

Spiritual Development in the Family

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Spiritual development is a process that begins in infancy. It is the nurturing of that part of the child that searches for meaning. At a very young age children ask questions, 'Where did I come from?' 'How do flowers grow?' 'Why can't I see the wind?' The questions are numerous and an attempt should always be made to answer them honestly. Otherwise the child will stop asking.

In the innocence of their questions and the sharpness of their sense of justice, children often cause us to reflect beyond their questions.

'Mummy, where did I come from?' The answer to which brings us right back through the generations to God and the generosity of God in his creation.

'Mummy, why does that little boy have no food? Is he going to die?' This must cause us to reflect on the imbalance of the distribution of the goods of the earth and to ask what we can do to rectify matters, even in the smallest way.



When things are going against them at home, they might stamp their foot as they ask, 'Why did I get this family? You are all so mean to me.'

Children also cause us to reflect through their interactions with one another and in their sense of wonder at the world around them. Remember how Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants' (Lk 10:21).

Relationships within the family play a big part in the spiritual development of the child. If the child sees kindness, she will be kind; if she sees respect, she will be respectful; if she sees helpfulness, she will be helpful. The child will copy the adult. The



alternative also applies; if the parents are disrespectful to one another, arguing with one another, unhelpful and spiteful, the child will copy what she sees.

Ritual is important to human beings. It is to be found down through the ages in every culture. Couples bring to their new relationship the expectation of continuing the rituals that were important to them as they grew up. You hear new parents talking about creating a bedtime routine for their new infant. Included in this routine will be a prayer and a blessing said over the baby. Later the toddler will say a simple prayer with Mum or Dad and ask God to bless Mummy, and Daddy and Granny and a whole string of others in order to delay bedtime. This becomes a ritual when

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it is repeated in the same way each night. It becomes very important to the child, because it is linked up with the identity of this child, what she does is part of who she understands herself to be. The ritual is settling and comforting.

Many young people and adults today search for meaning in materialism. As soon as they gain what it is they have their hearts set on, they begin immediately looking to the next acquisition, because material gain doesn't bring the happiness they seek. What we need to do is stop searching for happiness outside ourselves, take the time to look inside and teach our children to do the same.

The twenty-first century spiritual writer Eckhart Tolle says in his book, *A New Earth*, 'Once you realise and accept that all structures (forms) are unstable, even the seemingly solid material ones, peace arises within you. This is because the recognition of the impermanence of all forms awakens you to the dimension of the formless within yourself, that which is beyond death. Jesus called it "eternal life."'