



Christian Meditation with Children: A Gift for Life

Noel Keating, volunteer coordinator for Christian Meditation Ireland, examines the distinct spiritual benefits Christian meditation can have for schoolchildren.

Since November 2012, Christian Meditation Ireland has been encouraging schools to adopt the practice on a whole-school level. Since then, 210 schools have introduced meditation to over 50,000 children. While meditation has become very popular because of the spread of mindfulness, the focus of the mindfulness movement is on its practical benefits. Our project goes deeper and stresses the deep spiritual fruits that flow from it. Our program teaches the difference between secular mindfulness and Christian meditation without in any way denigrating the former. Indeed the growing popularity of mindfulness gives us an opportunity to speak about the deep spiritual fruits of meditation.

Children love to meditate – they take to meditation like ducks to water. My doctoral research confirms that children experienced such heart-awareness as they sat in the stillness and silence of meditation. My book, *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*, (Veritas, 2016), describes in the words of the children themselves how they experience the fruits of meditation in their lives. It demonstrates the

incredible capacity of children to give metaphorical expression to its fruits in their lives. I summarise the fruits as expressed by the children under four headings: 'Meditation helps you to be yourself', 'Meditation helps you to feel the goodness inside', 'Meditation brings you closer to God' and 'Meditation makes you a kinder person'. There isn't sufficient space in this short article to do justice to what the children said but a few examples will give a flavour of what they experienced at a deep level within. For example, Pamela (11) said 'I think meditation brings out the real me, and I don't have to pretend to be someone else ... When I meditate, I can be myself'. Very many children spoke of becoming intensely aware in meditation of their own inherent goodness. Sophie (8) said, 'Meditation helps me to be more aware of the goodness inside me'. And Lucy (10) described that, 'When you're not doing meditation, you sort of ... have a snap inside you. As if you are always getting ready to snap. But when you do meditation, the goodness comes out'. Derek (9) offered that, 'When I meditate, I go on a journey down to God'. And Alex said, 'When I hear the chimes at the

Alex said ‘When I hear the chimes at the start of meditation, I imagine it is God ringing my doorbell and I open my heart to let him in’.



start of meditation, I imagine it is God ringing my doorbell and I open my heart to let him in’. As well as making them aware of the goodness within themselves, meditation helps children to appreciate the innate goodness in others and to relate better with them. The children seem to recognise that the goodness in themselves and others is who they really are, their deepest essence, their true-self.

Jason (12) used a very rich metaphor, saying: ‘Meditation is like a map and the destination is who you really are’. I was stunned by his capacity to express so succinctly the deep spiritual fruit of meditation. I believe meditation helps children to have personal spiritual experience which is vital for their overall development.

There is an urgent need in society

today for practices that awaken the person to their true nature. Thomas Merton spoke of the true self as distinct from the egoic self and Richard Rohr describes the true self as ‘who we are in God and who God is in us’. They are both pointing to a truth common to almost all religions, that there is a divine spark in the human person which is intimately connected to God, the original, creative energy of the universe. Meditation is a universal practice that does just that – it awakens the person to an appreciation of who they are at the deepest level of their being. John Main suggested that meditation opens the human heart as naturally as sunlight generates the opening of a flower. What is wonderful to behold, is the spread of meditation as a practice for children. ♡