

THE GIFT of Meditation

By Silvia Smart, Tulen Center
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I couldn't hear myself think. Parents shouting. Fans screaming. The gym was shaking. You'd have thought I'd landed court-side tickets to an earthquake. This was our son's big wrestling season finale. Districts! In the middle of all this chaos was my son, Henry.

It had been a good year. Henry, 10 at the time, and in his first year of wrestling, was undefeated. He was facing his final opponent, a kid in his weight class with several more years of experience.

Henry's match was next. I searched the crowds and there he was, my son, sitting in a cross-legged position, wrists on his knees, thumb touching middle finger, and back straight. Though far away, I knew he was breathing deeply, and setting his intention. In the midst of this pandemonium, my son sat quietly in meditation.

By now, we are all aware of the benefits of meditation. Daily practice can bring balance to our busy lives. Google "meditation" and you get thousands of articles and studies describing positive effects of this mindful practice, like lowered blood pressure, reduced anxiety and increased calm, focus and well being, to name just a few. As a teacher at an area martial arts studio, I am constantly privy to stories about the benefits of this practice for children.

Ten year-old Corrine trains in a traditional martial art in which meditation is part of each class. "It is a time when I can reflect on things, like ripples on water. I feel calm, I feel safe...It gives me time away from all

my busy activities. I'm happy that I have a chance to close my eyes and breathe in peace."

A mom I know, Berkeley, recently told me this story: She and her 2nd grader were having an argument about chores. Their disagreement had reached an impasse and neither one was budging. Karina told her mom she "just couldn't deal with her right now" and needed a break. Berkeley took a deep breath and gave her daughter some space. About 15 minutes later, she went to Karina's room to check on her. There she was, sitting serenely on her bed, eyes closed, breathing deeply. When she emerged a short time later, Karina told her mom she felt calmer and ready to resolve their disagreement.

Bio: Silvia Smart is a 6th degree black belt in a martial art from Indonesia called Poekoelan Tijimindie Tulen. With her husband, Jeff Denson, she runs Tulen Center in Southwest Portland. Through the Tulen Foundation, (a national non-profit dedicated to teaching self-defense and personal empowerment) Silvia teaches free self-defense classes at schools and community centers in the Southwest Portland/Beaverton area. Silvia has her Master's in Special Education and has two kids, Emilia (16) and Henry (14).

The Dalai Lama says, "If every 8 year old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation." When we share a genuine, authentic gift like this with children, they know it, they feel it, and they "get" it. We teach kids life skills like swimming and fire safety, so why not teach them how to find peace, compassion and strength within themselves as well?

Imagine your child having such a gift. In a world that sometimes feels scary and overwhelming, consider gifting your child a tool they can rely on which brings them a deep sense of peace. This gift of self-reliance will last our children a lifetime!

Tulen Center
for martial arts and wellness
503-291-9333 | www.tulencenter.com
4710 SW Scholls Ferry Rd. Portland, OR 97225

BULLET POINTS/STEP BY STEP

Do this with your kids, it's more fun for them and it's also fantastic for you! There are really no rules. Just some guidelines.

- Make sure there are no distractions. Find a nice quiet place and turn off phones.
- Pick a time of day that works for you on a regular basis. First thing in the morning or just at night before tuck in are nice times. But anytime is great!
- Get into a comfortable position.
- Go outside on a nice day, lounge in the living room, sit at the kitchen table or in the car waiting to pick up a sibling...anyplace, really!
- Focus on your breath. Breathe in all the way. Breathe out all the way. Use nice, slow breath. You can count three heart beats per breath if that helps stay focused.
- Some people like to use words to help focus on breath. For example, breathe in "I am," breathe out "love."
- Start for just a short time and increase little by little.

This is a simple way to get started. You can build from here and use guided meditations, set your intention, use music, movement...the possibilities are endless.

