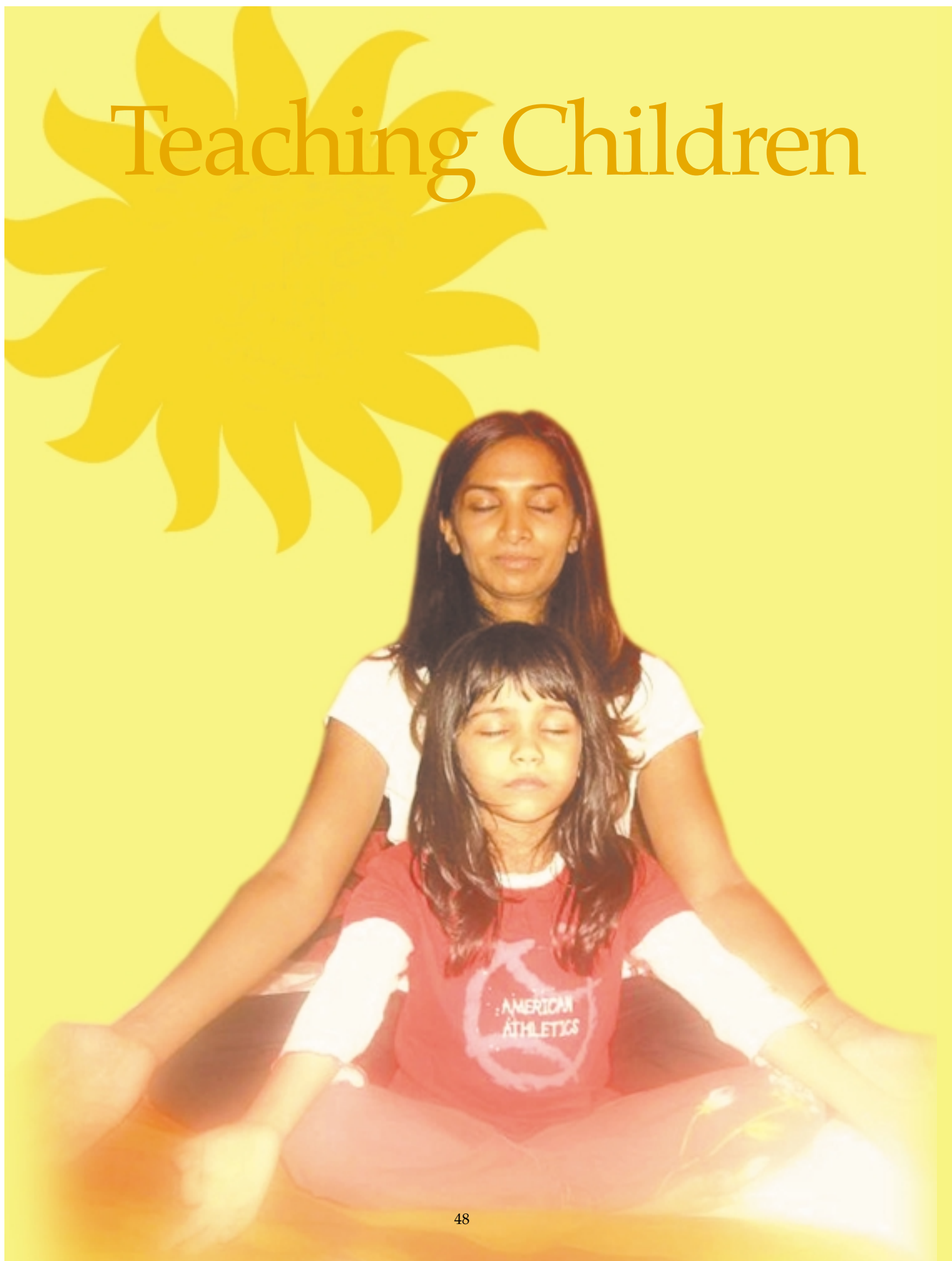


# Teaching Children



# Meditation

Shivanth Roy

“ Teaching your child to meditate basically involves helping them learn how to connect with their inner-self, including their imagination and the real essence of who they are. ”

We live in a world of non-stop pandemonium where our time is measured in accordance to how much we can do and how much we can produce in a day. Seldom do we find ourselves taking it easy and letting our hairs down to properly unwind and enjoy the moment. In fact, even in prayer these days, we hurry our moment of quiet to take care of unfinished business. In doing these hectic activities day in and day out, we unknowingly set examples as role models to our children as to how life is to be lived. They then become our clones who practice impatience and intolerance in their journeys of life.

We pile our children with a variety of tuition classes, music classes and engage them in so many other extra-curricular activities like sports and dance, only to prepare them for the competition ahead. And when the activities are done, they return to their homework, to yet conclude the activities of the day.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most of them are in a variety of extra-curricular activities and sports (i.e. swimming, skating, scouts, ballet, etc.), that so much so after homework or dinner is through few have time to really catch their breath before it is time for bed. That is not to say that children do not benefit from such activities, for surely they do. The point is merely that we have overwhelmed our children with so many new and different endeavours that they do not have the opportunity to learn how to repose. Contrary to our society's energetic values, rest and meditation can actually create a renewed sense of motivation and well-being in us as well as our children. Moreover, it allows a person to turn inwards, become acquainted with oneself, and ultimately become at peace with oneself. Beyond the hustle and bustle of daily life, is that not what we would want for our children – peace of mind and self-trust?

Teaching your child to meditate basically involves helping them learn how to connect with their inner-self, including their imagination and the real essence of who they are. Although meditation for some may signify the very still, closed-eyed and cross-legged pose it does not have to mean that for our children. In fact, it simply involves giving

children the time to be creative, to practice listening and to be carefree. It is easy to teach and may also be beneficial for parents who include themselves in the practice. At the very least, finding time to relax can reduce anxiety and increase one's ability to problem-solve. Sometimes just focusing attention on a different task permits new and fresh ideas to present themselves. Meditation can also help an angry or frustrated child to calm down and rethink a situation.

Meditation describes a state of concentrated attention on some object of thought or awareness. It usually involves turning the attention inward to the mind itself. Meditation is often recognized as a component of Eastern religions, where it has been practiced for over 5,000 years.

The English word meditation comes from the Latin *meditatio*, which originally indicated every type of physical or intellectual exercise, then later evolved into the more specific meaning “contemplation.” From the point of view of psychology, meditation can induce an altered state of consciousness. The goals of meditation are varied, and range from spiritual enlightenment, to the transformation of attitudes, to better cardiovascular health.

Most of us would like to think that childhood is a time of happiness and innocence. The reality is that children are under just as much pressure as the rest of us. Exams are now taken by children as young as six and seven - and children are only too aware of the importance of academic performance to most parents. But these are not the only stresses for children. Peer pressure and bullying are rife, more families break up than ever before, and even time off tends to be a relentless bombardment of noise and image in the form of television and computer games. Born into a mercilessly hectic and noisy world, children may find that the only quiet moments they experience are when they are asleep.

Inculcating the practice of meditation, yoga and spirituality to children is surely one of the best contributions we can give them. These treasures have the potential of nourishing and completing the futures of these little beings. But the task on us as their teachers is a gargantuan one – for we need to teach children of various ages the techniques of receiving the fullest benefits from them.

Meditation gives young children the power over their thinking and their emotions, not by a repressive self-control, but by enhanced self-understanding and self-acceptance. This allows a child to understand their tantrum throwing and how to deal with the frustrations of life.

When teaching children to meditate, it is important to select techniques that are easy to be applied and remembered by children. This is so that they feel the need to return to the practice whenever they need it or so that it becomes a common and comfortable ground for them to find their centering.

Since meditation incorporates many different methods and practices, there are a few pointers which have to be kept in mind when dealing with children and they are:

- Do not incorporate meditation techniques for children that are similar to those practiced by adults seeking spiritual enlightenment;
- Try and develop your own meditation technique based on your research of what would best suit your child's needs;
- When teaching your child meditation, it would be a good idea for parents to sit in along with him or her to create the habit;

- Do not expect too much from your child. Remember that they have a lot on their minds and expecting immediate results is a big burden on them;
- Do not make the meditation time an endless moment. Decide before you start that for at least 15 minutes, you are going to do all you and your child can to rid all thoughts from your minds; and
- When practicing visualization techniques, remember not to endow your child with all your thoughts and ideas. Let him decide the place he finds the most suitable in his mind's eye and the kind of things he would like to do in his favourite place. If he needs to talk his experience out aloud, allow him that privilege – don't take the fun away from the place that gives your child all the comfort and security in the world.

#### Benefits of meditation for children:

- Meditation supports the growth of children's bodies and mind;
- It fosters development of the child's unique personality and supports their creative expression;
- It will help children relax and focus better in school and in other activities so that they are able to concentrate and stay more attuned with the activities around them;
- It teaches children to be more self-aware, encouraging them to accept themselves for who they are; and among other things,
- It helps children deal with the vicissitudes of life with great belief and potential in themselves.

#### Meditation for children eight years of age and below

Since children have the tendency to absorb the energy of the environment they exist in, it is better that for children between the ages of one to eight years, for their parents to incorporate the principles of meditation in their daily lives instead. When parents practice calmness and quiet gratitude, their children will grow up in a healthier more relaxed and aware environment. This alone helps children to be patient and to look at life with a perspective full of love and hope.



Dorothy Nolte in her poem 'Children Learn What They Live,' said "If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight. If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient." Thus, children become their environment and knowing this, the best milieu to give our children would be one where there is an abundance of gratitude, patience and tolerance.

Hence it is of utmost importance that parents observe the practice of meditation so that it increases their aptitude towards their surroundings and presence. Meditation will provide the presence of mind and awareness that growing children require from their parents. Quiet contemplation provides the platform of being in the present and available to handle a dozen things with equal importance – something that children will appreciate in their growing lives.

#### Meditation for children from age eight to thirteen

As the child grows older, her fundamental personality has already been formed and her body undergoes a process of preparing for the teens. Changes begin in the child's brain at the age of eight and this reaches its climax during teenage years.

The scope in which meditation should be taught to children of this age, should be one where the meditation techniques support the physical and mental development of the child. This is particularly so because growing children have different situations to deal with and the meditation techniques will help these children to be better prepared for the desires and urges that arise during their teenage years.

#### Post Teenage

Older children seem to be better able to sit longer in meditation. Therefore, it is a little more flexible for children in this age category to follow a technique that already exists for some adults.

However the meditation methods here have to be more streamlined into a practice that caters more for their mental peace and development. At this age, a great variety of

dreams and ambitions are being tailored and their minds become overloaded. Competition and ego takes over and stress piles up, which is the root cause of many teenage children venting out their frustrations through head-banging exercises and intoxicating elements.

The best meditation techniques to afford children of this age is the visualization and breath techniques which can help develop their memory and their mental power and ease out the need for competition.

This in turn will help children deal with all the expectations of life and foster some amount of easiness in the manner in which they detail their life's plans.

Meditation is no doubt a formula that is proven to complete a person and in today's time and age, when the mind is constantly challenged and disturbed with so many activities, ambitions, social happenings and work load, it is the only call of salvation for the modern man. Men, women and children of today's era have a great deal to benefit from the ancient findings of our predecessors. YL

