



## PARENTING THE INNER WORLD

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*In order to be there, fully, for our children, we firstly need to know how to be there for ourselves. Many of us come to the world of parents and children from the 'outside world' of work, tasks and busyness. We're often less practised at enjoying stillness, focusing within and simply BE-ing - the exact qualities our babies bring in with them and require of us.*

When we're trying to be there for our children, we can come up against much within ourselves. We may not be used to spending time just being with ourselves or simply being our 'self'. This is why in the first weeks, months, years of our child's life we can feel a constant struggle, perhaps deep questioning, a lack or a void. We strive to be there for this little bundle of wonder and we want to love them so intensely. Yet standing at the change table or rocking the cradle, lugging the baby capsule or nursing the beautiful one, we often find ourselves wishing we were somewhere else, yearning to have a break, find a way to change things or run away. We can feel bored, under-valued, trapped, lonely, lost and sometimes it's like we're living in a heavy cloud or vacuum.

Do we feel all of this because our modern world isolates and de-values the world of parents and children? Or is it because we're physically 'run-down' from lack of sleep and meeting all of the demands? Yes, these are partly the answers but as I explored all of these feelings in my first weeks and months with my children, something kept bugging me. Somewhere else in my life I had experienced feelings a bit like this.

Where was it?

Finally I realised I had come up against similar reactions, years beforehand when I found my way to a yoga class, struggling with myself in a demanding job, trying to give up smoking. As I started learning relaxation techniques and meditation there was a real restlessness; surges of confusing, sometimes frightening and strong feelings; anxiety; a deep boredom or a sense of being lost in a heavy fog; a frenetic mind racing around in circles, out of control; a seething mass of tasks presenting themselves as urgent; body twitching and fidgeting – all to the point that I would feel that I had to get up, go out, run away and get busy doing something.

This is what many of us can face when we start looking within ourselves and explore our inner world more deeply. All these things present themselves because they are symbols of the next challenges we need to meet in order to become more whole.

There is much in our life and our society that pulls us 'out there'. We can be forgiven if we feel that we are only someone when we are 'out there' visible for all to see. For most of us,

most of the time, the 'outer world' is all there is. It is a world made up of what we do, what we wear and eat, what we say, who we're with, what we buy, who we talk to, and what we accomplish. Our lives can be so busy that we no longer allow ourselves time to just BE.

In our life before children, how often did we simply sit and read, let alone just sit and think or dream? How often were we alone? Did we ever allow ourselves to sit with our feelings and let them flow through us? Did we let ourselves ponder the 'Who am I?', 'Where am I going?' questions for a long time without jumping into the lists of 'shoulds', 'could have beens'? Were we content with just going for a quiet stroll, with no real destination? How often did we choose to stay home, not to get things done, not because we were sick, tired, or fed-up, but simply because we just wanted to be quiet, to BE?

If we answer 'never', 'hardly ever' or 'only occasionally' to most of these questions, then it is understandable that we might be in for an internal struggle when we are striving to be there for our baby. Many of us keep ourselves busy in the outer world throughout our pregnancy so by the time the baby is born we've barely started to adjust to spending time on the 'inner side'.

When our babies are born they come to us, in a sense, from the 'inner world'. They come from a deep inner quiet where there is nothing else but simply 'being'. At first we might feel like an uncomfortable stranger in this inner world, in the same way our baby is a stranger in the 'outer world' we have just brought them into.

If we are used to making attempts to contact our inner world we will be on our way to genuinely understanding our babies.

**Our task in the first few years of parenting is to help our babies and children learn how to cross a bridge from the 'inner world' to the 'outer world', and back again. [This is exactly our task when we learn meditation, relaxation and other inner quietening techniques]**

We have a choice about how we help the children around us weave between the 'inner' and 'outer' realities. We can stay in the outer world and beckon them, cajole them, direct them or harangue them into this outer world and teach them the rules so they know how to live and be here. When they know the rules enough, and know the language, that's when we feel we can get to know them.

Or we can cross the bridge into the inner realms, into our inner world and thus automatically connect with theirs. That's when we have those moments of pure connection with our children and our intuition - when, for example, we can happily sit watching our baby and lose all track of time and then somehow know exactly what their next cry means. We can genuinely 'be there' for them to guide and support their true nature, see things through their eyes, whilst also showing them the way across the bridge to the outer world. We meet them on their side of the bridge and gradually walk back with them, helping them to learn how to stay connected to their true self whilst also operating in the outer world.

How do we take ourselves across that bridge? There are four simple steps:

1. Next time you have that gnawing feeling and a yearning to escape the humdrum of the baby-world take a deep breath and a long slow look at your precious one and see yourself as your baby sees you - perfect, complete and exactly who you need to be, simply because you are you, regardless of the tumult of feelings and doubts that may be pulling on you.
2. Practise your own inner quietening every day/every week - pause a moment in the sunlight, breathe deeply, meditate, join a well-rounded yoga class (one that includes breathing, meditative techniques and relaxation as well as physical stretches and postures) or walk alone, quietly and rhythmically.
3. Courageously face, or at least sit with, any difficult feelings that arise until the ritual of taking a quiet moment is as habitual as cleaning your teeth in the morning.

4. Start right now. Pause, to give yourself a quiet moment in your own way or would you like to try this exercise?

*Take a seat on the nearest chair, bed or stool. Allow your feet to rest evenly on the floor or foot-rest, tuck your tail under to lengthen your lower back. Shrug your shoulders back and down to feel an openness in your chest that allows your breath to flow. Now simply watch the flow of your breath, without trying to change it. Notice the flow of air in, through your nostrils, filling your lungs with a sense of abundance ... holding a moment ... and then releasing, letting go, until all the air has flowed out through your nostrils. And now very naturally you are ready for the next breath in. Simply watch your breath. There's no right or wrong, just simply notice the flow of air ... in ... and ... out ... and ... in ... and ... out ... in ... and ... out ...*

*Now resume reading, or go back into your life. You may not notice any immediate differences in yourself but there is a possibility that you will catch another quiet moment or notice your breath again before you go to bed tonight. Even just one quiet moment will put you more firmly on your own path to the inner world and thus to a deeper connection with your precious ones.*

The process of parenting, then, takes us on a journey into our inner world and our own unfolding. Our children will feel naturally nurtured for who they are, rather than who they should be and will surpass us in their ability to move effortlessly from the inner world to the outer and back again throughout their life. And we will have experienced the most powerful phenomenon of growing very deeply within ourselves simply by guiding and parenting the children around us.

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