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Children and the Media

How well has the media served children?

COMMENTARY BY **RAFFI**

Visual media channels society's pulse and behaviour to the formative, impressionable childhood years. The African adage says, "it takes the whole village to raise a child." Remembering that the duty of village elders is to show children where and how they belong in the tribe, what does the media show and tell?

It is also said, "without a vision, the people perish." We say our vision is freedom. But freedom for what end? Freedom to compete for scarce rewards of money and power? Without context, in a spiritual vacuum, freedom to compete for material and emotional rewards is a scarcity vision in stark contrast to Earth's abundance, the vast leisure time of early tribal life, and the security of interdependence. Competing for survival breeds fear and insecurity from birth, and the addictions to video, violent sports, cynicism, acting-out delinquency, drug and other abuses, in course follow. We have trumpeted freedom, and got isolation, and this frenetic alienation is what the media shows as it sells us shiny painkillers.

Kids' popular heroes are Barbie and Ken, rock-star or wrestler, slim pickings as role models. In these video-dominant times, electronic babysitters need restraint, for TV abuse in our young is a concern. Young children need to progress along an inner timetable of growth and discovery, exercise their imaginations, and dream of how their souls might play on Earth and touch the cosmos. Instead they are fed a diet of pre-fab images in a sea of consuming pitches, a quick-edit storm of need-creation that is geared to sell things, not

serve children.

Granted, our tribal numbers make for the complex village of pluralist society. But how did promoting "consumer confidence" come to run this village? Money, the *symbolic* reward of our endeavours, has been elevated above the actual meaning of what we do to earn it. We have created a virtual reality, where leaders cling to the superstition of "economic growth," pundits preach consumption, and children are trained to obey.

When symbol replaces heart, the "consuming environment" dulls our sense of place. Bank replaces temple, notoriety supplants integrity. We lose substance, our sense of self in the Earth family, and the rich diversity of countless tribes and many paths that is humanity's heritage. Until numbers and letters serve the purpose of our health and evolution, we will wrongly favour looks over feeling, data over experience, and grow nutrient-thin food that looks good but contains toxins that degrade flesh, soil, and waters.

Love is the prime nutrient in healthy human development — the nurturing, demonstrative, appropriate love that children need to grow whole. Young children need to interact more with people and nature, not with machines. We see through quantum physics that relationship and interdependence make the web of all life. This profound reassurance for our young will be reflected by media when the elders have reviewed their priorities, and once again found their way. That change is now at hand. There are many exciting stories of per-

sonal transformation playing in households near you.

Raffi is an award-winning singer, songwriter, and family entertainer whose audios, videos, and books play in millions of homes and classrooms. His music is self-esteem based, offering

children a joyful, life-affirming sense of connection and place in the global family. Raffi is a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Environment Programme, which recently gave him a Global 500 Award. His latest recording — an appeal to imaginative play — is BANANAPHONE.

