

Lesson 3: The Fruits of Meditation

Aim: To introduce children to meditation as a spiritual practice and to explore the spiritual fruits of meditation. This lesson introduces meditation as a spiritual practice; with a particular focus on the Christian tradition. However, it can be adapted by teachers and parents to refer to any tradition.

Learning Outcomes: Children will understand that many people meditate as part of their religion (or their spiritual practice), in order to simply be with God. They will be familiar with the inner fruits of meditation as described by children and will have had an opportunity to discuss their own experience of its fruits. In Christian terms, they will be able to relate its fruits to the fruits of the Spirit as described by St Paul.

Key Elements of Lesson 3:

1. Some people meditate to spend time with God.
 2. As well as having practical benefits, meditation also has deep inner fruits.
 3. What other children say about the fruits of meditation.
 - a. You Can Be Yourself
 - b. You Feel the Goodness Deep Inside
 - c. You Come Closer to God
 - d. You Become a Kinder Person
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1. Meditation is an important part of many religions in different parts of the world. It is also an important part the Christian religion. Prayer is important to Christians and meditation is a form of silent prayer. Usually when we pray we use words – we thank God for things, we pray that people will not suffer from war or hunger; we pray for people who are not as fortunate as ourselves and we ask God to help them and we promise to do what we can to help. Meditation is often called the prayer of the heart.

But we don't have to use words when we pray. We can simply choose to be with God, with Jesus. That's what we do in meditation – we open our hearts to God and he fills us with His Love. And after meditation we show love to all around us. When we meditate, we sit with Jesus, in his company, without saying anything with our voice or in our minds. Instead, we let our heart do the 'talking.' God created each of us and he knows us

better than we know ourselves. There is a verse in the bible which says “Be still and know that I am God.” When we meditate in silence we can feel that in our hearts.

2. Children meditate so they can spend time with God, with Jesus, in a special way. Children who do this regularly find that meditation changes them; the change happens very quietly and slowly – not during meditation but after you have been meditating regularly for a while. One of the things that deepens in us is how we see God in everything – in ourselves, in one another, in our families, in nature, in other creatures. Meditation makes us realise we are all in this together, that we are all children of God.
3. Christians believe that meditation leads to deep inner fruits, to human flourishing. **Figure 5.2** below depicts how children describe the fruits of meditation. Because these fruits are teased out in detail in Chapter 4, they are merely summarised as bullet points here.

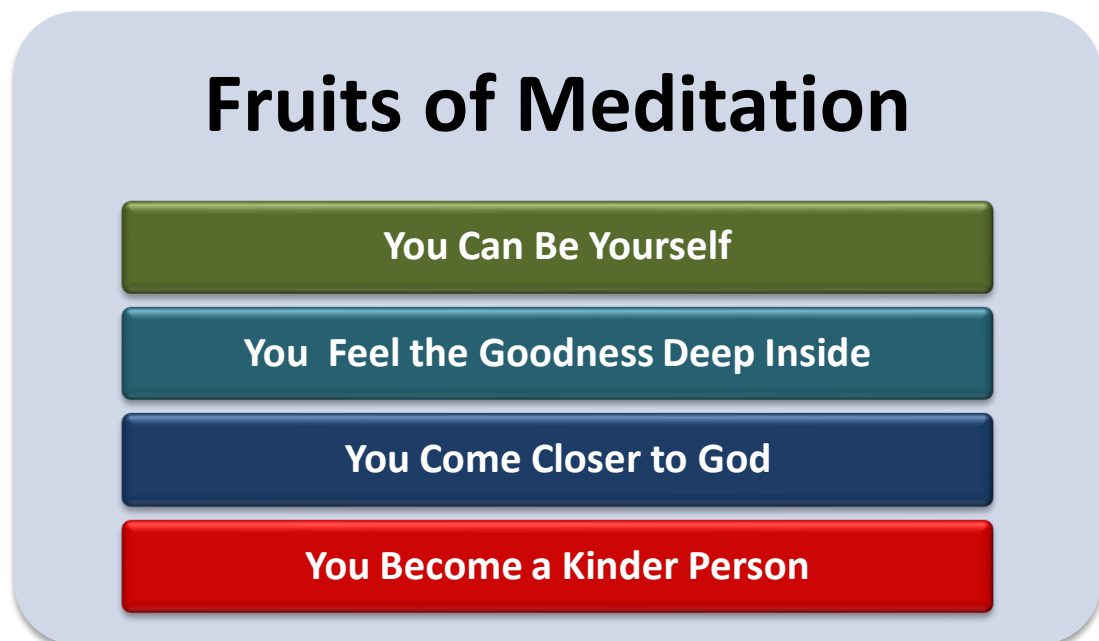


Figure Error! No text of specified style in document..1 The Fruits of Meditation According to Children

3a. *You Can Be Yourself:*

- Lots of children say that meditation helps them to be themselves, to be true to themselves. You might ask the children: *What do you think they meant by that?*
- Many children say that meditation brings them deeper inside themselves. You might ask: *Does that make sense to you? How would you say that, in your own words, from your own experience of meditation?*

- Children also say that meditation makes them realise that everybody is different and that each person is already perfect just as they are. Meditation helps them to realise that they can be themselves.
- Other children say that meditation helps them to get in touch with their own feelings more, to *feel* their feelings more. So, instead of getting caught up in their anger, they can see that they are getting caught up in it. They can see that it is their anger that is in the driving seat, directing their behaviour, not their best selves. And they can change that.
- And, even when somebody else is very angry or cross with them, they are able to stand back and figure out that the way they are behaving is driven by *their* anger and that their behaviour doesn't represent who they really are.

3b. *You Feel the Goodness Deep Inside:*

- Lots of the children who speak about meditation say that meditation makes them feel the goodness deep inside themselves. As they let go of their thoughts, meditation moves them away from their heads and into our hearts. You might ask: *Do you know what I mean by that? How would you describe that in your own words?*
- Speaking about meditation a child once said “*Meditation makes me realise that when someone is behaving badly, there is still goodness inside them but because they are upset they just can't see it. If they meditated they might see it.*”
- Another child said that when he is not meditating he tends to follow his head but when he meditates he follows his heart. You might ask: *What do you think he meant by that? Can you think of any time when you felt like that?*
- One young girl said that when she discovered the goodness inside of herself it was like discovering a secret garden. It was there all the time but she hadn't really appreciated it until she started to meditate.
- The Christian faith tells us that the Holy Spirit dwells in every person. And the Gospels show us that Jesus always saw the goodness in everyone. Throughout His life he came to know his true-self. And He shows us how to be true to ourselves by following His example, how to follow our heart, how to let our goodness show. Meditation grows this way of seeing and being in our hearts.

3c. *You Come Closer to God:*

- When we sit in meditation, in silence, still in body and still in mind we are not *doing* anything. We are just *being* ourselves, being with God. Meditation is a time to simply sit with God, with Jesus.
- For Christians, meditation is a silent way of praying. When we meditate we don't think about anything and we don't say anything, apart from our sacred word. In meditation we can *be with* Jesus, not to talk to him but simply to *be* with him.
- Someone once said that "*Silence is God's first language.*"¹ You might ask: *I wonder what that means? How can you communicate with someone who can't hear? Or relate to someone who can't speak?* Usually we communicate with people using words. But can you think of ways we can relate to someone who is deaf? By smiling, perhaps, to show them we are happy to see them? By touch, maybe giving them a hug? How do we communicate with a baby who is too small to understand words? With hugs and kisses or holding them lovingly and protectively. Have you ever been with a pet dog or cat and felt really close to them even without saying a word or touching them? Just being with them.
- It's the same with God. We can speak to Him without using words. We can feel really close to him, really loved by Him and love Him back, in our hearts. We can feel Jesus' love for us without having to hear Him say it out loud. And we know He can understand the love we have for Him and for our friends without us having to say it.
- One child said "*There is a part of God in everyone's heart.*" You might ask: *I wonder what she meant by that?* Our faith tells us that God created each one of us in his image; so, deep inside, that is who we really are. And when we meditate we can feel that very deeply. When we meditate, we acknowledge that God is always present to us and that it is we who are often too busy to notice his presence and we come to enjoy the chance to make ourselves present for the time of meditation.
- Children understand the use of symbols and at times of prayer people often use a candle to symbolise the presence of God. Norah (10) lights a candle when she meditates at home and she imagines when they meditate in school that it's as if each person is a lighted candle and "*I feel like [God] flies into each candle, leaving hope in each one.*" The symbolism may help to mark the silence as a *sacred* silence rather than the mere absence of sound."²

¹ It was St John of the Cross

² When facilitating an adult meditation group I will usually have a single candle lighting throughout the welcome, introduction and meditation to symbolise that the Divine is always present with us and to us. When

- John Main also makes use of the imagery of a candle flame, asking us to imagine that as we race through our busy lives, there is a candle in our hearts; and because we are moving at such high speed, this candle is always in danger of going out. But when we sit down in the stillness and silence of meditation, in the Real Presence, then the flame begins to burn brightly.³
- Through such symbols and stories we may begin to understand ourselves and others in terms of light, energy, warmth and love, all of which are made manifest in meditation.
- Some children say that when they meditate they feel very close to people they knew who loved them but who have died. Some even say that in meditation they feel very close to pets who have passed away. Meditation helps us to connect with God and with those we love, whether they are still with us or have passed on from this world.
- Lots of children say that they love it when the whole school meditates together. It makes them feel that everybody is equal. They realise that meditation is something that every child and adult can do equally well – nobody is better at meditation or worse at meditation than anyone else - everybody is doing the same thing, saying their word and letting go of their thoughts, over and over again. Everybody is just being with God. One child said: *“When we meditate it feels like everyone is one ... as if everyone is where you are now. And God is in the Presence.”* You might ask: *I wonder what he meant by that? What do you think? How do you experience being close to God in meditation?*

3d. *You Become a Kinder Person:*

- Because you have discovered the goodness inside yourself and the same goodness in others, you are able to be kinder to yourself and to your friends; and to others in your class and school that you don’t normally play with.

the group begins to meditate I light a second candle to symbolise that we are making ourselves present to God as we meditate. If I’m using real wax candles, I will use the first to light the second and I will comment on the transfer of energy as the first candle lights the second. That symbolism reminds us that we are energised in the silence as our spirit encounters the Holy Spirit – His flame makes ours burn more brightly. Indeed, as St. Symeon the New Theologian expressed it, when you light “a flame from a flame, it is the whole flame you receive.” See St Symeon the New Theologian, "Hymn 1," in *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul’s Ascent from the Desert Fathers and Other Early Christian Contemplatives*, (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2003), 160.

³ Main, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, Kindle Location 1670.

- Because you have come to realise who you really are, because you can be yourself, you are able to let others be themselves too. You don't put pressure on others to be the way you want them to be. You accept them for who they are.
- You realise everybody doesn't have to be the same and that everybody is equal, but different. And that makes you be kinder to them and to yourself. Sometimes we can be very hard on ourselves and others but meditation makes us realise that everybody makes mistakes - that's how people learn. And realising that makes us be kinder to ourselves and to others.
- Jesus said a lot of things that showed how kind and loving He was. He was asked once what was most important and he reminded us that we should love God and love our neighbour. That's the most important thing in life – to be loving; to love one another, including ourselves.
- When we see the goodness in ourselves and in others, when we realise that is who we really are, then loving ourselves and loving others isn't a big thing at all. Meditation helps us to care for one another, to look out for one another – especially anyone who is being left out or who is having a hard time. It's easy because that is who we really are, deep inside. We just have to let it show.

To conclude the lesson you might like to sum up the four things that children say about the fruits of meditation: It lets our goodness show and shine. It helps you to be yourself, to feel the goodness inside, to come closer to God, to Jesus. And all of that makes you a kinder person because it guides you to love God and love one another. We show that we love the other person as Jesus does *by our actions*.⁴

These four fruits of meditation might be described as '**Be-Attitudes**:' Before responding to any situation think: '*B4 You Act: Be Yourself/ Be Aware of the Goodness Within/ Be with God/ Be a Kinder Person.*'

I suggest that in the weeks following this lesson, you might seek opportunities to reinforce these fruits. When something happens in the school or the class that touches on any of the fruits, you might use the opportunity to link the issue to meditation and its fruits. The story off the Good Samaritan is a good example of the '**Be-Attitudes**.' You might set aside

⁴ Jean Vanier once reflected on how does one bring the good news of the Gospel to others, especially those who are marginalised, dispossessed and oppressed. He was very clear that it is not enough to tell them that they are loved by God, but each of us is called to show that love. See Jean Vanier, *Signs: Seven Words of Hope* (Toronto, ON: Novalis Publishing, 2014).

some time a few weeks after this lesson, someday before or after meditation, to reflect briefly on the parable of the Good Samaritan; or you might just mention it and return to it another day. For example, you might ask the children if they are familiar with the story and get them to describe it; or read it to them. And then ask them what has the story got to do with meditation? The link of course lies in the fact that the Good Samaritan saw clearly what needed to be done. And he believed in the ‘**Be-Attitudes**.’ He saw the injured man and he felt very sorry for him. Because he saw the goodness in himself, he saw the goodness in the man who was beaten by the robbers also. Because he recognised the goodness in him, because he recognised that they were intimately connected through God, he acted out of the ‘**Be-Attitude**’ and he gave freely of himself. He responded to the man in need and he did something positive to help. Just like Jesus did every time he healed the sick and the blind and the lame. But the priest and the Levi, who were supposed to be holy men, didn’t see clearly; they failed to see God in the injured man and they didn’t respond as the situation called for. In the section on the fruits of meditation we saw that Aideen (11) realised that some people work at enhancing their inner God and others don’t. Meditation helps us to enhance our inner God, to discover our true-self, who we really are. And when we do, we begin to live out of that way of seeing. We begin to see everything clearly and we respond as the situation calls for. St Paul describes this as ‘putting on the mind of Christ.’⁵ That’s another way of describing the ‘**Be-Attitude**.’

In the follow-up lesson or during RE class, it may be appropriate to link meditation and the fruits of the Spirit which are described by St Paul in Galatians 5:22 as love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Note: From this lesson onwards, you might like to light a candle (battery operated, for safety) and place it on a small table or sacred space in the room. You may add flowers if you wish. You can allude to the candle saying that it is a symbol of God’s presence in the room with us during meditation, a symbol of the divine spark within every one of us; a symbol of our intention to be still and silent in God’s presence during meditation – not talking to Him or thinking about Him, but simply being with him, lovingly. And remind the children that as we sit in stillness and silence in meditation, God fills our hearts with His Love. Meditation fills us with the sacred energy of Love.

⁵ See Philippians 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 2:16

Meditation as Silent Prayer: In the context of a Christian school or family, it is important to remind children from time to time that meditation is seen in the Christian tradition as a very deep form of silent prayer where we simply chose to spend time with God. We simply sit with Him in stillness and silence. At other times we may pray to God with words; we may thank Him for all that is going well in our lives and families; or we may pray for those who need God's help – family members or friends who are ill or in pain, those suffering from the loss of loved one's; or we might ask God to help those who are most in need – those who are homeless and have nowhere to live, or for refugees who are fleeing war, or poverty and famine. Praying like that is, of course, very important. But meditation is a different kind of prayer. It is a form of silent, imageless, wordless prayer where we simply sit with Jesus. We get to know *about* Jesus through our Religious Education class but we get close to him through prayer and meditation.

From this lesson onwards, you can speak of meditation as a universal practice which has become very popular in society (often referred to as mindfulness) but which, for many, is also a deeply spiritual practice which helps us to be ourselves and brings us closer to God; and how, in the Christian tradition, the intention is to be still and silent in God's presence. If you have children of no faith in your group, they can continue to meditate as a secular, mindfulness practice and may choose a word acceptable to them that has no spiritual symbolism for them e.g. Peace or Joy or Love or a combination of them. In a denominational school, children from a different faith background to that of the school may use a word from their own faith tradition, in consultation with their parents.