



Magical Child

by Joseph Chilton Pearce

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Intense, intellectual, impassioned former humanities teacher, as father of five children, **Pearce's first reaction to the evidence he presents in the *Magical Child* was to shut it out because it led him to a position so at odds with current opinion about the child mind and human intelligence that he found himself at a loss to bridge the gap. He and his wife had raised their five the best they could and acted conscientiously "to a painful degree." It took him a long time to realize that they were not guilty, a point he emphasizes for us all.** This given, he aims to sketch a picture of a child's mind and nature's plan for intelligence, believing that what is at issue here is a biological plan for the growth of intelligence, a genetic encoding within us that we unwittingly ignore, damage, even destroy.

The existence of a genetic plan for the body's physical growth is apparent. *Magical Child* discusses a corresponding, beautifully coordinated plan for the development of intelligence. Pearce believes that the "mind-brain" is designed for astonishing capacities, that logical maturation would develop a utility, value, and ability almost beyond our imagination. He notes children in other parts of the world who display abilities far beyond our accepted norm, and asserts that the full development of intelligence requires acknowledging and cooperating with the biological plan. In so doing, we would find that most of our current problems with infants and children never materialize, for "our problems have been caused by ignoring nature's plan."

Pearce presents the biological plan for the development of intelligence as being based on a series of matrix formations and shifts. The matrix (Latin for womb) offers three things to a newly forming life: a source of possibility, a source of energy to explore that possibility, and a safe space within which that exploration takes place. Each matrix shift propels us into another set of unknown experiences. This is the way intelligence grows. The progression of matrix shifts is from concreteness towards abstraction, or the physical world of womb, mother, earth, body to the mental world of thought. Movement into a new matrix is made only by standing on the old, i.e., a child can move into exploration of the earth matrix only by standing on the safe place provided by mother.

The womb matrix within the mother is the infant's first matrix. Mother is the second. "Mother is the infant's world, hologram, content for her intent... safe space." If mother as matrix is not given from birth, intelligence has no ground to grow on. For this child, earth as matrix cannot become functional, as designed, at around seven, when nature provides for the child to functionally separate from direct dependence on the mother to move out and structure a knowledge of the third matrix, the earth. The world becomes the enemy, the adversary, the danger.

Nurtured appropriately, from 7-11 (roughly), a child's knowledge of self as matrix grows through physical interactions with the earth. Autonomy is now the goal. By adolescence, the biological plan is for us to become our own matrix, i.e., we become our own source of power, possibility, and safe place to stand. At some point after maturity, the mind should begin a functional separation from brain processes. Pearce believes that this is the final matrix shift of which we can have any direct knowledge. Personal awareness is no longer dependent on any concreteness. Progression to abstraction is complete.

Pearce believes that our 3 billion year heritage is truly magnificent; success depends on the infant-child having a proper context for nature's intent. Drawing on research from a wide variety of sources, Pearce examines, in depth, the means by which nature's plan for the development of intelligence can be injured or nurtured as we move from matrix to matrix.

Damaging practices in the early years include: modern birthing practices, separating mother and infant at birth, placing infants in cribs and strollers rather than on the mother's body, subjecting a child to deal with information or experiences suited to a later stage, and interfering with their need to construct knowledge of the world by inflicting on them our anxiety-ridden view. Childhood becomes a battleground between biological plans, *intent*, which drives the child from within, and our anxious *intentions*, pressing her from without. Anxiety is the enemy of intelligence and blocks the biological plan.

Noting that the United States has the most expensive medical care system in the world, and an astonishingly high infant mortality rate (with reference to hospital births), Pearce writes, "The infant is exposed to an intelligence distrustful of anything natural, an intelligence with a vast array of tools... with which to outwit, and in fact, supplant nature... and in that outwitting and supplanting, damage is done that is incalculable. Future historians will shudder... at the hospital treatment of newborns and mothers in this very dark age..." **He shows how technological childbirth and conventional notions about the treatment of infants damage nature's plan for the development of intelligence.**

Pearce elaborates on the ramifications of these birthing practices--and he sees these as being extensive. For example, essentially abandoned at birth, the infant-child learns to relieve stress through material objects. The long-term effects include the breakdown of interpersonal relationships and an obsessive-compulsive attachment to material objects. The net result is a collapsing social order and generations of people with an increased passion for consumer goods.

He contrasts the passage through pregnancy, birthing, and the early years of a typical child in our culture, with that of a "magical child." This mother is a composite of real people Pearce has met, in many different guises and places. "She knows that the creation of life is the greatest of human acts and that successfully nurturing a new life is a consummate art... that the creative thrust of life supports her, that she... has the strength of that flow." She responds to the needs of her body with the same respect and care she does for her infant in and out of the womb. "Knowing anxiety to be the greatcrippler of intelligence, she works... for calm repose." When time comes for birthing, she knows what to do by heeding the three-billion-year biological coding built into her genes. "Her knowing is not articulated, thought-out, coherent... she is just a coordinate of smooth actions." Pearce writes of the first hour after birth as the most critical time in human life. When the infant's every need is met, within hours the newborn will be smiling, knowing where s/he stands: in the safe place, the matrix. In no way is mother "beguiled by such nonsense" as the notion things must not be too easy for her infant, lest s/he think the world a bed of roses. She knows frustration does not build concepts in the brain. Concepts build through successful assimilations and accommodations; the infant is prompted from within by an enormous drive that goes ahead of ability, and there are frustrations aplenty in that.

Childhood begins as s/he moves to interact with the living earth and structure a knowledge of it, just as s/he has of mother. This will take about seven years. A child learns by freely interacting through the 5 senses and body movement. Nothing more is needed. For most children, this matrix shift is blocked by anxiety cued from the adult.

The clash damaging the biological plan at this point is that between adult logic and the child's practical intelligence. For example, because the language grasp of the 3- or 4-year-old is enormous, we tend to think s/he can process adult verbal logic. Not so. Abstract communications (not referring to the immediate context), especially if the child is expected to respond or obey, create sensory disorientation in the brain, and produce a form of premature autonomy. The child needs simple, concrete communications and correctives.

Defending the child's need to be a child, Pearce tells us that reasoning with the pre-reasoning child creates a form of psychological abandonment. Parents have not met the child where s/he is, the only place where s/he can be. They have isolated their child with his/her fears, even though they may temporarily calm him/her. No learning has taken place, for anxiety is the enemy of intelligence.

Pearce moves with compelling insight through the needs and revelations of each matrix. In closing, he looks at what we adults can do now about our child and our own split selves. Perhaps most important, for ourselves as adults, we need reclaim our lives from anxiety's grip, learn again to listen to our body and our primary processes for, as Pearce writes, "They have their language too, though it is not of the same nature as the prepositional logic chattering in our heads."

We are fortunate enough to know Pearce as a neighbor, colleague, and friend. Now in his early seventies, he is an incredibly vital, engaging, and entertaining character. His eyes twinkle. His enthusiasm and dedication to this work are an inspiration.

Magical Child was first published in 1977. The material is by and large as valid now as it was then. Research done since that time primarily serves to amplify his premises. While he has written several books since, this remains the most relevant to the field of attachment parenting. There is really nothing else, at this time, that covers the situation with anything like the depth and breadth that *Magical Child* does.

It is very difficult for me to begin to do justice to this book. The material is dense in content. There are parts of it that I can absorb only a page at a time, others I can move through easily. I pick it up again and again, for while it is too much for me to absorb at once, I feel compelled to refer to the chapters appropriate to Siena's current stage of development. This is a very important book--not just on a theoretical, intellectual level, but on a very practical one. For the most part, it is not an easy read, but it is a very, important one.

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