaries. They pinch, bite or hit. Not all of them and not everyday, but children struggle, just like we do.

Learning to be the authority and hold the space is part of this path. Remember that it is that confidence, that Light within you that brings the energy into the space and immediately you are wearing an energetic signs that says "I am the Mom. Don't mess with me." It starts with a connection to the Divine and remembering that you were given these children - you were not given them to fail, you were given them so you can help them achieve wonderful things. God trusts you. Remember that parenthood is a mantle of responsibility more than it is a cloak of comfort! We have to decide - consciously - that we are going to walk forward and work hard to be centered each day before we greet our children. Then we are going to remember not to give them too many choices, we are in charge. If we need them to get dressed, eat breakfast, go for a walk, we are not going to ask, we are going to be matter of fact. It is time to get dressed. I am so sorry you don't want to, but it is time. Then you follow through on the motions of helping them get dressed. You aren't having a negotiation about it - in fact watch out, if you start negotiating when they are little then they will assume that is how we walk through life and they will struggle to trust anyone.

Marcy also wrote, "Meeting this challenge [holding calm, loving authority] is an opportunity for self-development. One thing we can do is learn to audit ourselves as we interact with our children. If we sense that we are acting out of fear and anxiety, the child will experience that and react negatively. If we are acting out of confidence and firm conviction, the child will behave as we ask."

Now you might be thinking "That won't work with my 9yo!" You are right! This is the foundation you start with when they are younger. It isn't cruel or mean to draw your boundary and stick to it. It is all in the HOW we do things. When we come from a place of loving support then we can give them the firm boundary they need and they feel secure in knowing that they can be a kid and not have to worry about everything. So maybe you didn't parent this way, maybe you were too permissive and now you are struggling to reign it in... DO NOT GIVE UP. You will need to be more firm, but that doesn't mean you aren't loving and it doesn't mean that you have to resort to complete coercion. It means that you are loving authority - your child needs this. It means you find your confidence. You ASK the heavens for help and then you trust the help you are given. If Johnny doesn't want to do his main lesson then sadly he can't go on that camp out. You can do it... say it with me..... NO. It is okay to say no. We should say no when it is warranted. We should teach loving boundaries and we should allow them to expand when they get older. My teens might come to me and say "Mom, I really want to go to X and I know my work isn't done. Is there something I can do to still go?" My teens know when they can ask if it is something I will bend on. They know what my rules are and that I won't do a ton of negotiating (one of my favorite lines is "This house is not a democracy :)") They do know that while I won't let them get

out of their work, that I am loving and will hear them out and if they present something reasonable then maybe I will go for it. It makes them think and keeps them on their toes!

Learning to hold the space will really help you with your rhythm. When we start the day in confidence, we can glide into the kitchen and cook food for their smiling faces and they feel that loving Light from you as they gather at the table and then later help you tidy up and prepare for a walk. Loving Light energy isn't frantic, it isn't filled with "oh no, what if they don't obey." It is filled with that same energy that you have when you expect they will wear their seat belt - you are the authority. Making your child the co-decision maker is very confusing to them, it makes them wonder who is really in charge, you don't want that! You are the Mom. Be the Mom.

What about when you are at a play date? I get this question a lot from moms... they don't understand why they go on a play date and the kids play nice for a bit and then it deteriorates. I always ask the mom... "Where were you?" Mom is most often in another room with another mom chatting. When we are at home with these kids all day, we crave the attention of another adult. I submit that this is NOT the way to get it. Play dates should be filled with loving Light energy from MOM. Both moms is even better! So can the children play in a common space and you knit with a friend, chat about things that are ok for children to hear. Don't talk about adult things with kids around. Holding the space doesn't end when you leave home. You may find yourself holding the space for a LOT of children! It happens to me often in church situations or with people at the grocery store.

What about teens and holding the space? That same space that allows my teens to take over and be in charge when they are alone or babysitting reverts back to me when I am home. They look to me. If I am not on my game and I haven't warned them "hey Mom is not in a great place today" - I can say that to my teens - if I don't warn them and I don't bring my loving Light to the day then it can devolve quickly... the only thing worse than a 6yo picking on a toddler is a 16yo picking on the 6yo. Communicate with your big kids.

In the end, remember this parenthood thing is a high calling. We are given much and we have much to give. Strive for perfection, but forgive yourself for being human.



Part 5 ~ Commitment

This is where we have to be super honest with ourselves. Are we really committed? How badly do we want this? And if we really do but we are still failing (or just not meeting the mark we are setting) then we have to realize it begins and ends with us. That doesn't have to be an ugly realization, it just is what it is. We are made up of our temperament, our past, our current situation and our dreams for the future. We have to somehow make all of those sync.

We have talked some about temperament parenting, but I think it needs even more talk. In the Waldorf world we often focus on our children and neglect to think about our journey with temperament too. Temperament shouldn't be a label, it is another one of those things that just is. There is a tendency to lump people in these categories and what I like to focus on for adults is active work on being the healthiest part of your temperament. Let's run through a few for review, you can get more in our Temperament Parenting series, also included in this eBook.

So if you are *choleric*, focus on the positive aspects of your temperament and focus your inner development toward that... good leadership skills, great execution skills, etc. Your downfall as a choleric is that you can get impatient and letting the kids help you can feel like it is a test in every last ounce of patience you have... this IS your test... you have a lot of will forces, your challenge is to be the leader AND allow others to help you AND to be patient while you are explaining to the others HOW to help you. Of course it is easier to just do it all yourself but then the children won't learn about the process. Breathe, be calm and carry on.

If you are *sanguine*, focus on the positives that you offer. So you are generally bright and energetic, you are great at planning and not so great at following through. You are probably a curriculum collector and you love making beautiful lesson plans for your child, the hard part for you comes in translating that into work. Your challenge is to DECIDE. Decide what you are using and put it together and stick with it. Most Waldorf curriculum is the same, you just need to decide on a voice and then stick with that. Use consult time that comes with the curriculum or ask questions if you need to, but stick with it and really follow through. This will really help you tame your will forces. The same goes for all those knitting and reading projects you have going. TAME them :) One or two craft/handwork projects at once and the same goes for books. One novel and maybe one parenting or school related book. Simplify so you can get things done.

If you are *melancholic*, then you have to focus on the beauty and stop focusing on being so stressed that you won't be able to do it! You CAN do this. Bring the very best parts of you to your child. Often you are stressing that you aren't good enough and that can make you worried or even depressed. Don't own that! Do you know that God made you exactly the same way I was made and guess what?? We are BOTH capable! So if I can do it with my loud choleric/sanguine self, SO CAN YOU :) I promise! The best parts of you are the love and tenderness you can give. Try on the choleric hat when you need to hold the space or keep a boundary with your child. Try letting things go like a sanguine can and stop worrying about what everyone thinks of you... honey, it is none of your business. Be YOU. You are fabulous. I will put a bit of a spiritual warning in here for my Christian melancholic friends or those recovering from a topsy turvy Christian path that has you mad at God. My melancholic friends are more prone to martyrdom or feelings of inadequacy when it comes to their relationship with God. Remember, God didn't give you those feelings. God (or Source, whatever God is to you) is there to help guide and love you.

Have you heard the analogy of the \$20 bill? I want you to imagine a nice clean crisp \$20. It would be nice to have... even if you don't really *need* it, you'll still take it if I hand it to you. It equals

\$20. Now I am going to crinkle up that \$20 bill, it is no longer pretty and flat, but it is still \$20, it will still buy us lunch right? You'd still take it. Now let me put it on the floor - better yet, I am going to go out to the driveway and run over it. Now it is dirty, it has some mud on it. But it will still get me that yummy avocado sandwich with mustard and provolone.... what are you having? It is dirty, but it is still \$20 and I want it for my lunch... where are we going? No kids, just us. Ok, now that same \$20 is torn in half. Where is the tape?? I will tape it back together and we can still go get lunch. Hurry before they notice we are gone. Ellie is a great babysitter :) Let's go. It's \$20.

You know that is how God sees us.

No matter how dirty we are, no matter how crumpled up, even if we have been run over and torn apart, we are still children of our Creator. We still belong to someone bigger than we are who loves us, NO MATTER WHAT.

So my dear melancholic mama.... STOP FUSSING. Just do it. You are good enough. We are all good enough. We all deserve a peaceful home and we are the ones that have to lead that peace. So get out of your own way and lets go :) Wait... are we still getting lunch?

Now my *phlegmatic* friends... I just love you. You have the ability to stay curled up and you can really harness that part of Waldorf that says we shouldn't be doing too much in the early years. You are fine with it. You want to stay home and play with the silks and wooden toys and knit a few rows and then bake, as long as you are comfortable. The moment you start thinking about that crazy lady telling you to make a plan and get up early you are irritated. Probably not irritated enough though to do much more than let your Facebook friends know. *wink* So my phlegmatic friends are a lot like my melancholic ones in that they really need to work to build up their will. We have to work hard to get up off the sofa. Leave the TV covered up and don't use Netflix, just get out the paper and pen, sit in a warm corner or by a pretty sunlit window and start your plan. You can do this. You have such wonderful qualities, share them. Often you may not want to do something, but if it is your own project, then you will plow through and get it done. This curriculum is YOUR WAY! You get to say when and how much and where. You. You are in charge so you get to run it all. With that in mind, don't get bogged down with it all, pick a starting point and ask for help when you need it.

So now that we have run through the temperaments VERY briefly, let's move on to the other parts of committing to this.

I get a lot of objection to getting up before kids. I want to see if I can clarify what I mean and also if I can shed some light for those that have different circumstances. Keep in mind, I work with

moms that are doing a variety of things - it is all about committing to what you really want and then finding ways to get it rather than being grumpy about not being able to have it.

Many of us family bed. While I have 16yo, I still have a 2yo. A 2yo booby monster that doesn't seem to be ready to let up any time soon. I am trying to savor it as she is the last, but she also has some sensory stuff going on and there are mornings when my butt is kicked and I feel just as tired as I did before I got into bed the night before! She is a joy, but she is no picnic! There are many mornings when I slip out to go potty and come back to sit in the bed and use my laptop. Since she is so big, sometimes the laptop is too much to wrangle with her so I use my phone. I get emails checked and answered, I can even get some writing done this way. I can pray this way, I can listen to podcasts, and I can get in my guilty pleasures like Facebook and Pinterest while I am laying there nursing her back to sleep. I can get myself mentally and spiritually ready for the day. All of that and I only left the bed for the potty.

Now as they get older, you can get up and get a lot more done. If they are ready for their own bed then transition them and take back your love nest :) Invite your husband to help you with this endeavor, trust me, he will be all over it! What are you doing in the morning? You are making sure your menu is good for the day, making sure you have your laundry caught up, getting in that computer time... connecting with God. Practicing painting - grade one will be here before you know it! Use your morning time wisely. Enjoy it!

If you are in the throws of kids with main lessons, then this morning time is golden for you. Get those chalkboard drawings done, get the last minute read throughs on those Grimm's tales done. Connect with God about your upcoming day. Enjoy quiet time with your partner. This is YOUR time. See it as the gift it is rather than robbing yourself of it by staying up too late. What is so wrong with staying up late? Our brains cannot make the centered decisions it needs to late at night. Ever notice how things seem so much more magnified in the darkness than they do in the light? Go to bed Mama so you can get up. Guard your morning time.

Now I will make a FEW... FEW... exceptions to the get up before your kids rule. Again, they are few. If you are working out of the home in the late evening is one of them. I work with a client today that works 3-11 several nights a week. It has been taking her another 2 hours to wind down and then she can't seem to get up before 8am. We discussed a plan. First, her husband is already a rockstar in the morning and helps with their children while she gets herself moving, but that still left her with not a lot of time to plan. She wanted to get into bed earlier, but couldn't see how it would happen. She has a job that can keep her mind on her patients all night. I gave her an assignment. I asked her to pray when she gets in the car before she drives home. In her prayers, she is to hand her clients over to God and trust that they will be there safely when she returns. Then she is to drive home listening to something uplifting, music, a podcast, something. She was excited because she really felt like she could shave off time and get into bed earlier. She also committed to getting up just 15 minutes earlier. What a big step and a huge start.

Remember that these journeys have to start somewhere. You have to take the first step.

You need to PLAN your early morning time. I have to do this so I can be super productive in the morning, but I also found that having a plan helps me get out of bed each morning. When I take the time to make a plan, then I have direction, things go fast and I know that Monday I do prayer, emails and work on whatever new project we are finishing, Tuesday I pray, email and gather things for school, and so on, each day is a gift, I just have to be willing to get up and take the gift.

Part 6 ~ Mental Health

This one is tough. Mental health. What does that mean exactly?

Good mental health doesn't mean that you don't have bad days. It doesn't mean you are the perfect mother. It doesn't mean even that you are medication free. Good mental health starts with being a proactive participant in your own care. It means knowing when to get help. It means allowing yourself to feel pain. It also means knowing how to not throw poo. Let's talk about poo. If you are new to our work then you might be pretty grossed out - stick with me. Poo is gross. If it gets on you then you can't wait to get it off. It stinks. It stains. It is the last thing that we want on us, our shoes, our clothes... what about our loved ones? We don't like them to have poo on them either. Poo can come in many forms. I am talking about emotional poo. Emotional poo is the stuff that comes out when we aren't taking good mental care of ourselves.

**Please know, I am NOT talking about depression, I will talk about that more in a minute. Right now I am talking about emotionally unhealthy people that love pain and drama.

Pain and drama! Yes. We all know someone that is super dramatic and loves to tell you all the horror stories in their lives. We get off the phone and we are drained. Worn out. Spent. Ask yourself if you do that to anyone? Or when there are dramas created in Facebook groups or even local co-ops. There are some that stir and some that get consumed and some that just don't get involved. Now I will be the first to say that it is EASY to get mixed up in something that you didn't mean to. It happens.

Emotional poo is the stuff that hangs on from an unhealthy childhood and try as we might, we are making the same really crappy mistakes that our parents made. Emotional poo comes out when we are sheltering our children from things and we think we are doing something huge but sometimes we might just be making a bigger deal out of things. Poo isn't nice. Poo keeps us from standing in the light. So now that you have a sense for poo, let's think about how we can get it gone.

I mentioned before that I don't consider depression as part of this really - why? Well I think there is a lot of misdiagnosing that happens with moms. We are complex, complicated beings with postpartum and nursing hormones running through us and some temperaments presenting differently than others when faced with those. That doesn't mean I don't think some moms need medical help, that is not it at all, but I do think if you are continually struggling, then stand back

and re-evaluate. I know a mom that recently got taken off of depression meds and put on something for ADD, she said it changed her life, all this time she was misdiagnosed and that cost her precious time with her family and really, with herself. So if you are struggling don't give up, get to the bottom of things. I do believe that 99% of what we have going on can be taken care of without medication. We have to remember the recipe for feeling good... rest...eating right...moving our bodies. Those three things are the magic combination for good mental health in general. Then take your temperament into account, we talked about that a bit in Part 5. Working with our own temperament can be tricky, but it is good to know "hey, so *that* is why I want to curl up and not leave the sofa! I am not depressed, I am phlegmatic!" While they are generalizations, it is amazing how accurate they are. I tend to focus on adult temperament far more than my children. I need to lead before I can diagnose :) Plus, when I take care of me, then I can take care of everyone else. So again, if you battle depression, look at it on many levels. You may still end up with medication, but remember that isn't a magic bullet, you still have to take care of yourself.

So you are working on your inner work, it starts to bring up some things from your past that you aren't super thrilled with, so now what? We have to work on releasing that. Our [Beacon files](#) are a great place to start for that. The short answer is that we have to get rid of our own baggage - emotional poo - so that we can move on and not give it to our kids. We tend to give it to our kids in the weirdest of ways and it is usually part of our good intentions. How? Well I can share something I did. I grew up Catholic. In my 20s I decided that didn't work for me so I took everything that I thought was wrong with the Catholic Church and lumped that into some pretty intense negativity. I decided that I couldn't have the patriarchal side and still honor myself as a mother. I was looking at life through very narrow lenses. One day my son, 6 or so at the time, asked me why we hated Christians. Stopped. Me. Cold. What? We don't hate Christians! Crazy boy why would you even think that? Out of the mouths of babes come truths unimagined. I started to examine the extremes I had gone to and just how they affected my children and their perception of the world. I started looking at tolerance and forgiveness and unconditional love. I didn't want to bring my issues to my children. As the story would have it, within a few years I came back to Christianity, but with a much different outlook. I started really trying to see people the way the Creator does. This was an amazing transformation of a poo poo situation. There are things MUCH deeper that we carry around. We carry the deepest fears that our parents give us about being a good girl or doing enough or being dumb or wasting our lives or insert your own big ugly bag of poop here. It isn't fun. It needs to be dealt with. It is time to get busy on what hangs us up. Don't worry about what hangs Dad up right now or what hangs your sister up. Worry about you. When you get healthy then things change. People seem to change. Our children's behaviors even change. It is amazing AMAZING what can happen in a house where Mom loves herself, is confident and feels good. It can happen. If you are not in that place right now, go, grab a sheet of paper and as soon as you are finished reading this, I want you to write. WHY are you not feeling good? I challenged a mom the other day to tell me who she was without her engineering degree. She was a little stumped. Before you are a mom. Before you are a career woman. Before you are a wife. You are a beautiful creation of the Divine. God loves you. God wants you to love you. Just like it hurts you when your children talk down about themselves, it hurts God when we don't respect ourselves or we allow someone to hurt

us. Christian or Jew. Native or Pagan. Muslim or Hindu. You are a Divine child. Loved. Cared for on High. Sought after. You are a virtuous woman no matter what you think you have done in the past to change it. It can begin right now. Today. I want you to stop reading and hug yourself. I want you to know that I know you are worthy. I know you have strength you have yet to tap. I know you can do this. You are wonderful. Today is the day to stop making excuses and get busy. You have a lot of loving you to do.

Part 7 ~ Get Pen & Paper

Ok, so hopefully you have been keeping up and by now you know that rhythm is much more than just painting on a certain day and going to the market on a certain day. Rhythm is the foundation for living. It defines who you are, how you respond to things and also how you are raising your children. Your rhythm will probably look pretty different than mine - it should - mine can be a guide as you get started, but over time you should create your own. This helps you to own it, love it and most of all uphold it! It will likely change as your family changes, this keeps it from getting stale but also helps you to tailor it to your family.

Today, I want you to grab a pen and paper. Better yet, get a pencil. Do you have one that you love? I am an office supply nerd. I love things that are just MINE :) Pretty paper. Awesome pen & pencil. Good stuff.

First, make a list of all the chores you need to get done, big and small. I am here to tell you that you may NOT wait until your house is clean and decluttered to start this! We are starting it now. There will always be a reason to delay - you have the tools now though, so now you are bound! You are now a find-a-way, make-a-way woman. No more excuses right? Just make the list.

Make a list of all the things you want to fit into your rhythm.

Now draw out your week. You can use a plan paper calendar to write it out or you can draw something pretty. I love to use pretty pencils and have fun with this. Remember this IS fun. Life IS fun. If you are feeling burned out and you don't like yourself or your children then you need to go back to Part 1!

Ok, Make sure you put EVERYTHING on here the first time you do it. We will do it a few times to get it right, but for the first ones, we are just getting it down on paper. You must put everything here so you can see it all. Write in when your partner leaves for work, comes home, meal times, school time, and your weekly appointment to the chiropractor.... WRITE IT DOWN. You are worrying about time, so let's really see where it is all going. For many moms, this is a huge surprise. For many moms, this is when they get the realization that more is not better. This is when you get a dose of reality. I promise, it gets better.

Now, what on your weekly rhythm can be deleted, consolidated or otherwise altered? If you have a standing appointment with someone every week, can you move it to a day when you are already planning to leave the house so you don't have to go twice? Of course the little ones need home time, but also, don't underestimate the older ones that need it too. Of course, big kids are generally more social and you can really meet that need, but let's be deliberate about it and really make sure that your week works for everyone. With the spread we have... from 17 down to 3, I make sure that anything that could possibly affect our home rhythm is taken into account and if it doesn't work for the littlest one, well the older child will get over it. The big kids are encouraged to work together to find rides and public transportation when they can. My teens use the buddy system and learn how to get along so they can go alone together on our public train and bus. I want them to be able to rely on each other and understand the layout of their city. Life skills. I wouldn't worry about this until 12+.

Now that you are looking more closely at things, you might be ready to tell me just how social your 7yo is and how they just can't give up that oboe lesson or swim team practice. Yes they can. Consolidate it, change the time to fit your needs or find a way to make peace with it in your rhythm. I keep a general rule of 2 activities per child AFTER they are in first grade. That is MORE than enough. Right now we don't even have that many! Simplicity is the key here.

We have a chore list and a basic weekly schedule on paper. What's next? Let's look at a bare bones menu. Come on! WRITE IT DOWN. It isn't hard... you don't have to be super specific... you can segment your breakfasts into a grain day, a muffin day, an egg day, etc. You can refine it as you make your weekly shopping list, right now you just want to get it down on paper. Make sure it is food you like! For lunches, keep it simple - find a handful of things that everyone likes and stick to it for now. Remember that the point is to simplify your life, it isn't to make an elaborate menu. Same with dinner... pasta night, soup night, rice night, ethnic night, etc. Think logically about things, for instance, I make pasta sauce on Monday so I can turn leftovers into creamy tomato soup on Tuesday, etc. When I make my special German egg noodles, I make two batches so I can freeze one. When I buy frozen fruit and greens for smoothies, I prep a week + at a time and freeze the fruit so I can just grab the bag from the freezer. This is about working smarter, not harder.

I often hear the objection that you are using a different diet. I work with the premise that we have a whole diet as often as possible and I am here to tell you that it can be done. I make my own butter, skim my own cream, make my own kefir... with prep and planning you can do anything! Plan it all into your rhythm. I like to get milk on Wednesday, skim the cream Thursday morning, make butter from the settled and separated cream on Friday. Make creamy soup with the left over almost week old cream on Tuesday, etc. We grind wheat on one day and bake on the next. The keys are really to plan it out and then stay on top of it. Of course going out of town or getting sick get us off a bit, but there again, I can make a plan when we go out of town. That plan includes enough food left at home for two+ meals when we return. I also make sure I leave with a clean house so we can come home and do laundry and step right back into life... I also do

loads of laundry when we are gone just so it lightens my load when I get home. Now sickness is another story. While your daily prep will suffer, if you have been doing your job, you should be ahead just a bit. If you have been planning and shopping for your meals ahead then it shouldn't be too hard to be out of commission for a couple days. Planning it out sets you free - MUCH freer than winging it!

We have the nuts and bolts here. What next? Where is the fluff? We are NOT going to worry about fluff right now. What is fluff? Fluff is the sweet dinner verse you saw some blog about, complete with pictures of a lit candle and everyone sitting still. FLUFF. We aren't going to worry about that in this post. We can worry about that in the next post. Think of it this way... you just brought home the cutest chair... maybe from IKEA...the chair is one of those awesome comfy ones with a nice pad... maybe you even sprang for the leather because you are *sure* your 4yo is over the writing on furniture stage. You come home, open the box. Hmmm.... you REALLY want to sit on that comfy chair pad! It is your favorite color, you want it now. How are you going to get that far? Well Mama... you gotta build the darn chair! If you don't take out those annoying wordless IKEA instructions and try to figure out what the little rotund man is trying to build then the cushion is completely useless. Maybe you can use it as a pillow? WHY.... build the dang chair!!! Get up! Do it. Do it so you can sit on the cushion... or the fluff. The fluff of Waldorf is wonderful. The play silks and the fairies and the gnomes and the birthday rings on the dinner table and the pretty cards on the nature table and the expensive paints and and and.... the awesome bedtime routine that another mom posted and all the day you thought "I just want to send Johnny into dream land like that mom does!" Hey... that mom has bad days too... she just doesn't shoot those with her Canon camera. That mom maybe has been raised this way or she has, like me been doing it since the dawn of time.... ok not that long, but Ellie called me elderly the other day so it feels like the dawn of time... until you have the chair built, the cushion is not going to work. Sure you can put that cushion on your sofa and then sit or lay on it, but it won't be the same. That cushion belongs on that chair. Get busy. Build the chair. When you get frustrated because *somehow* the screws for the chair don't line up with the holes (of course that NEVER happens with IKEA right?!) don't get discouraged. Take the screw out, try to see if it is user error... maybe it was going in crooked or maybe you have to grab your husband's drill and fix the hole.... whatever you have to do, build the chair. Then when the chair is built.... place your beautiful cushion on it. Hide the Sharpies from your 4yo and brew some tea, grab a good book from your favorite, fabulous, 40yo homeschooling author and curl up. Be fed. Be excited. You built the chair. You love this cushion. You are going to protect it from that Sharpie no matter what and if somehow that crafty little person finds where you hid the Sharpie and writes on your awesome cushion... you will breathe, you will remember that because the chair is built, you can readjust the cushion so no one can see the stain.

Mama... you can do this. I know you can. I am here to help.



Part 8 ~ The Fluff

The Fluff. What exactly is the fluff? The fluff is what draws a lot of mamas to Waldorf. It is the cute stuff. The stuff that makes us want to be a kid again. The toys. The sweet dinner time verses. The bedtime rituals. The birthday ring. The play silks. The fairies. The gnomes. The fluff. It is good stuff! I love the fluff. Through the years, the fluff has changed in my home, as it will in yours. The one thing I came to realize in wrestling my own rhythm was that the fluff had to be secondary. Steiner didn't talk about the fluff. The fluff wasn't the soul changing element in our children. The fluff wasn't what he said would help them live strong, healthy lives. It is just fluff.

Beautiful, awesome, wonderful, yummy fluff. There are Pinterest boards and blogs dedicated to the fluff. There are books dedicated to the fluff. There is no shortage of ways for you to find fluff and then feel badly that you don't have it or don't do enough of it.

With that in mind... let's make sure you feel good about Parts 1-7 of this series. If not, do not start on the fluff. The fluff will not change your lives in the long run. Actively parenting and holding the space in a daily rhythm will change your lives. The fluff will just bring in more fun. So we are on the same page... continuing to read means that you have gone through and begun to master the foundations laid out in 1-7.

Fluff takes on many forms. It can be the beautiful wooden toys we see in catalogs or in on line shops. Let's start there.

Toy fluff. If you are new to Waldorf, this aspect is both delightful and frustrating. Often we want these toys more than our children do. We have to keep that in mind when we are knocking ourselves out to buy the perfect gift. There are many considerations, including environmental, ethical, esthetics, etc. When Waldorf became a big part of our toy life, my older children were very young. Like many moms, I was fretting over having the perfect play things. I remember when we still had the little rubbery Little People from Fisher Price. I knew they were not what I wanted to have around and I was striving to do better, but I can remember one interaction that just made me feel terrible. A mom from the new play group that I was so excited to be a part of, said to me "I choose wooden because I don't want my children to die from cancer after mouthing plastic toys." She said it right as Ellie, then about 6 months old, was mouthing a toy from the Little People Farm I was trying to get rid of. I felt a pit in my stomach and spent some time crying afterward. In looking back, that mom thought she had something to prove. She defined herself on her house, her children's toys and how many loaves of bread she made each week. That is not healthy behavior. When you are approaching the toy fluff, you will not win any contests by

running out and replacing toy for toy. Steiner talked about simple toys during his simple time. He talked a lot about materialism. You can have simple toys and be a materialist! Ask yourself with each step - "do we need this?" Before you start buying, I would look at the toys you have and seriously cull them. What can be reduced? Start with toys that are not played with. Then once you have purged these then look at the toys that are regulars in your house. Now I know many moms rotate toys. I don't. Don't yell at me. You can rotate them if you want. Since I started this track, my life has changed monumentally and I decided that if I had enough toys to rotate then we had too many. This can be REALLY hard with a young child. I am not suggesting that you go through and get rid of toys they love. Not suggesting that at all. What I am suggesting is a transition that over the period of 6-12 months can downsize into a manageable toy stash. I learned a lot over the years - much of it through making mistakes! Sam has super heroes mixed in with the wooden toys. I would have cringed when my big boys were little to see this. With Sam, I was in a better place... a place of not judging everything... a place of working to understand rather than trying to convert everyone around me. I began to really watch Sam in his play. One day I noticed that there was a little figure of The Hulk in the wooden house with the other toys. I asked, "Sam what is the Hulk doing in the play house?" He told me that the animals needed help moving furniture and cleaning and the Hulk was strong so they asked him to help. The use of the toy melted me heart. That was about 5 years ago. Now that he is 8, my only rule is that Iron Man isn't shooting any of the forest animals. Of course I am always amazed when he tells me that the figures have a place in the play and they are generally good places. Having not seen any of the movies himself, he is forced to use what he thinks he knows and make up the rest. It is very sweet. I wouldn't take those toys out of his play - it would make him sad. Integrating them all is a much healthier way to approach it. Children will gain the desire for the esthetic in time.

Be aware too that play changes. There will be a time when most children ask for something that isn't wooden or cute or remotely what our Fluff mind thinks they need. Again, ask yourself about balance. How balanced is this situation? While a birthday party that is completely Lego themed isn't wrong, it also isn't balanced. So how can you balance things for your older children? I like to continually ask what my child needs. I ask God (Source) these questions often. It is only through connecting that I can find what my child needs.

Don't be sad if your child doesn't take to all the toys you want them to have. Unless you live in a cave and never go to Target, then your child will see other toys. I spend a lot of time making sure my children have access to good quality toys (many that have been around for 10 years or more) and then just the other day, I stopped at Target for something. I had to walk past the toy section and just at Sariah's level, there was one of those (gag) plastic purses with a little cell phone in it and fake lipstick, plastic keys, etc. She thought it was the cat's pajamas! She picked up the box and wanted it to come home. Of course I didn't let that happen, but I did let her stand there in the toy section and enjoy its plastic goodness for a moment to get it out of her system, then I distracted her and we moved on. She loves her Waldorf dolly and wooden animals and her desire to have the plastic purse didn't make her love them any less.

As moms, we have to detach from the toys we give. I promise that you will be much happier if you do. Teach your children to care for all of their toys and that will carry over into the good wooden, natural toys you are buying.

Focus on keeping things simple. Don't replace toy for toy. Think about basics. What can you make? Nothing???. Then get over to Thinking Feeling Willing if you are not already and get going on some handwork! Handwork is such a wonderful way to bring things to your children and also further your skills.

Moving on.

Meal time fluff. This is really two fold. The Waldorf journey often takes us to a place of really understanding our bodies and our dietary needs more. We may be exploring things we didn't think of before. Maybe we are uncovering food allergies we didn't know about or maybe we have just made the commitment to not eat the way 90% of the rest of civilization eats. Being conscious can take many forms. In it all, be kind to yourself. Be happy with your progress and don't expect to get there overnight. If you are completely altering your diet, then make sure you purposefully put some fun in it. Remember that kids raised on no refined sugars taste things differently than those of us that allow our babies to have M&M's. It is ok. Where ever you are, work within that context. The M&M comment aside, I was being a bit tongue in cheek there... feed your children mostly whole foods and they will ask for them. Sam will fight you for the blueberries. There may be bloodshed. Watch out. He loves blueberries. Ellie, now 13yo, would generally prefer a salad laden with blue cheese and hard boiled eggs to a burger. My big boys... In & Out makes their heart sing. At the end of the day though, we eat balanced. We have a child with food sensitivities; we are mindful of it. I like to have raw milk and make my own butter, creamy soups, breads, etc. but I have come to a place where that striving does not define me. If I can do it, great, if I can't one week because our rhythm was off or someone was sick or I was called to help someone else... it is ok. In the years when my son's food issues ruled us a lot more, I had to be super mindful of everything. I had to prepare in advance and we had to eat on a schedule. If this is your reality, then your food prep has to become part of your daily rhythm. While for me, making butter is in my schedule, I won't fall apart if I can't do it, maybe you are different, maybe you are gluten free and you must make sure your kitchen stays that way... work it in. If you need help, ask for it. I am happy to help you with some short cuts. I found labeling flours, making up mixes, chopping raw ingredients, etc. to be very time saving for me over time.

How about that perfect verse and candle... what about that fluff?

Remember there are seasons to life. If you will spend more time keeping the toddler out of the flame, then skip the candle! I find that by the time they are about 3 years old they can exercise more control - this is general though, I had one son that couldn't exercise it at 10! The practice of lighting a candle and saying a prayer or verse can bring mindfulness and quiet to your meals. Do not do it because you think it is part of Waldorf and you have to... do it because it resonates with you AND with your partner. Talk about it together before you get started bringing

it to your meals. Then spend time talking to your kids about it. Don't spring it on everyone. Take the time for mindfulness. Once you have an idea of what you want to do then introduce it with a meal that also invites reverence. Don't bring it in on pizza night, start on a night when the mood brought by the food is calm.

Some ideas?

Start simple. If you are not in the habit of prayer at meals then consider how you can bring this to everyone. A verse or prayer song might be easiest at first. Begin by preparing for your meal. Wash hands. Washing hands is a beautiful gesture and brings reverence to the meal time space. Then gather, pick a child to light the candle or ask Dad to light it as a significance of his leading and guiding role in the home. Then either join hands or bow heads and try a verse like:

Blessings on the blossom,
 Blessings on the fruit,
 Blessings on the leaf and stem,
 Blessings on the root.

OR

For these things we give thanks.

OR

If you would like to start praying together, pick a child to say the prayer. We sort of laugh about this one. We have such eager prayer givers that it can become a fight, so Daddy assigns the mealtime prayers. They are often simple and sweet, sometimes long suffering and deep, other times short and to the point.

Rituals and fluff around mealtimes can help with children that are fussy eaters or those that want to take forever to get on with things. When we begin in reverence, it gets everyone headed toward the direction of receiving nourishment. When we don't come together in prayer, there is a haphazard chaos that tries to prevail. Being mindful and standing strong with your partner helps this energy be where it should be.

Bedtime fluff. When I hear the bedtime rituals of some Waldorf families I am amazed anyone sleeps! No really. 14 stories, 3 songs, a prayer, two glasses of water, a snack, and, and, and. We need to think about a few things when we are crafting our bedtime rituals. The first thing is "what is my goal?" If your goal is to get this child to sleep, then let's focus on calming MINIMAL activities. This is the last squeeze they will get for a few hours, BUT we are with them ALL day! Let's be realistic about what they really need. This is a place where I also encourage Dad to

step in a lot because generally he isn't around all day. They need some Dad strength at night too. Leave space for this nighttime ritual to change as your child changes.

When I married Erik, the nighttime ritual was a mystery to him. He was never "tucked in" at night. He told his parents good night and he went to bed. Having a long drawn out ritual was something he had to adjust to. It also gave me pause and cause to adjust. Was I doing too much and was it affecting my own down time at night. When examined, it was. So then I had to be studious and prayerful about how to fix it in a healthy way. I began to examine what my children needed at each stage in their lives.

If you are mothering really little ones, say 2 and under, then your rituals will look different than if you are mothering primarily older children. Really small ones are often still nursing or just needing some snuggles and a prayer to get them off to dreamland. Don't over complicate it for this age.

The 3-5 yo set can probably use a bit more. Maybe a song. If you do a story, be sure to keep it simple.

The 5-8 yo set will want a bit more still. This is a good time to start a chapter book at bedtime. I encourage you to make parameters with this. The entire night time rhythm has to work for everyone, so if it doesn't start on time then these extras don't get to happen. The big kids are usually really good about making sure this happens, they want the story! Look at how much time your night time rituals take and don't let them fall beyond the time you have set out for them to get into bed. Also, again, make sure Dad helps if he can.

Set the expectation that you are off duty at a certain point. Everyone has had their last drink, their last song, their last story. It is now time for you to center and be done for the night. Remember that we can be loving and firm at night. Remember that it doesn't always go the way we want it to. Remember that the fluff changes over time.

Bigger kids, 9 & up, often want something more substantial at bed time. They may want quiet time to read on their own or some may want a few minutes to talk to you with all the other children down for the night. Be open to things changing for children as they grow.

Always keep in mind how important sleep is. If you don't have a firm testimony of how important it is then email me. Sleep is very important. Getting your children in a good place so you can in turn be in a good place is a fantastic striving.

I hope this piece and the series has been helpful. Remembering to be strong in the foundations of Waldorf before you try to run with everything else will help you in the long run. It will keep you from burn out. Never forget why you are taking the journey.