

FAMILY MEDITATION

All Souls Church and The Insight Meditation Community of Washington

October 2009-May 2010

Why are we here?

- In the Family Meditation class we hope to provide young children and their parents with a Buddhist framework to 1) explore their inner life, 2) understand the causes of emotional stress, 3) realize the possibility of freedom, and 4) develop the Buddha's path of peace, wisdom and kindness

What do we do?

- We learn the teachings of the Buddha (the Dharma)
- Practice – and hopefully enjoy and appreciate – meditation as an ancient spiritual practice
- Provide a vocabulary of inner states and *explore what is helpful and what is hurtful*
- Develop peace, wisdom and kindness in a general way
 - In support of that, make use of the specific meditation practices of samatha (serenity), vipassana (insight) and metta (loving-kindness)
- Make clear that external circumstances do not have to rule our inner responses
- Explain the difference between internal and external sources of happiness and internal and external sources of suffering
- Given that the world can provide no assurances of health and safety, we point to, cultivate and make strong those aspects of mind that *can not be hurt*, that provide inner safety and refuge
- Develop awareness of the connections between the mind and body
- Cultivate compassion for one's self, others and all living things
 - Generate energy for social responses that are balanced with wisdom
- Help parents cultivate balance *in the midst of the stresses* of parenting
- Nurture a sense of spiritual community within the family

Teaching Philosophy

- Meet the kids where they are: discern, acknowledge and respect their interests and concerns
 - Tailor the vocabulary and teaching tools to suit their stages of understanding
- Encourage and respect individual autonomy and integrity
 - Rather than dictating the truth, invite and encourage curiosity and investigation so children will know the value of the teachings and practice through their own direct experience
- Create an open, accepting environment in which children and parents are not ashamed to experience and share their inner "compost pile"
 - At the same time, create a sense of the possibility of freedom from what causes harm
- Engage the senses with visual devices, movement, stories, chanting and song to bring the lessons alive, and help make connections with the lesson concepts
- Balance activity, liveliness and humor with silence and stillness
 - Accommodate children's level of attention and physical energy without giving into distractedness, agitation and restlessness
- Strike a balance between devotion, ritual and repetition -- which children often seem drawn towards -- and new activities
- Manifest the possibility of inner peace and balance, even when the energy of the class becomes wobbly and chaotic
- "When the field guide looks one way and the bird looks another, *believe the bird*"
 - When the lesson plan conflicts with the realities of the class, follow the lead of the children