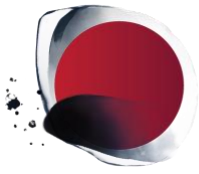


## Fathering Journal 2



### The Seminal Moment

My son was just beginning to crawl. It was only a matter of days until he found his way to the stairwell and decided to climb to the second floor in search of his mother. I caught up to him when he was midway up the steep, wooden spiral staircase. Quickly, I wanted to show him how to climb down the stairs so that he would be safe. I decided that this lesson should happen immediately, with little sensitivity to the fact that he had an entirely different agenda: to reach his mother. I understood that if he was going to go up, then he must learn to come down. I see this as a classic attempt to discipline a child. I wanted him to do something that I thought was important for the “real world” or his future but had little relevance to his world at that moment.



**The lesson continues:** I placed my hand under his belly and with the other hand attempted to move his arms and legs in such a way that I thought would safely reverse his direction. Of course, he struggled. Of course, it did not work the way that I hoped it would. The more he struggled, the closer I thought we were getting to the “lesson.” Finally, it all fell apart when he slipped, or I lost my grip. His chin hit the tread, his one tooth pierced his lower lip, and the tears and blood began to flow. His mother came to the top of the stairs, eyebrows raised with hands on her hips. I had difficulty explaining exactly what I was attempting to accomplish.

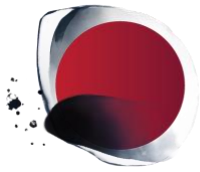
This was a seminal moment. I learned something important about relating to a child. If I could learn to say “yes” to my son and his decisions, if I can get an understanding of what he wants and what he is trying to accomplish, I would be better able to control or at least influence his decisions moving forward. What a fascinating challenge! Could I find a way to say “yes” to exactly how my son was behaving in the moment while at the same time guiding and teaching him about being in the world?

### **Partnership Requires Surrender**

Navigating partnership while parenting children brings up the crucial question: “Who’s in control?” There are so many demands on two people when having children, so much has to be managed, it would be really nice if there was one clearly defined leader, and everyone simply did as they were told. However, families don’t work that way. In any given moment, leadership is predetermined by the parent who is closest to what is true, the parent closest to the situation or by the one who takes charge. However, sometimes the moment does not require a leader. In each leaderless moment, we must be willing to trust and listen to what is seeking to be revealed. Knowing when to take charge and when to sit back and let go is not easy. It takes slowing down and living moment to moment with the understanding that life will reveal itself naturally if we utilize our partnership and trust. When this occurs, leadership will emerge, and action will become a natural response. Sometimes this may be you, your partner or it may be your child. Moments are what matter most. How we string moments into a process of relating makes a family.

### **Looking vs Seeing**

Years ago, my son gave me a very poignant lesson in the difference between hearing and looking verses listening and seeing. We were out for a walk, and I drew his attention to a particularly beautiful cloud formation. “Look at the beauty of those clouds,” I



said. With a quick glance at the sky, he turned to me and said, "Dad, you don't look at clouds, you look at videos or TV! You see clouds, Dad!" I got it: looking is a lot like hearing rather passive... listening is active.

### **Use your Behavior, not your Voice!**

I am sitting next to a father and his daughter on a flight to San Francisco. She is seated across the aisle from him, and he is having difficulty encouraging her to settle in. He tries numerous cajoling techniques, and nothing is working. Her fidgeting and anxiety escalate until finally he simply reaches across the aisle and gently takes her hand. He changes the tone of his voice to a soothing calm, and she visibly relaxes. Sometimes this is all it takes: a soft embrace and a moment of richer consciousness meant only for your child.

### **Breakfast in Paris**

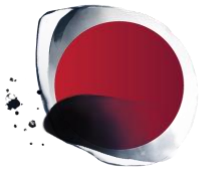
It's breakfast time, and my three-year-old son sits on a bench across the table. He requests that he be able to eat at the bench because he wants to have his breakfast in "Paris" where his dog can sit at his feet. I sit sipping my coffee and watch as he spreads butter and jam on his toast. He folds his bread in half just as moments before I had folded my toast, sandwich form, to contain the butter from spilling onto the plate. Subtly and almost without detection, he had observed me and is now experimenting with my behaviors. I can't help but wonder, how much have I communicated in each unconscious gesture, word, and deed?

### **When the Eyes Roll**

Here's what to do or say to yourself when your teenager rolls her eyes or sets out to do the very thing you've suggested she not do: understand that the future arrives only one moment at a time. It is not off in some distant place; it is always right here, unfolding before you. I am not sure that any father, of any generation, has been able to rest in the assurance that he could prepare his children. I imagine that the future has always loomed just beyond our love for all that is dear to us, threatening in its unpredictability.

### **Creation**

When a baby is born, the man has done more than create a child; he has also created a father in himself and participated in the creation of a mother in his partner. While



the role is still new, he may find himself deluged with conscious and unconscious images of what he will be as a father. He must sort through these images and make choices about his own potential to fulfill each possibility . . . . To some extent, each man continues to create himself as a father throughout his life, as he interacts with his children and makes choices about his relationship to his family. (Coleman and Coleman, 1988, p. 153)

### **I Am Here**

I remember comforting my infant in the middle of the night, surrendering on a summer's afternoon to nap with my two-year-old, picking him up from a party when he called because, "Dad, I made a mistake and drank too much," or signing a check for his tuition. In these moments, I realized something quite profound: This is what I am meant to be doing. This moment, this action, this thought, this feeling is exactly what I am here for.

### **Freedom**

"You want to be free in life?" a teacher once suggested, "Learn to commit." For many American males, *commitment and freedom do not belong in the same sentence*. However, I have accepted this as a very useful realization. I am free in my relationship to my child because I know, and accept, that whatever the moment demands is exactly what I need to be doing.

### **In Our Words,**

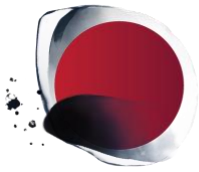
We Tell Our Children Who They Are in Our Experience.

### **In Our words,**

They Know That They Exist and That We Exist for Them.

I am upstairs in our cottage and my wife is with our newborn in the kitchen below. I am writing and fully concentrated until I overhear fragments of a conversation rising from downstairs. I wonder who has stopped by for a visit. Finding a good opportunity to distract myself, I walk to the head of the stairs and call out, "Who's here? Who are you talking to?" She calls back to me, "Our baby, who do you think?"

For whatever reason, I am struck by this moment. My wife is speaking to someone who doesn't yet speak. Even though I know she talks to everything, including plants, I didn't expect her to be speaking to our two-day-old baby. I realized in that moment that life would



never be the same. Someone else had entered the conversation. Two days ago, we were a couple; now we are a family.

### **The Pain of Surrender**

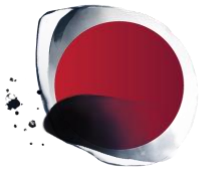
We've talked about this one: the need to surrender, to place yourself on hold and rise to the occasion. I find that the circumstances that provoke this pain, while seemingly petty, are also relentless: dealing with a crying baby at 2 a.m. – again. Changing a diaper after you just made a cup of coffee and knowing it will become cold. Dropping everything as you respond to his question. Waking up early, letting go of a restful sleep to make sure that everything and everyone gets out of the door on time and successfully. Sitting with her as she studies because she needs someone to hold the space. Interrupting your dinner plans with your partner because his plans fell through, and he needs to not be alone. Picking her up 10,000 times without ever getting a thank you. Attending the game despite other demanding priorities. Being on time. Listening with a genuine ear. Dealing with your frustration and anxiety because of unanswered texts or phone calls. The rolling eyes. The snarky remarks. Small adjustments really, but despite all the benefits, they still hurt. This is the pain of present fathering, and I would not trade a moment of it.

### **Words**

Words are mirrors for our children. They allow us to maintain an ongoing dialogue, reflecting our experience of them in our presence. Words can reflect the beauty of our children so that they know that we know who they are. They recognize that they are seen and that whatever they experience lands in a shared world that we hold in common.

### **I Hold Part of You and You Hold Part of Me**

When you trust someone, you give that person a part of yourself with the expectation that when it is returned, it will be enhanced. You take a risk and share an emotion with your friend. "I am confused about how to handle this situation." "I think maybe I am not making the best decisions at work, and I need help." These moments of communication leave us open and exposed, and until we can know how we are being received, we are vulnerable. We can get disappointed or even hurt. We gave something of ourselves and until it is returned, we don't really know how we are being received. To trust, we need to feel safe enough to share something of ourselves with one another.



Our children have no choice but to trust us. Their trust is something for us to lose, and we can lose it in so many ways. There is the old story of the father who has his daughter jump into his arms off the top of the waist-high wall in the backyard. She jumps time and time again and he catches her. Now one time, just one time, he is distracted, and she falls to the ground, scraping her knee. She cries out in pain. How long do you think it takes for her to trust this game and risk being caught or dropped in the future?

### **It Will Find You**

Trusting yourself often means that if what you are doing isn't working - for you, your child, your partner, your family - then try something different. Sometimes the right way is outside of your control, and it will find you as you make the necessary adjustments to stay present and related to the situation in front of you.

### **Be Willing**

Find your way of being in relationship to your child and family. If you are willing, you can simply trust what you are doing. If what you are doing isn't working, then trust in your ability to start again, to try again, and to know that because you are willing, you will find your way. Trust in your children, your partner, and your instincts. They are all great teachers and will show you the way.

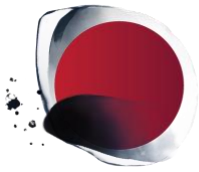
### **Let Go**

Your deep inclinations to father your children will arise through trusting the entirety of the situation as it unfolds before you. Know that if what you are doing does not seem to work, you can do anything differently. Let go of your intention, start again, and see what happens.

### **The Work of the Father**

I remember the screen door with the sound of the spring as it yawned upon opening and closed with a sharp clack! I loved that sound. One day, the spring snapped and hung loose and forgotten. Days, weeks and months went by, the door opening and closing by hands too busy or uncaring to repair the spring and restore the door to its inherent integrity. Repairing a moment or a door is the work of a father.

### **Fix It**



When things fall apart, it is not a problem. Find a way to put it back together. When I was growing up in a challenging and at times dysfunctional family, things continually fell apart. Now that I have my own family, I have learned that although things can fall apart, what matters is the degree to which they fall apart and the time it takes to put them back together. In my family of origin, when something broke, it stayed broken.

### **You Take What You Make**

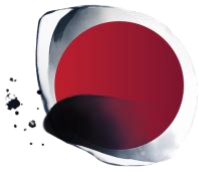
What worked yesterday may not work today. You don't often get away with concocting a formula for successful engagement and find that you can easily repeat it. This doesn't mean that it isn't valid. It means that a family is a living, breathing organism, and it will continue its own evolution on a daily basis. The central premise behind this is that you take what you make. What you want out of a situation, you must be willing to put into it. You can't sit back in a disconnected place, issue directives and expect that the response you'll get will be anywhere close to successful, particularly if you haven't been around all day.

### **Your Body Knows**

Through spending time with your child, you develop a feeling or a felt sense for the moment. This is not a rational understanding; it is a deep knowing. You recognize this not with your mind but in your body. In your body, you will sense when the timing is right. Listen to your body, and by that I mean just feel and sense when to act and when to sit back, when to ask and when to wait, when to speak and when to listen. What is seeking your attention, both yours and your child's, will reveal itself when the relational climate is right. Your mind may not recognize it. Your emotions may seek to cloak it. But your body knows. It always does.

### **Surrender**

Our connections with our children are deeply intertwined with every level of our being. When our child suffers, we suffer. We feel what they feel, and they feel what we feel. We can act as if there are significant degrees of separation between us, but the maddening truth is that there is not. When they are struggling, we feel the struggle and though we may defend against and attempt to "let it be his or her challenge to face," we are no less affected by it. In turn, when we are under stress, they know it. They see and feel us. Even subtle infusions of our discontent can be to our child very significant.



So, what do we do? First, we simply surrender, let go, give up control and turn a part of ourselves over to the situation. What does it mean to surrender? First off, it does not mean to take a defeat. It does not mean to give in. It is not about losing. Parenting is not an “us or them” situation. We do not exist separately from our children, and they do not exist separately from us. Surrendering points to a willingness to allow ourselves to be taken over by the moment in such a way that there is ample room for all involved. This includes the unwanted memories, judgments, fears, doubt and literally everything that emerges and nips at our equilibrium. If something influences our thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, we need to be aware of it, receive it into consciousness and determine a course of action that best reflects the highest expectation we can hold for ourselves.

### Receiving

As fathers, even when we are absent from our children’s lives or they from ours, our children are still a gift to us. Whether you are fortunate enough to have access to your child daily or are with them for occasional holidays, the work is the same. As a father, you must find the strength to receive them just the way they are:

- Not when you have the time.
- Not when they are available.
- Not when you feel like it.
- Not when it is convenient.
- Not when it feels good.
- Not only when you are with them.

Image Search “Journal” Courtesy of: [Jan Kahánek](#) [@honza\\_kahanek](#)

*The Tim Dukes Method provides an opportunity for self-reflective individuals to cultivate the capacity to receive into consciousness hidden aspects of the self, claiming your unique gifts – ensuring that today’s brilliance successfully transitions into tomorrow’s wisdom. The Tim Dukes Method is designed and implemented by Dr. Timothy Dukes for determined creatives to ensure long-term viability — as a continuing investment in the well-being of yourself, family, organizations, culture, society, and the Earth itself.*