



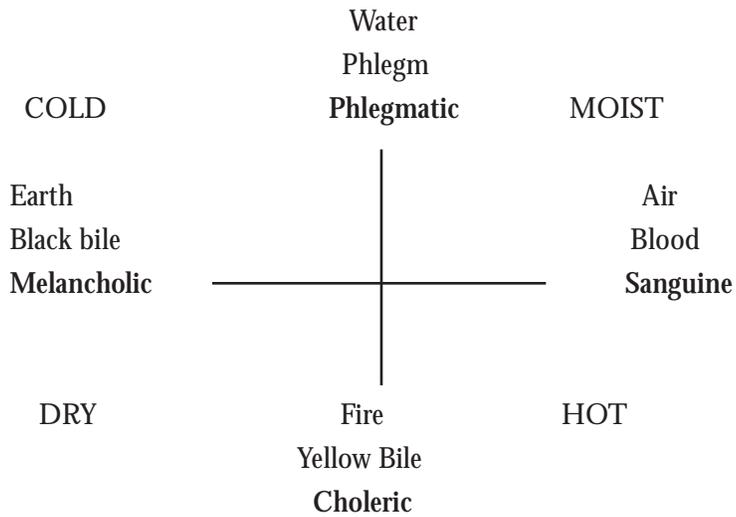
The Four Temperaments

One of the many surprises for parents new to Waldorf education comes when they hear their child referred to in some seemingly arcane terminology: “You see Mr. and Mrs. Smith, your daughter’s real problem is that she is overly phlegmatic.”

Goodness, what to make of that! The teacher is not identifying a contagious or terminal condition, only describing the child in terms of the theory of the temperaments. Let us look at the history of this theory, the characteristics of each of the four temperaments—melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine, and choleric—and how we can use this understanding of human types to help our children develop into well-balanced individuals.

The Temperaments in Premodern Thought

The notion of temperament is very old, dating back at least to the ancient Greece. Hippocrates, in the fourth century BC, spoke of four qualities or “humors” in the human being—cold, moist, hot and dry. In the second century AD, the physician, Galen, spoke of the mixing or “temperare” of these four humors to yield four temperaments. These in turn were related to the four elements yielding the fiery choleric, the airy sanguine, the watery phlegmatic, and the earthy melancholic.



The Greeks sought to explain temperament as being due to an excess of inner fluids. Thus there arose the theory that the melancholic was cool and dry (as often perceived when you hold their hand) due to an excess of black bile. Similarly, was the sanguine warm and moist due to too much blood, the choleric character due to an excess of yellow bile, and the phlegmatic to too much phlegm. At least this is the medieval reading of the Greeks attribution of temperament to biles—it may be that these were terms used in the Greek Mysteries to represent spiritual phenomena which some ten centuries later was interpreted by the uninitiated in a purely materialistic matter. Alas, one of the barriers to the acceptance of these temperaments in this century was the dubiousness of connecting temperament to these fluids. What is black bile, anyway?





Nevertheless, the concept of temperament remained important and widely used in understanding human character and behavior until the Enlightenment. With the development of psychology in the late nineteenth century, the idea that a child's upbringing is the primary determinant of personality and character became the academic orthodoxy. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion of temperament was "exiled" because it became politically incorrect to speak of inborn qualities of human beings. The theory of genetic inferiority arose in America with the inflow of poor and uneducated immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and in Germany with the Nazi writings on the superiority of the Aryan race. All this made the study of inborn or temperamental factors taboo.

Modern Science Discovers the Temperaments

In the 1950s several researchers in psychology (among them Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas) began to re-explore the concept of temperament. Initially they were spurred by Carl Jung's concept of introvert-extrovert (and the later Myers-Briggs research on personality types) and by studies that showed that stable and loving parents can still have aggressive or excessively fearful children for which no psychological cause could be found. Thus researchers began to look at the stable qualities which exist in the young child and continue into adulthood, the most prominent among these being inhibited and uninhibited behaviors.

In his book *Galen's Prophecy* (Basic Books, 1994), research psychologist Jerome Kagan describes how he and his colleagues found that inhibited children begin to show indications of their temperament after their first birthday, reacting to new events with initial caution and hesitation. These children tend to withdraw or fret when faced with the unfamiliar and cling to their mothers in the presence of strangers. It was found that twenty percent of healthy infants are thus easily aroused



by new experiences and when aroused, become distressed. Most of these later become fearful, cautious children.

The study showed that uninhibited children in contrast are hard to frighten. They take going to school for the first time in stride. They laugh easily and are socially confident and relaxed. This group, who grow up to be bold, outgoing, and socially unflappable adults, comprise about fifteen percent of all children.

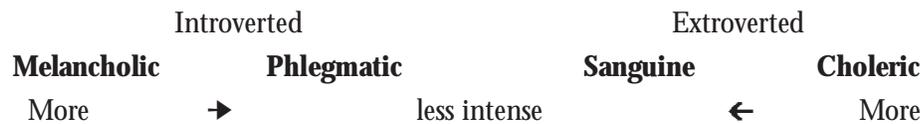
Associating body type with personality is an important part of the outmoded—in the eyes of science, at least—theory of temperaments. It is interesting then that data collected supported a connection between temperament and body type. This correlation was initially shocking and resisted by the researchers because it contradicted current assumptions in the field.

Kagan and his colleagues found that inhibited children tend to have slim bodies, narrow faces, and a proneness to allergies and constipation. A significant number have light blue eyes (which alarmed them further due to possible racial implications) and greater than average heart-rate activity. A slight majority are females. Among the uninhibited children, the majority are boys, especially the boldest and most active in the group. They tend to be stockily-built with broad faces, and sixty percent have dark eyes. Some, however, are slim; the key physical marker in children apparently is a stronger musculature around the base of the neck.

These physical characteristics of temperament led Kagan to wonder about differences in the brain and in levels of responsiveness in the nervous system. He found that the two types differed in terms of the threshold of excitability of the grey mass at the base of the brain, the amygdala, and of its projections into the sympathetic nervous system. This “hardwiring,” however, did not imply that there was no hope for the children with the most extreme symptoms of temperament—most became either less fearful or less aggressive and ebullient and more to the

middle range as they got older. Researchers have now become interested in how they might help this process of modifying temperamental extremes although this work is still exploratory. The main import of this research for the parent and teacher is that some children have temperamental tendencies that are not due to parental upbringing or entirely linked to heredity.

Modern researchers such as Kagan identified the melancholic or inhibited child and the choleric or uninhibited child but failed to distinguish the other two temperaments of the sanguine and phlegmatic. Kagan lumped children of these dispositions into a catchall “normal group” reflecting their being behaviorally easier to manage. Other researchers, notably Kiersey, corrected this error, though he often likes to speak of four pairs of temperaments, rather than just the classical four.



Waldorf Education and the Four Temperaments

The understanding of the four temperaments used in Waldorf education is a sophisticated and developed one. Earlier in this century, Steiner reexamined the traditional view of the temperaments and was impressed by the wisdom it contained regarding human nature. He then refined these concepts and developed practical techniques based on the temperaments. Adults can use these to help understand and work on these behavior patterns (more will be said about this in the next chapter) and also to help children from being trapped in behavioral “dead ends” or bad habits. Adults can moderate the intensity of children’s temperaments by helping them to break out of habitual tendencies.



The Melancholic Child

Thoughtful, sensitive, precise, drooping, moody, lonely

Dylan is a tall slim boy tending to paleness and having a transparent quality to his delicate skin. Despite his slight build, there can be a heaviness about him—he drags his feet and often slumps, though he is still years away from adolescence. At other times, however, he has a wiry fierceness and tenacity about him—he does not let go once he sets his mind to something. He is a moody and sensitive boy, disposed to moaning and whining, and can easily be moved to tears. This sensitivity, however, also manifests in empathy and concern for others. Sometimes this only shows in regards to animals, for he has a deep appreciation and love of nature. Dylan has excellent powers of observation, but can be obsessively self-observant to the point of paranoia, brooding, or hypochondria. This self-awareness can be extreme when he looks at his own body, especially as he gets older. He is overly cautious and has a tendency to fearfulness and phobias. This cautious attitude makes him a slow worker and a perfectionist in all that he does. He does not like the cold, and often he prefers the dark corner where he can pursue the hobbies in which he gets deeply involved, uninterested in the input of others. He has a delicate digestion and is easily prone to stomach aches, constipation and headaches.

Dylan plays the violin and does so not out of duty but out of real enjoyment. He has an acute sense of hearing, a gift for music, and excellent memory. Because the melancholic temperament has aptitude in the arts as well as a tremendous depth of feeling, many great musicians have been melancholics.

No person is a pure representative of one temperament. As we get older each of us manifest at least two—a primary one and a secondary one—the latter happily tending to balance the former, as one is normally introverted and the other, one of the extroverted temperaments. Certain combinations seem more common. The



melancholic/choleric child tends to be egotistical, constantly irritated, socially difficult and high in energy—a handful for parents and teachers but oftentimes, a very successful person when grown up.

The melancholic child needs physical and emotional warmth. In dealing with her, the adult should be caring and sympathetic, patient but not caught up in her moods nor manipulated into satisfying her every whim. The melancholic child needs to be lifted from gloomy introspection by either focusing on others or by being given errands and household tasks where she can be helpful. Fairy tales, stories, and, as she gets older, biographies which portray others' struggles with life can stimulate the melancholic child to forget her own troubles. She can be at her best when attending to someone less fortunate. More than any other temperament, melancholics are interested in suffering and make the best nurses and caregivers.

The melancholic child is fond of sweets and even needs them more than other children when especially irritated. Steiner particularly recommended that they have oats (be it in porridge or granola) because the high oil content helped to warm them and to give them more energy.

The melancholic, like his fellow introvert the phlegmatic, can prefer staying indoors too much. Bringing the melancholic into an early connection with outdoor nature activities can inculcate a habit that overcomes this tendency. Thus encouraging him to be outside and to be engaged in physical activity is important.

The child also may need help in finding opportunities with other children. He is not naturally skilled in the social realm and has to have one-on-one playdates arranged so that these skills can be developed (teams and group activities develop a different set of skills). Otherwise he may get stuck in the solitude and loneliness he most prefers.



The Sanguine Child

Airy, light-filled, smiling, sociable, superficial, inconsistent, flighty

Erica is the archetype of the joyful, fun-filled child. She is lively, even vivacious, full of excitement and wonder. She meets each new experience with enthusiasm, though she never stays with any one thing for long. Childhood as a stage of life has an inherent sanguine quality, just as middle age has a phlegmatic cast and old age the depth as well as the heaviness of melancholia.

Erica is tall, blonde, and slim but better proportioned than the lanky melancholic child. She is light on her feet—her eurythmy teacher knew her temperament at once from the way in which she walks almost on her toes. She never wears out the heels on her shoes.

Erica can be witty and lighthearted, even bubbly, and is very popular, though her demands for constant change and diversion can become irritating. Boredom is what she fears most. With her effervescence, she always brings a smile to others. She sometimes disappoints her friends, though, because she is not dependable and lacks the follow-through to get things done. She forgets her promises and commitments to others or just fails to understand why that sort of thing is even important! Erica is a child of the whirlwind. Restless and usually in motion, she loves to dance and whirl about, to swing and to climb about on rocks and trees.

In the formal environment of school, this airiness can be a problem. Erica has difficulty with concentration and memory. Her thinking is neither systematic nor focused. Her mother complains that Erica usually manages to misplace or forget her homework assignments somewhere between school and home. She has difficulty sitting all day at her desk and is liable to break into a fit of giggling or to get into mischief just for diversion.



Parents and teachers must remember that one should never directly confront a child's temperament. A rigid attitude will not work with this child. Rather the adult needs to appreciate the world of the sanguine child and to enter it oneself in order to move the child along. Rather one tries to work with and guide or coax the child toward a more balanced direction. Hence, a parent should not simply try to force the sometimes scatterbrained sanguine child to do homework. Instead, arousing enthusiasm for the subject or the task is better, usually through participation of the parent. This will help the child learn to remain focused for longer periods of time. Television and other "screen time" are the worst thing for the sanguine child. Though they satisfy this child's desire for constant change and diversion, they only exacerbate the child's superficiality and ability to remain engaged.

Nutritionally, one might attempt to weigh the sanguine child down a bit. Whole grains are mandatory, especially wheat and rye. Good luck though in keeping this child from just nibbling at such hearty fare. For the sanguine child is quintessentially one without a care and without responsibility, living and loving life spontaneously and without regrets, taking each moment as it comes and quickly letting it go, leaving the slow and measured contemplation of life's depths and mysteries to others.

The Phlegmatic Child

Patient, even-tempered, harmonious, procrastinating, comfort-loving, lazy

Laura is an unashamedly chubby little girl. She loves food and she loves to eat. She is often dreaming of ice cream sundaes dripping with chocolate and marshmallow sauce and covered with whipped cream. In school her reverie might feature the lunch her mother packed and the possibility that, well, she might just tuck into it at snack time instead of waiting until noon.



There is a pervasive expansiveness and wateriness about Laura. She moves slowly but with a stolid grace, reminding one of a stately ship sailing in a steady breeze. Her thinking likewise is deliberate and methodical. She gets along with others because her nature is easygoing and she dislikes “making waves.” She can be almost bovine in her placidity and imperturbability. Laura is able, though, to think deeply about things because she “chews” on them a bit before formulating an opinion. When Laura works, she is slow and steady and, like the tortoise who overcame the sanguine hare, she has perseverance and endurance. She can plod through a tedious and difficult task on which other children would soon give up on.

Though Laura is liked by her classmates, she has some social difficulties. She is sometimes teased about her weight—at her school there are few heavier children and she does stand out, especially in games class. But generally, she does not seem interested in doing many things. She needs the enthusiasm of her friends to get her fired up and she never gets around to initiating social activity on her own. Like the melancholic child, she needs parental help in organizing play dates and getting her involved with others. (But once she is involved, she loves it!)

One danger of the phlegmatic nature is the tendency to wallow in comfort and passivity, i.e., to become a couch potato. Also, phlegmatics have a hard time dealing with change. She can run into trouble, though, when quickness and alertness are called for. And never expect a quick answer from a reflective child like Laura. Even though she is bright, she is rarely spontaneous. The phlegmatic child can be depended on for faithfully practicing something and for memorization.

The phlegmatic child often needs to be spurred into action. Helping him to find a goal he sees as worthy of striving toward is one way of doing this. Waldorf teachers have a few other techniques that they use. One is to have all the phlegmatic



children in the class to sit together. The other is to assign a phlegmatic child an exceedingly phlegmatic role in the class play. Both strategies overdose the child with his own temperament, thus coaxing him into behaviors and attitudes that are not typical for him and that help create balance. These two techniques work for other temperaments as well.

Steiner called phlegmatic children “sleeping choleric.” When suitably inspired they can explode into action, just as they can explode into anger when teased or tormented. Once being aroused, though, the phlegmatic soon settles back into her even-tempered manner.

The Choleric Child

Dynamic, energetic, action-oriented, pushy, insensitive, impetuous

Jeremy is a bundle of irrepressible energy who gets into one kind of mischief after another. He is stocky and square-shouldered, with dark, curly hair and a thick neck. He has a hyperactive quality about him but fortunately is too bright to be considered for the all-too-common Ritalin treatment. Jeremy has a quick temper but also a warm heart and a sociability that causes other children to admire and look up to him.

He likes to sleep late in the morning, but once he is up, he immediately wants action. He works and plays with passion and with force but he often lacks precision and form. Red is his favorite color, and his style is likewise brash, forthright, and unsubtle. This young Napoleon is a daredevil because he does not reflect enough to know fear—or even common sense at times. He is a child who lives in doing. As he gets older, though, he will learn to channel some of this vitality and become an excellent worker.

Generally speaking, an adult gets along most easily with children of his own temperament, you could say, because they speak the same language. A choleric



adult knows the language of the choleric child and generally they get on well, but for other adults this child can be a trial. It is an effort to mobilize the fiery energy needed to meet the child on her own terms and then keep that energy under control. One can easily react with anger, which may not be the most helpful response.

The choleric child greatly appreciates the adult who has mastered a particular skill or technique and is willing to share that with the child. The child will work hard for such an adult and in the process learn to moderate tantrums and outbursts.

A very gifted eurythmy teacher appraised Jeremy the first day he walked—or rather stomped—into class. (The footprint a choleric child leaves in the sand is all heel!) She immediately made him her special child, a class pet. She gave him many kinds of helping tasks and challenged him with difficult rod exercises and moving quickly from one thing to the next. Jeremy's other teachers were astounded at how well behaved and motivated he was in eurythmy class. Their own response was to groan with foreboding when he was launched through the door of their classes and they braced themselves for his inevitable antics, even though these often left them chuckling. The other children in class were also amazed, never having thought of Jeremy as a teacher's favorite, especially in eurythmy.

Harnessing all that energy is a challenge with a choleric child, and it often involves lots of outdoor activity along with projects and adventures. Positive behavior management techniques may be used judiciously. Too many negative consequences, though, are not good for any child and can only work occasionally to repress the restlessness of the choleric. What he really needs is an adult who accepts and loves him for what he is and who, through effort and imagination, helps him channel his creative, if boisterous, energies.



Parents and teachers need the flexibility to enter into the particular temperament of a child and be that temperament for that child. They must learn to appeal to and relate to each of the temperaments. A bit of standard Waldorf wisdom is that when a teacher makes up and tells a story, she will win the attention of the choleric child by entering vigorously into the narration of the hero's battle with the seven-headed dragon. But she must include a magnificent banquet scene sensuously described to interest the phlegmatic child and a tragic scene poignantly depicted to arouse the sympathies of the melancholic. To be really successful in reaching the various temperaments, though, is more than a matter of technique. Rather, it involves a certain degree of self-knowledge and self-recognition—in terms of temperament, who am I as an adult? How one-sided is my approach to life, and how open am I to another perspective? The topic of how an adult's temperament affects a child is what we will explore next.







Watching Your Temper(ament)

On the very first day of the first training course that he gave for Waldorf teachers in 1919 (published as *Discussions with Teachers*), Rudolf Steiner stressed the need to honor the diversity of children's needs. Steiner was not so bothered about class size as long as the individuality of each child was addressed. In this regard, he indicated that "the most important task of the educator is to know and recognize these four types we call temperaments."

In Waldorf circles this "temperament work" has two aspects. The most obvious involves identifying the temperament of a child and then making interventions or adaptations of one's teaching or discipline style to match that temperament's style. This allows one to engage the interest of a child in a story or even a math lesson by playing to his or her temperament. On another level, some children can be overly "stuck" in just one style of learning or behavior and the right intervention can help them to broaden their repertoire. Some examples of this include choosing an overly choleric child and seating her with all the other choleric until all this "choleric" becomes a bit too much for them all, or by choosing a very phlegmatic role for an already very phlegmatic child in the class play. Both of these "homeopathic" ("like repels like") interventions can work to shake the child out of his characteristic constitution and open him to trying something else. A skilled teacher has something in each lesson that appeals to each temperament and is also able to draw out and develop the special gift of each temperament. Thus the children learn to appreciate the strengths and virtues of those who are different from them.





The other approach to temperament work is equally important but perhaps more difficult. It requires that the teacher or parent take note of and then work on his own temperamental style. Balancing the excesses of this very intimate (and too often ignored) part of who we are constitutes an important path in our self development and has an important bearing not only in our interactions with our children but also in those with our friends, colleagues, and spouses.

Modern psychologists speak of the “goodness of fit” between the child’s temperament and the values of the adult in the child’s life. The psychiatrist and bestselling author on parenting, Stanley Turecki, tells the story of a young, very active girl who could be aggressive, a choleric child. Living on a rural Midwest farm in a home with relatively few demands besides helping with the farm work, her rough and tumble style netted her the reputation of being “a tomboy.” This same child, however, if transported to a small Manhattan apartment lovingly filled with prize antiques, the home of two busy professionals with high demands on their child’s academic performance and behavior, would find a very different outcome. Here the child would no doubt be diagnosed with ADHD and medicated.

As parents and teachers, we need to realize that our particular temperament can affect “goodness of fit” for ourselves and our children. By recognizing and understanding our own temperament, we can create a home and school environment that will serve the growing child.

The Melancholic Adult

The melancholic adult is very aware of her physical body. The melancholic (referred to by some psychologists as the “highly sensitive person,” since the term “melancholic” has a negative connotation for some) has a low threshold for discomfort and pain and often is plagued by ailments that others can just shrug





off. Allergies, headaches, abdominal problems and digestive difficulties are common afflictions. and either because of all this or in response, she can be overly thin and insufficiently robust. She is frequently at the doctor and is likely to be an enthusiast for every new health diet and alternative therapy. Some doctors frame these difficulties in term of neurotransmitter imbalances and suggest a treatment like Prozac. In general, though temperament does not respond to such treatment.

When it comes to interactions with children, the melancholic excels at offering lots of care and attention as well as an avid interest in all that may ail the child—they are always interested in ailments. The danger is that this caring can be overdone and become controlling or overprotective. The melancholic may project her own frailty and sensitivity onto her child, not allowing him enough outdoor play and keeping him from adventures that involve risk. This can suppress a child's natural need to explore and experiment. It can cause the child to retreat and not fully express himself. Melancholics are also perfectionists, holding themselves and their children to very high standards. This can also make for a stifling regime, especially if applied too early in a child's development.

Interestingly, even children of typically extroverted temperament—the sanguines and choleric—tend to become more introverted when raised by melancholic parents. Melancholic parents need to compensate for this “social blind spot” by taking initiative in arranging frequent playdates and one-on-one social situations for their children. They need to be careful about projecting their own introversion and social reticence onto their children. Children need to develop essential social skills. This aspect of “emotional intelligence” is very important for later happiness and success.

The melancholic adult, having a well developed inner life of feeling, usually wants to have a deep, personal relationship with her child. To her bewilderment





and dismay, the child—particularly the extroverted youngster—may have no interest in such a relationship and may even be irritated by the attention and push the parent away. The melancholic parent needs to find a balance between hovering over the child and letting the child be.

A final danger is that chronic depression, which often afflicts the unbalanced melancholic temperament, can be passed from parent to child. There is about a forty percent correlation between depression in mothers and later problems with depression for their children. Thus melancholic adults need to consciously develop elements of other temperamental styles in their own thoughts and behavior. Melancholic parents are potentially the best parents. They are caring, attentive and interested in their children. They try to meet what they perceive their child's needs to be and are good disciplinarians. They just need to lighten up a bit, focus on the joys of parenting, and remember the importance of social interaction.



The Choleric Adult



The choleric person, possessing “ the temperament of fire” is referred to by some psychologists as the “active” temperament. Though warm-heartedness is also a trait he possesses, the choleric is generally better known for being impulsive, workaholic, and prickly. Action is what he lives for, and other people can sometimes be viewed merely as tools for accomplishing what the choleric wants done. He tends to be the least sensitive of the temperaments especially in terms of reading the needs of others. This is mainly because he is so focused, with almost tunnel vision, on achieving a goal. Choleric are people who get things done.

In relating to children, the choleric adult is action-orientated. He likes to plan projects and lead adventures and can be lots of fun. He is high in energy and can accomplish a tremendous amount, be it in the classroom, the playing field or





the home. But he is usually more interested in his own ideas and aims than in those of others. He lacks the sensitivity and ability to listen and to tune into the needs of children. The choleric also tends to be more interested in what a child does and can do than in what a child needs or feels.

It is hard for the choleric to be rhythmical and steady, and this often shows the most when it comes to managing discipline—he tends to be too harsh one moment and uninterested or unavailable the next. The choleric adult has a tendency to be domineering and overwhelming which, for a sensitive or inward child, can evoke submission and even fear. Such a regimen can traumatize a young child leading to nervousness, no doubt from living in constant anticipation of again being “blasted” by the choleric caregiver’s outbursts (even if they are directed to someone other than the child). On the physical level, such children can also develop breathing problems. However, even their organ formation can be compromised, and later in life, these children can have problems with poor digestion and metabolic disorders as well.

The choleric style of child-rearing, like the other temperament styles, is not necessarily limited to those adults of that particular temperament. Until the late 1960s, the choleric approach was more or less standard in North America. Parents of non-choleric persuasion adopted this strong, insensitive, quasi-military approach that deemed that children are to be dominated and are meant “to be seen and not heard.” Since then as a society we have come to react to such excesses and have now taken on a more phlegmatic or sanguine approach to children’s upbringing. But as we shall see, these two less intense styles also have their dangers.

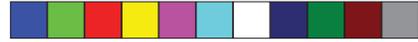


The Sanguine Adult

The sanguine person is by nature light, carefree, fun-loving and optimistic. Although the choleric gets a lot more done and the melancholic does a more careful and complete job, the sanguine is often the most popular and successful person. The sanguine does not get bogged down in one thing, avoids the overly abstract or the overly serious, and moves from one experience or friendship to the next, rather like the beautiful butterfly tasting the nectar of many lovely flowers.

All children have a bit of the playful, fun-loving nature of the sanguine, and the sanguine adult can bring much joy and entertainment to children. There are potential problems though. The child has other deeper needs and especially non-sanguine children can have difficulty keeping up with the overly sanguine adult. Too much of this flitting about with constant shopping and excursions and activities can create a psychological exhaustion. The child never learns to be aroused inwardly—he is seduced into a life that is overly shallow and too much focused on constantly changing outer impressions. This becomes a child with attention problems or a boy who is easily seduced by computer games and videos or a girl obsessed with fashion and shopping. Such children rarely get in touch with their deeper side, do not develop a strong will, and may lack a vitality and zest for life that stems from within. For such children adolescence can be very trying because they are unable to find content in their lives at this crucial developmental stage which is so concerned with finding meaning.

Because sanguine adults often start many things but find it hard to bring anything to completion, they can be messy housekeepers (though with the quantity of “stuff” that every home now finds essential, most of us are beginning to tend in this direction). Recent studies have indicated that a home can be a bit unclean but that if things are constantly scattered about and rarely picked up and put in



order, a child's thinking develops in this similarly scattered and disorganized manner, marring later academic achievement. Some people attribute the Waldorf preschool's attention to orderliness at the end of each day to some notion of propriety but the fruits of this practice support both healthy neurological development and a sense of stability and order.

The sanguine adult has difficulty heeding the child's need for a regular, predictable, harmonious life. Having regular mealtimes and bedtimes is obviously important, but for the sanguine may in practice be difficult to realize. Providing consistent limits and discipline is also not a high priority for the sanguine, often focused on enjoying himself. Consciously incorporating a degree of the melancholic's sensitivity to the child's needs, attention to detail, and follow-through can bring real balance.

The Phlegmatic Adult

The easy-going phlegmatic values comfort and non-confrontation but can slip into laziness and indifference. The phlegmatic is loyal, consistent (sometimes to the point of monotony), anchored and dependable. The watery phlegmatic way with its even and rhythmical habits is a balm and a support, especially to the preschool child. This temperament brings many good qualities to parenting and to teaching but also has its dangers.

The typical child is bursting with vitality and looks to the adult for help and for model behaviors in finding ways to channel energy. An overly-phlegmatic adult can dampen this energy and leave the child's soul "asphyxiated." Where the child wants to be active, to explore or to create, it is met by dullness, by tiredness, by ennui which over time promotes a child who is dull and not interested in anything. That "couch potato" parent harms more than his own waistline by his inactivity.



Too phlegmatic an approach can also leave a child insufficiently cared for or attended. The phlegmatic adult can focus too much on his or her own comfort or what is easiest for him or her and not be attuned to the less obvious needs of children. Their “don’t sweat the small stuff” attitude may make them poor disciplinarians or guides for their children. To maximize their potential, many children need a certain degree of “push” from the adults around them—getting them to practice the violin, do homework, try new things, even to do their best. They need constant monitoring, encouragement, and help. While some temperaments can overdo this, the phlegmatic is at risk for doing too little. Plodding along in the same old way can, on one hand, provide a comforting security blanket for the child (this is the forte of the mellow phlegmatic), but such a style needs to be modified if one is to provide the child’s will the challenges it needs to meet the future.

No temperament is good or bad. Each is a mixture of possible strengths and weaknesses. We all need to develop the positive sides of our particular temperaments and consciously cultivate the positive qualities of the other temperaments. The first step is to identify what temperament we are. As adults we normally have a primary and then a secondary temperament. To identify your primary temperament, first look at the physique which typifies most of your adult life: lean and wiry = melancholic, thick-necked and stocky = choleric, rounded = phlegmatic, and slim and balanced = sanguine. If the primary temperament is one of the extroverted types (sanguine or choleric), the secondary temperament is almost always one of the introverted ones (and vice versa).

Once you become aware of your types, get acquainted with the typical strengths and weaknesses that go along with those styles. In this exploration of temperament, you will have increasing “aha!” experiences as you recognize that temperament is



the reason you mother or your spouse or your daughter does things or sees things in a particular way. Farther down the line one can start to work on the reason for this exercise, which is to understand the way temperament influences your own habits.

Having gotten this far you now have the possibility of making a choice—should I go along with my usual temperament’s way of doing things or should I expand my habitual repertoire and do it a little differently? Every temperament has its gift and its biases. For the classroom, Steiner spoke of the need for the teacher to learn to become whatever temperament the child needs at that time. As parents (or even spouses or co-workers), we can lazily and unconsciously just go along with our usual way of interacting with others or we can attempt to practice being another temperament, thus stretching ourselves and developing a more alive and flexible being.

Temperament has a physiological basis connected to our physical gestalt and neurotransmitter levels. It is not an immutable determinant of behavior. Over time we can with conscious effort adopt any temperament in a situation and become a harmonious blending of the four.







A Modern Path of Meditation and Inner Development

According to Rudolf Steiner, there are two dimensions of reality. One is the physical, material world that the human being perceives with the physical senses of sight, hearing, touch, and so forth. The other is the invisible and impalpable spiritual realm that lies behind the physical world. This is comprised of the subtle energies, elemental nature beings, and higher spiritual beings that have brought the physical world into being and that animate, influence, and direct it. In past ages, human beings were able to perceive and communicate, in varying degrees, with this spiritual world. For the modern human being, particularly for the Western person, this domain is a closed *terra incognita*. The materialistic worldview that prevails in much of our culture holds that this domain does not exist, that all invisible realities are merely epiphenomena of matter. Agnostics hold that while this world may exist, the human being has no capacity to perceive or enter into it.

On the first page of his book **Knowledge of the Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation**, Steiner writes that within each human being lies dormant the capacity to perceive, experience and communicate with the spiritual realm. He then describes a series of exercises in meditation and inner work that, if practiced regularly and with enthusiasm, will bring the seeker experience of this world.

