

Product vs. Process

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What an identity crisis being a parent can be. Here I was brought up in a culture where the final product and not the process was mostly what was valued. During medical school and my pediatric residency, it didn't matter if I didn't get any sleep, didn't eat right, didn't see my own family, and was downright grumpy to my friends, as long as I completed my goals (i.e. saw my patients, prepared my clinic talks, and finished my research papers). In other words, I was living the life where "the end always justified the means."

Having a child finally taught me that "the end" doesn't justify "the means". When I first started to bake with my child, I was so focused on the product, the end result. I was over concerned with how accurately the flour or baking powder was measured. I wanted to end up with "perfect" muffins. Yet, my child wanted to experience the joy of feeling the texture of the flour and just mixing everything together. I was so worried about the future (i.e. whether the muffins would turn out) that the experience of baking together was not an enjoyable one for either of us. The muffins turned out but after that experience my son was not interested in baking with me anymore. The same held true with going for a walk. Before having a child, I had always had a destination when I took a walk or a hike. I thought you had to arrive at the destination to "have a successful walk". Here was my child wanting to stop every few feet to observe a rock, a bug, or pick up a stick. A whole hour would go by and we had only walked one block. I was frustrated and my child would pick up my frustration though probably didn't understand it. For a while, until I learned how to live more in the present, going on a walk together was not an enjoyable experience.

It also mattered if I didn't take care of myself (i.e. skipped meals, didn't get enough sleep, drank too much caffeine, or held unresolved anger). It greatly affected the relationship with my child. Especially during their first 7 years, children absorb our soul moods and our gestures. Even in the older child, our moods and our gestures serve as their teachers and role models. The mood of our soul is in every one of our gestures and these gestures imprint on our child. If I am doing one activity, like grating a carrot and I am thinking about something upsetting that happened earlier in the day or on the news (i.e. the past) it affects the way I grate that carrot. I will grate that carrot in a jerky, angry and chaotic way. How confusing for a child to be watching the gesture of grating a carrot and absorbing the jerky movements of my arms and absorbing my facial expressions that have nothing to do with the actual act of grating a carrot. One lecturer I recently heard wondered if the increased anxiety and nervousness in our children's movements today could be related to our lack of presence in the activities we are doing in front of them. We are all under stress and there seems to be so little time to get everything done. Yet time, and how we spend it is a spiritual matter. There is a tendency to constantly dwell on the past or worry about the future when we are with our children. Children live in the moment, and if we spend enough time with them they will remind us how to live in the present as well.

Finally, there is a saying that goes, "it is not so much what we say that children remember, it is how we make them feel when they are with us". The greatest gift we can give our children and each other is our presence.