

Teaching Meditation to Young People

Notes from ClearVision presentation to 'Buddhists and Schools Conference' Birmingham March 2011

Welcome everyone – say about the shrine room (act as though they are children)
Shrine. Buddha sitting still. Shall we try sitting still like the Buddha? Try to sit like the Buddha (crossing of legs, hand in lap, eyes closed) until you hear the sound of the bell.

What did you feel like sitting like the Buddha?
Story of the Buddha and the King (how long can you sit for?)

- △ I will concentrate, for the purposes of this workshop, on primary school children.
 - Experience with Ladywood Interfaith Project.
 - Also here more common (in comparison with Manchester).
 - If one takes the Buddhist tradition as a whole, meditation one of principle means of transformation. But, three elements that aid that which are very far from fully developed in primary school children.
 - self-reflexive awareness
 - the ability to maintain attention on an object of awareness over time
 - an ability to sit still, and to some degree consciously control that physical stillness.

This can mean that there are things we can approach introducing meditation to children with some concerns, even some reluctance. (or am I speaking personally!)

- △ Importance of recognising what one is working with – not going to be able to practise meditation like an adult or a teenager.
- △ Looking at ways in that relate to the characteristics of primary school-age children

A few I've noticed are:

1. Children are very emotional, but they can often be more raw, or at least their expression tends to be much more immediate. Less censored.
2. Children live in a world of play, a world of imagination even. They like entering worlds, sometimes quite complex ones, that they create.
3. They are receptive to guidance. It can be easier to build up trust so that they will follow you. Children are happier to be led.
4. They are happy to repeat something if you can make it interesting to do so. Little and often.

So I've tried to experiment with working with their strengths as it were...and this had met with some success I think.

I need 5 volunteers – 5 faces; sad, angry, jealous, bored, happy.
WHICH WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE?



Buddha very happy – qualities of the Buddha....happiness that was undisturbed.
Are we always happy? - waves and a ship...
How to become happy? - actions and their consequences; 5 Precepts....

Meditation of loving-kindness (the sun inside + the sun inside a friend)
Buddha said that meditation on loving kindness helps to protect us, keep us safe from difficulties and secure in ourselves.

Waves of a ship with protectors....
Meditation in the context of the Buddha's life
Story of the Buddha – entering a world. Get them doing it....

I get the children to act it out: everything from the 4 sights to the attack of Mara with his ferocious sons and tempting daughters. Depending on how the sessions went I might introduce meditations for the points where he meets his first meditation teachers, and of course, during the time under the Bodhi Tree.

So, to sum up:

1. Introducing meditation to children can present some unique challenges.
2. Work with the children's capacities for play, receptivity, and emotional honesty.
3. Little and often – short meditation throughout say, an hour session, have worked well in my experience.
4. It's best to do this through a different context.
5. Build up trust. If the children like you, they'll go with your suggestions.
6. Enjoy it yourself!

