FRESH
A Phenomenological Enquiry

by

Leanne Tonkin

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Leanne Tonkin 2015
Abstract

This thesis examines the lived experiences of children in Maharashtra, India who practise a secular meditation. Worldwide children are now encouraged to develop awareness through practicing similar although distinctive forms of secular mindful methods, such as contemplation, social and emotional learning and meditation. The children in this study have for several years practised a breath awareness and loving kindness meditation at the non-governmental organisation where they reside and/or at the school they attend. This study points to the children’s experiences around the theme of their mindful practise by asking three guiding questions: 1) How does the child experience meditation? 2) How does the child build morality through meditation practise? 3) How does the child’s meditation practise offer certain “protective” benefits?

To approach these questions this thesis engages a phenomenological practice orientated towards pedagogy and relies on educational holistic attitudes and theory. Overall research on meditation and children is uncommon, but in the last few years that has begun to change as internationally people across the disciplines investigate this subject area. The research that has been done on the subject of children and meditation is more survey oriented and clinical based. This study is distinct in its focus on listening to and learning from the lived experiences of
children who are born, raised and educated in environments that encourage meditation as integral to the development of emotional, mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being.

Eight children ages 11 to 16 are this study’s key informants. To help inform the children’s stories, four adults familiar with the participant children and/or their environments contributed their lived experiences around the theme of mindful practice. I worked with the participant children as a meditation group facilitator in India for over 2.5 consecutive years. This study reveals an ongoing development of friendship, trust and participation with and research on Indian cultures; an ongoing engagement with the children and their families, friends and communities; and an ongoing effort around meditation through group work, observation and volunteer work. This involvement was integral to understanding the children and their cultures, faiths, traditions, beliefs, politics, histories, practices, geographical locations and more.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was inspired and supported by a diversity of institutions and individuals. Above all, I thank Sister Lucy Kurien, the participant children and their families, housemothers and housemates and all of the Maher family for sharing their lives with me. It is because of their readiness this thesis exists. I also thank each of the participant adults for their rich contributions that helped me to better understand the participant children.

The School of Graduate Studies of the University of Toronto not only financially supported this work and importantly the field research but also personally supported me as a doctoral candidate. There are also individuals at OISE of the University of Toronto who supported this work in pivotal ways. I especially thank Margaret Brennan, Mary MacDonell, Lise Watson, Michelle Pon, Safia Gahayr and Alfredo Chow, Tong Gallina and all of the OISE Education Commons technicians.

There are people who also supported this work in financially indirect ways through offering me free lodging, free storage, free labour and more. I especially thank Wilson, Vickie, Sarah and Stephanie Lim, Kim Larson, Brenda and Colin Baskind, Ghanekar family, Sister Lisa Peres and family, Susheela Kapur, Sarina Shah, Father Joy Thomas, Anna Sienicka and Father Scaria.

Many people offered me their conceptual support throughout my doctorate studies. I am especially appreciative of those whose encouragement was instrumental in terms of this work. An extensive thanks to the late Roger Simon, Heesoon Bai, Claudia Eppert, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Karen Donovan, Young-Yie Kim, Jonathan Arendt, Chyleen Shih, Radhi Raja, Shanti Shah, Father George Pattery, Max van Manen, Father Cyril Debrulais and Sara Comish.

My deepest gratitude goes to my meditation teachers Mrs. Illaichidevi Goenka and the late Mr. Satya Narayan Goenka for their devotion, direction and example. I also cannot thank enough Drs. Nirmala and Hamir Ganla for their ongoing guidance, generosity and loving kindness. Certainly without their help I would not have come in contact with Maher and the spirited and varied community of volunteers in India who encourage children to be mindful.

I am particularly grateful to my dissertation committee for their encouragement, guidance and approval from the initial stages to the completion of this work. I am especially indebted to my supervisor Grace Feuerverger for her ongoing willingness, timely and insightful instruction and endorsement beginning with my acceptance to OISE. Importantly, without Grace this work would not have been possible. I am deeply grateful to John (Jack) P. Miller for his Holistic Curriculum graduate class and his instrumental advice on my committee formation, methodology and data collection. I will always be grateful to Reva Joshee for her gentle reassurance that led me to proceed to India with confidence, insightful comments to improve this thesis and inspirational work on inclusive diversity through education in Canada. Although not on my dissertation committee, special thanks to Four Arrows (Don Trent Jacobs) for his insightful and thoughtful suggestions on how to strengthen and deepen the quality of this work.

Many friends and extended family members from India to Canada nurtured me in all kinds of essentials ways. There are too many people to name here and so I trust all know I am grateful for their presence in my life. I must however mention some people or groups who have uniquely helped me to complete this work. I thank Alana Baskind, Fay Zeira, Jantzi-Stein family, Munira Nagji, Blanche Pereira, Father Dhanush Pazhangattu, Diana Llanio, Sister Sushanti Horo, Pune Vipassana community and members of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth.

Finally, I thank my family for everything they have taught me. I must thank my aunt, Anne Tonkin, for her continued queries on my doctorate process. I especially express my gratitude to mother, Patricia Tonkin, for all of her ongoing support and especially as I wrote this thesis. I dedicate this thesis to my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents east and west.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dialogue</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Context</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Approach</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Defences or Educational Ability</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE: A Call for Mindful Education</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation in Education</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO: The Adults</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Time for <em>Connection</em></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacredness or Devotion</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Listening</em></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Drop in the Ocean</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: The Children</strong></td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful of Morals</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FOUR: The Children and Meditation</strong></td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ten <em>Parami:</em></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dana</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sila</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panna</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viriya</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khanti</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacca</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhitthana</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metta</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upekkha</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nekhamma</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: A Mindful Protection</strong></td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That Feeling of <em>Fresh</em> Transformation</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

There is a story about a plaster Buddha that was housed at a modest temple in Thailand. Very little was known about the 3 metres high statue until May 1955 when the resident monks decided to relocate it within the temple grounds. A crane was used to lift the cumbersome statue, and although it was eventually lifted, as soon as it was airborne the ropes securing it broke and the statue fell to the ground. The monks inspected the damage; and to their surprise they saw a gold colour shining from underneath the broken plaster. The exact history of the statue remains unclear, but it is believed that sometime between the 13th to 14th century monks had laid plaster over a solid gold Buddha to protect it from pillage, war and harsh realities. Today, the Golden Buddha is priced at $250 million dollars and is the most revered Golden Buddha statue visited by people from all over the world.

I learned of that story when I was in India preparing for this study. I thought it was pleasing to read but I did not reflect on it further. Over time though the story resurfaced in different texts and contexts, and I began to notice that after each time I read it I felt satisfied. Ironically the same story appeared in the newspaper when I started to write this thesis. It was then that I decided to consider more deeply the Golden Buddha, and as I did the clutter concealing its meaning cleared away (van Manen, 2014, pp. 28-29). By listening, reflecting and writing on the statue I began to wonder about our true nature, and what if any evolutionary changes led us to “plaster” over it. In turn it dawned on me how people of all ages are breathing life into qualities most associated with the child and its discerning innocence, flexibility and openness. That phenomenon corresponds with the current western scientific research on the human brain and how by performing certain mindful activities the human brain shows signs of a plasticity that with mindful practise can lead a person to be more discernibly innocent, flexible and open (Holzel et al., 2011; Tang, Lu, Fan, Yang & Posner, 2012).
Briefly, the terms *mindful practise* and *meditation* in this thesis refer to an activity where different energies build on one another and result in an ease of mind. In other words, with practise the energy of concentration leads to more powerful looking which in turn brings about the energy of insight and breakthroughs to understanding things more wholly (Hanh, 2004, p. 97). With the power of insight we can see things with a greater clarity that helps us to make healthier choices and work to sustain and develop those energies that result in a sense of freedom central to the development of our well-being individually and collectively.

After considering the child’s discerning innocence, flexibility and openness in relationship to the current western scientific interest around mindful practise, I turned to Maria Montessori and her life’s work. Montessori conducted studies over a century ago that are congruent with the western neuroscientific research results. Montessori’s research however included working in collaboration with children in a pedagogical environment on an education meeting the child’s needs and tendencies. That is to say that through writing about the Golden Buddha I felt guided to continue to approach this study’s larger meaning. Montessori’s methodology and/or philosophy naturally supports this process because of the careful attention it pays to the child’s discerning innocence, flexibility and openness. Importantly it acknowledges the potential or sees the true nature of not only the individual but also society. With that in mind this study relies on holistic education attitudes and theory with a special emphasis on Montessori and her theory and practise.

Montessori began working as a physician with differently abled children, and grew so dismayed by the conditions for the child that she returned to higher education to study theoretical and moral philosophy, anthropology and pedagogy. Those studies eventually led her to carry out educational research with children. It was only after years of study and research that Montessori (1917/1965) published her findings on a scientific education showing how the child from “methodical concentration develops equilibrium, elasticity, adaptability, and the resulting power
to perform the higher actions, such as those which are termed acts of obedience” (p. 105).

Montessori (1936/2003) said a storm was causing the child to hide its deepest nature from the outside world (pp. 106-107). However by listening and following the child the hidden being will reveal its inherent genius, which she grew certain we must search for “in a spirit of enthusiasm, like those who know of hidden gold, and who explore unknown lands and move mountains in search of the precious metal” (Montessori, 1936/2003, p.10).

Montessori’s insight albeit unique resonates with the meaning I associate with the Golden Buddha. The statue and insight point to our golden quality or our true nature despite the degree to which we are covered with “plaster”. Conversely both of them also remind me of the power we have to “plaster” over our true nature. It is for this reason that as western science further investigates the correlation between neuroscience and mindful practices (Walach, Schmidt & Jonas, 2011) it may become essential in education to guide our children to be more mindful. However Montessori’s work with children touched on the depth of the child’s nature such that we could in theory and practise understand how to guide the child to do what it does better than the adult—live in the present moment. John Dewey (1916/2004) says, “Children proverbially live in the present; that is not only a fact not to be evaded, but it is an excellence” (p. 52). That is why key educationists like Dewey and Montessori called for experiential and mindful reflection, which ultimately supports the import of the Golden Buddha.

With this in mind, below is a dialogue presenting a snapshot of the children’s expressions around the subject of their mindful practise. The dialogue is one from among many of our group discussions and derives from a time when the children and I met twice a week for a period of 3.5 months. What you are about to read demonstrates how the children and I would discuss their experience of meditation after we had meditated together. It also conveys how we would focus loosely around themes I would have thought about beforehand. Specifically in the proceeding dialogue we broadly focus around the interrelatedness between one’s mind, will and decision-
making. The reader can draw a lot of information from the dialogue that may give this entire work a certain meaning, and it is important to remember how that meaning may change once this work is read in its entirety.

The dialogue does not make any epistemological claims but rather it illustrates what some of the work the participant children and I did together looked like and more importantly provide from the onset of this thesis an example of the children speaking to their lived experiences. Communication of every hue with the child is paramount to education and so it is with this in mind that all of the forthcoming dialogue in this thesis develops from my phenomenological interpretations of the participant children’s lived experiences. What is new in this approach is the role of a mindful practice not as a method addressed and practised by the participants and the author of the text but as a practical and vital energy in the phenomenology of practise (van Manen, 2007, pp. 11-30), in this case pedagogy, of which all theory and research were meant to orient us to in our relations with children (van Manen, 1990, p. 135).
What inspires me, what I would like to say, is seeing you, the children and the helpers, and how much both sides can learn from each other. It’s not just one way. You children and young people are going to school, you are being educated, and you are being surrounded by people who really love you and care for you. You are surrounded by people who believe in you, who believe in your potential, which is a wonderful thing for all of us. But also the helpers and teachers are learning many things from the ones they are supposedly helping, because there are many qualities of the heart that we all need to develop, and sometimes we need a good challenge in order to bring out these qualities. So, for example, for the younger people and the older people, we need to develop generosity, generosity of heart. We need to develop patience, we need to develop the sense of giving, in service, not just out of duty. These qualities, this is the perfect place for everybody to learn, for the helpers and the young people. So, in a place like this, which is just so full of bubbling good feelings, then it is not just the children who are learning but also the adults who are learning—everybody is learning. So, therefore, while the helpers and teachers are teaching the young people, the young people are also teaching the helpers, the teachers. So whatever both of you are learning, you should be grateful to the other person. Because in this life, we never stop growing, we never stop learning.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, A public address, Maher, Pune, 2014
Viriya, Panna and I slipped off our shoes at the prayer room doors—the dark wood carved floral pattern framed by circular brass symbols of different faith practices: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Indigenous faiths, Jain, Sikh, Parsi, Judaism, Tao, Marxism, Atheist. Inside the prayer room, Panna gently removed her backpack and then stood taking in the prayer room; Viriya plopped her school bag to the side and then got to work placing the cushions in a circle on the floor; I turned on the lights and then prepared for our group activities. The other girls trickled in and soon enough we sat in a circle in half-lotus, cross-legged or with legs bent to one side. We talked among ourselves about life until eventually the prayer room as still as ever drew us inwards.

Khanti offered to say prayer; she identified with her Hindu faith mostly although as with many of the children she prayed with an inclusive “God” in mind.

O God, as today you were with us, shower your blessings upon this older sister that no trouble should come her way. Make her journey of life a joyful one.

O God, my sisters who are sitting here, shower your mercy towards them, take away all kinds of trouble from their lives. You protect them. O God, We thank you for showing us this world.

Next, we meditated in silence for 10 minutes or more. Panna had mentioned once how after meditation she feels fresh, as though she has woken up and is ready for a new day. I noticed how following meditation we seemed to need less of everything—a reason to smile, an explanation or that thing we wanted so badly before meditating. I looked around the circle, watched as the girls opened their eyes in their own time. After a few moments, I quietly said, “Can someone tell me what meditating was like for you?” There was silence. Dana was holding my gaze for longer than usual. I thought that maybe she wanted to say something. “Dana?” I asked. Dana lightly shook her head side to side as she looked away.

“Can I tell?” said Upekkha, sitting a little straighter. Upekkha is Dana’s older sister.

“Yeah, please,” I said.

“When my mind was outside,” said Upekkha, “I was thinking when we will go for our school picnic and where it will be and it should be to two or three places.” Upekkha gestured with her hands, using them like she does to help her express herself. “So, again, I told my mind, come again and do meditation. I was thinking all are doing meditation. It was silent, huh?” Upekkha made a clucking sound with her mouth as she searched for words to express herself. “And so I worked again on my meditation.” She looked down to her lap, where her hands now sat one over the other.

“Okay,” I said. There was more silence. I was a little nervous they lacked focus and were not using the breath to help them. Then I recognised my fear, my thoughts, my needs. I came back to my breath and then my senses, and was more accepting of whatever was happening. We sat in the silence for a moment. Then Metta, sitting cross-legged and with her hands resting at her ankles, raised a few of her fingers. “Metta?” I said.

Metta looked from me towards the ceiling as she said, “When I closed my eyes I was thinking about our annual function, at school, because our sir (teacher) is there and he can’t dance. I was thinking, and again I closed my eyes and again was doing meditation.” She looked down towards her fingers that she was tapping against the smoky blue carpet.

I nodded my head a couple of times and said, “Okay.” There was silence. I waited to see what came to mind, as maybe my approach was weak. I decided to ask, “So can a couple of people tell me how you feel now?”

Upekkha immediately said, “I feel relaxed.”

“I feel fresh,” said Adhitthana in a chipper voice as she sat even taller.
Sila smiled broadly, opened her eyes wide and said, “I feel calm.” Sila is Upekkha and Dana’s younger sister and she is the youngest child in the group. I looked to Metta. “You stoppedhiccupping,” I said. “Before meditating you had the hiccups and during meditation I noticed you stopped hiccupping.” Metta looked away as though she was thinking. Again we sat in silence.

Then Sacca, surprisingly, said, “When I come on Tuesdays and Fridays I do not concentrate on my breath, but today I concentrated from start to end.” At first I wondered if she had meant what she said and then it struck me how this was the first time Sacca had said anything remotely like that. Let alone spoke about it openly in the group.

“Great,” I said, trying not to praise Sacca but rather act natural as Montessori observed was best thing to do. I was thrilled though. Sacca and I smiled together until she shyly looked away. Although I did wonder what led to her breakthrough and what kept her from focusing on her breath. I was unsure of how to raise the issue though, and so I tried noticing my breath. Soon enough I remembered something. I said, “You know, sometimes, I am not aware at all of my breath while I meditate.” There was silence for a moment. I was unclear of what I had said so far as where it might lead the conversation. Then I heard myself ask, “Is there anything else you were aware of while meditating?”

“I heard music,” said Adhitthana.

“Me too,” said Upekkha. Panna, sitting near to Upekkha, looked at me and then towards the windows, from the direction the music had come. Usually Panna was more quiet and subtle, and I often worried she felt left out such that I would ask the girls to translate what I had said in English into Marathi.

“Hm-hm,” said Khanti, agreeing with the others, as she pulled down the waist of her navy blue school uniform.

“I heard a cat,” said Viriya, looking down towards her hands as she made deep lines with her finger in the carpet.

Thinking that maybe besides what they heard they also could get caught in their thoughts, I asked, “Did your mind wander to thoughts?”

Upekkha bluntly said, “Yes.”

Viriya smiled, quickly glanced at me and then returned to face the carpet. “I was too sleepy,” she said. I smiled at Viriya. In fact during the group meditation I had opened my eyes to look at each of the children, and Viriya was dipping forwards and back by the end of the 10 minutes. Between Maher, the non-governmental organisation where the children live, school and life in general the girls work harder than any other children I have ever met.

Adhitthana piped up, “I was wondering when I will go outside.”

“My mind went to the tamarind tree,” said Viriya, smiling shyly. She and a few of the girls really like to pick the fruit from the tamarind tree near the prayer room. Without forethought I said, “Did you come back or did you stay out?”

“I came back,” said Adhitthana.

We moved on to speak in more detail about the breath, and specifically about what lead Siddhartha Gautama to focus his attention on it. It was then that Upekkha asked if she could tell the story of Gautama’s life, which she told in great detail. Then at one point she grew confused about the sequence of events and so Dana intervened and finished telling the story.

At the end of the story, Panna’s eyes widened and she chimed in eagerly, “Even a python climbed on his body!” Panna was referring to how a snake tempted Gautama when he sat under the Bodhi Tree. Panna comes from a farming family, and she is looked up to by the children in her native farming community such that they often do not want her to even rest so she can tell them stories about life in the city.

Upekkha cocked her head sideways and quietly asked, “Why did the Buddha sit under the
tree?"

The question surprised me. I was unsure of what to say. I searched for my breath, and then the bodhi leaf work we did together came to mind. "Do you remember that pipal (bodhi) leaf with water and dirt sitting in it?"

At once, Upekkha, Viriya and Dana said, "Yes." The other girls looked thoughtful as though they were trying to recall the activity. I had found a bodhi leaf on a footpath near the prayer room. The leaf’s edges were upturned enough that it served as a shallow bowl in which sat clear water with some dirt settled at the bottom. The children and I were due to discuss to the mind, and I saw the bodhi leaf and it reminded me of how I could speak about the mind.

"When we stirred that water, what happened?" I said.

Dana hurried to speak, "Water came up and..." She tilted her head to the side and scrunched up her face. "No—"

Viriya eagerly said, "It became muddy."

"Exactly. Siddhartha Gautama saw that people were not calm and equanimous, and so their minds, hearts and whole beings were like that muddy water. Siddhartha sat under the bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya in Bihar and said he would not move until he was fully enlightened, which he did by observing his breath and body in a special way. No matter what tempted him or tried to distract him, and many, many, many things did, he remained equanimous and by doing that he saw how calmly, calmly, calmly his whole being like the mud and water will—"

"What bad thoughts came went away," said Upekkha. "Or they came and he did not react to them. All was coming into his mind and he did not get distracted." We sat in silence and stillness for a moment. "We don’t react to our thoughts, and our mind will become clear. So nice, huh? So that is why he sat under the tree." Upekkha smiled and the others looked pensive.

I am so happy Upekkha gets it, but again I think of how it is best not to single a child out for her efforts. "That’s just it," I said, smiling.

As a group we had read The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles and although I had intended to review the story that day without forethought I said, "So if we think of Ruby, what may have caused Ruby never to show her anger or talk badly about the white people who were mean to her, shouted hateful things and even threatened to physically hurt her?"

Sila looked up at me and said calmly, "She prayed to God." The story of Ruby made an impression on the girls. Some of them took the book to read it at Maher and many of them since reading it referred to the story. They would say, "What about Ruby..." or "...like Ruby."

"Yeah," I said, "and what do you think about a little girl who did not gossip, back bite or speak harsh words—"

Dana, excited, interrupted and said, "She was calm. She was calm and kind."

"She also prayed for them," said Viriya, keeping her eyes downcast as she continued drawing shapes in the carpet.

Dana said, "She was observing her breath."

"Maybe she was observing her breath..., but you see how much courage that takes? People hated her and they didn’t want her to live, they didn’t want her to learn and the didn’t want any people of the same skin colour as her to go to school." We sat in silence for a moment. I was unsure of how they would understand what I had said. They have spoken about, written on and even teased one another about their skin colour. At first the girls were surprised when I disapproved of any teasing about skin colour and told them I found them beautiful. Eventually a few of them would point out famous people with darker skin, e.g., Nelson Mandela. Suddenly I felt sad. I heard myself say, "Do you think you would have been angry if you were Ruby?"

"No," said Metta, assuredly.

Khanti looked at me, smiled and seemingly gathering conviction, like I have seen the children do again and again. "No," she said, "I will observe my breath and pray for them."
Adhitthana rolled her eyes back a little and said in exacerbation, “I will go and die first. If everyday that will happen, then what will I do!”

Dana agreed and said, “Three days, 4 days, we cannot bear that.”

Hearing their lack of conviction, fear, made me nervous, but I persisted and said, “No? What do you think it would take for you to bear that?”

Adhitthana immediately said, “Meditation.”

Sila looked at me, took a breath in and a breath out, and said, “Breathing in and breathing out.”

Adhitthana interjected and said, “Giving metta to ourselves.” She was referring to the *metta* meditation practise also knows as loving kindness meditation and not the group member called Metta.

“Praying,” said Sila. The children seem to be doing what we do sometimes in group, engage in group stream of consciousness dialogue.

“Kindness,” said Dana.

“Loving,” said Metta.

I turned to Metta who then looked down, “Loving what?” There was a moment of silence.

“They,” said Sila. We seem to all understand, as otherwise someone usually speaks up.

Viriya said, “Loving each other.”

“Loving each other even if the people are fighting you,” said Dana. “You are still going to love them.”

Metta and Adhitthana said together, “Yes.”

“Do you think Ruby was faithful?” I asked, not knowing where that question will lead us.

“Yes,” said Dana. “Faithful means very simple...”

“Trustful,” said Sacca, who is quieter in the group although speaks a lot with me privately.

Dana added, “Faithful means I believe that person.”

I was curious and asked, “So even if a person does wrong—”

Dana interjected with certitude and said, “Still we believe that person.”

“And why do think you have that faith?” I asked.

“Because that person does many good things too,” said Dana, gently.

I kept looking at Dana and said, “That is interesting, so do you think the people who wanted to kill Ruby, their behaviour was as little bad thing?”

Adhitthana straight away said, “No.”

“No,” said Sila.

I decided to pursue the discussion further and asked, “What do think made her have faith, what did she understand—”

Upekkha looked at me before I finished my sentence and said, “That they were very angry.”

“She thinks they don’t know what they are doing,” said Dana.

Upekkha said, “And it is not what they are doing, it is their mind and all of that, their thoughts and all of that. They are not bad, but their thoughts and their thinking—”

Dana interjected and said, “Their mind is bad.”

“It is almost as if they are out of their mind,” I added.

“Yes,” said Upekkha, deeply as she looked down. We sat in silence, as though Upekkha’s clarity had summed up our conversation.

Dana chimed, “Didi (older sister), in our body there are two persons, one is bad and one is a good person. When we do good things, that bad person says, ‘No you should not do that.’ It always tells us to do bad things. And bad things we can do easily but good things we need to
make effort to do.”

“What controls whether or not we are doing bad or good?” I asked.

“Our mind,” said Dana.

I carry on and asked, “Why are all of you encouraged to practise meditation?”

Adhitthana said, assuredly, “To be calm.”

“If you are calm,” I said, “what does that mean your mind is doing?”

Sacca looked at me and said, “Work.”

At first I did not entirely understand if she knew what I had asked but I realised she has answered the question realistically. I asked, “If unhappy thoughts come, what do we do?”

Dana hung her head a little and said, “We always will be angry, fight.”

“Fight,” said Adhitthana.

What they said it so true even though I had meant to ask something else. I rephrased my question and asked what I had meant to ask, “If you are calm and unhappy thoughts come, what can we do?

Sacca sat straighter, looked at me and said, “We can take action.”

“We can fight with those thoughts,” said Dana, speaking almost in a righteous tone, “because bad things we do easily and good things we need training, some people do but not so many.”

We stopped talking, and remained quiet and relatively still for a few moments. I felt a certain emptiness in the air. A moment later I heard myself ask, “What did it take for Ruby to walk through that mob for a year?”

Upekkha said, “She was poor, nuh, and she thought I should do what I came for doing. She was there to do it, and so she thought of that and she started doing it.”

“She got an opportunity to study,” said Adhitthana. “She thought that black and white people are one only, and they should not fight. To tell people this message she was driven to study. Meaning black and white people are one only, so they should not fight, and so she went in front [of the mob] to complete her dream. To give this message to people she went and completed her dream.”

Upekkha looked towards the floor and quietly said, “Ruby was poor, and I feel when my mom comes, then I think that I am poor, and I should realise my past and all of that, and so I should study now and be a good person in my life for my mother.” I know for a fact that Upekkha and her sisters went shopping with her mom last Parent’s Day at Maher. I happened to see them at a general store in our neighbourhood and I so stopped to say hello. It was then that Upekha told her mother she did need to buy her anything.

“Yes, like Upekka said,” agreed Dana, “if we get a chance we should do it.”

Adhitthana quietly said, “Yes.”

“Even I,” said Khanti, meaning she too wants to take the chance she has been given.

“When do you remind yourself of that?” I asked.

Dana quickly answered, “When Kathak exam is there, at that time.”

Adhitthana looked at Dana and asked, “Why?”

“I’m feeling, I will not give it because it is very hard and the other way I am feeling it is nice and it will help me in my future,” said Dana, looking at nothing in particular it seems. “I can teach other children and maybe give a chance to go out, out of country.”

“What do you think would make you stronger?” I asked.

“Breathing,” said Sila. I hope she is not saying that to please me, but Sila often surprises me, and she simply seems to know and do things easier than some of the others. She is the youngest in the group.

“Metta,” said Khanti, referring to the meditation practise of loving kindness.

Sacca gently nodded her head a couple of times and said, “Metta.”
“Praying..., meditation,” added Sila.

“Concentration on the breath,” said Khanti. Again we were speaking in a stream of consciousness way.

“Metta,” said Adhitthana. As the girls referred to the loving kindness meditation, I thought of the child in the group called Metta. I wondered what it felt like to hear people speak this way about loving kindness being a source of strength. There was silence for a moment.

“Concentration,” said Sila.

Adhitthana said, “Fresh.” She stopped, and then added, “Help.” Before I could ask her what she meant Sila spoke.

“Helping,” said Sila. I understood her to mean helping others, as the children at Maher are all so used to helping one another and others beyond Maher.

I thought back to what we spoke of earlier and said, “Like Upekkha said..., people have unstable minds, and so do you remember that man you told me about that was harming people in our neighbourhood—”

“His mind was telling him to do bad because he does not have control of his mind, because he has the habit,” said Dana, sounding clear about what was this criminal’s problem. I had not finished my thought before Dana spoke, but I waited to see where the conversation would lead us.

Sacca too joined in and said, “He will say, ‘I will not do it,’ but he has the habit of doing bad things.”

“Do you think you can change such a way in the world as Ruby did?” I asked, without understanding where this conversation was leading.

“Yes,” said Sila, Dana and Sacca together.

Sila said, with determination, “We can stop pollution.”

“By social work we can help others,” said Dana, “by helping the poor people—”

“By loving others,” said Sila, interrupting.

Adhitthana convincingly said, “Yes.”

Sila said, “Kindness.”

“Love,” added Adhitthana.

“Love and kindness,” said Dana. “Every question has an answer—metta.” Dana’s sincerity seemed to silence us. Then I could not help but think of Metta, the participant child, and how despite all of the suffering she has faced her loving kindness prevails.

“And by observing our breath, what can we help ourselves to do?” I asked.

Dana said, “Control ourselves.”

“And concentrate,” said Adhitthana.

“Control ourselves,” said Dana, “and take our own decisions.”

Upekkha said calmly, “We will feel less to fight and all that.”

“And when someone does something unkind or bothersome, what can we do?” I thought back to when we spoke about how people can have unstable minds and about that man who was attacking people in our neighbourhood.

Dana said, “Control ourselves by our breath—”

Upekkha interjected and said, “We have to pay attention to it or ignore it.”

“Even when you choose to ignore it, what do you first do?” I asked.

“Go back on our breath,” said Upekkha.

I looked at the clock on the wall. We had a moment left, but I persisted and said, “When you go back to your breath, you are in contact with your mind—”

“And it gives you a choice,” said Dana, summing up what I was getting at without knowing it.
The Context

India is home to roughly 1.23 billion people. India’s population, land mass and ancient history combined with its cultural, religious and ethnic diversity makes it a country with a vast resource of experience and increasingly a space ripe for fertile change. The media often biases what it portrays, although in reality India is the source of countless untold stories. Notably those stories concern umpteen moments in a given day in which people in India resist injustice and inhumane practises in simple to complex ways but undoubtedly by exercising a certain degree of acceptance, tolerance and determination. In fact perhaps there are more people in India actively resisting oppression than there are citizens in Canada, the second largest land mass country in the world with just over a 35 million population. Essentially what reverberates from all of those untold stories is the notion that people in India are building the energy of acceptance, tolerance and determination and more and which may be largely due to a means of survival although on the other hand are energies we seem to take for granted in Canada. What is also important to remember when we consider all of those untold stories is that Indian civilisation is over 5000 years old—India germinated civilisation.

Today in India change is happening quickly in response to the international operation of globalisation. In some ways the globalisation is interpreted as constructive, such as it has led to the strengthening of India’s economy, and in many ways the globalisation is interpreted as destructive, such as the methods of globalisation has led the poor to be further isolated from their rights to human development (United Nations Development Programme, 2011, pp. 45-66). India is the largest secular democratic country in the world; it is a multi-religious, multi-language and multi-culture nation housing a third of the world’s poorest citizens, which is roughly 400 million people (Olinto, Beegle, Sobrado & Uematsu, 2013). Naturally globalisation in India leads to conspicuous and inconspicuous harm for more than half of the population who live in or below the poverty level (Mahr, 2012). Perhaps though that change also moves India with its deep roots
into a more innovative space. Regardless, necessary change is tangible, and importantly in the field of education by a variety of organisations that draw from eastern and western practise and theory in their educational modes, such as Muktangan (2014), Teach for India (2012) and Pratham (2009).

Drawing from both eastern and western ways though is not new, and today individuals and organisations stand on the shoulders of others who were inclusive of difference. In India, B. R. Ambedkar is an example of someone who was born an Indian “untouchable” and whose inclusive vision led him to seek equality within Indian society among the various castes (Ambedkar & Pritchett, 1985). Ambedkar had travelled to study in the USA, and there he met his teacher, John Dewey, with whom he worked very closely (Mukherjee, 2009). While Ambedkar and Dewey were from disparate environments, they realised that working together they could help all peoples learn how “to live as equals in this global village” (p. 345). Also, Swami Vivekananda was open to difference. Born and raised in India, he too spent time in the USA, and his experience led him to realise how in terms of spirituality the United States citizens’ were very inferior to Indians but that their society was very superior to Indians (Chinmoy, 1993, para. 3). This insight shaped Vivekananda’s concept of education. He believed education was needed for all; he said education should not force information into people but rather only through positive education should a person develop physically, mentally and spiritually (Nithiya, 2012).

To clarify, in this thesis the term spiritual relates to the word spirit, originating from both the Latin of spiritus, “breath, spirit”, which has its roots in spirare, “to breathe”, and from the Hebrew of ruach, breath, of which is neither natural like the wind or spiritual like the spirit but rather it is the creative breathing that brings the two into one being (Buber, 1926/1994, pp. 4-21). With both interpretations soul was contrasted from spirit although in fact the origin of soul always derived from breath (Francois, 2008, pp. 187-193; Watkins, 2000, p. 11). Reference to a human spirit then points to something, perhaps a subtle energy field, we have not quantified but
that is integral to human life. It is that element of human nature that we can approach, for example by a breath awareness practise, and nourish along with our other human elements. The different parts (mental, social, emotional, physical and spiritual) of a human are interconnected and therefore interdependent, and so to nourish our spiritual element as we would our various other elements is integral not only to our well-being but also to our existence (Diamond, 2007, 2013). In this thesis then the term spirituality points to the need and tendency to nourish the human spirit.

Ancient Indian education was traditionally holistic in nature. This means it was an education inclusive of the complex interrelatedness of everything known to us in existence and that was best understood through approaching our wholeness (Miller, 2010, pp. 7-8). Briefly, the word holistic derives from holism, a term coined by J. C. Smuts (1926/1961) that originates from the Greek word holos or whole (p. v). The word whole derives from the German heilig, “health”, “complete”, “entire”. Holism then refers to a universe made up of a series of progressive integrated wholes that cannot neatly be reduced into the sum of its parts. By coining holism Smuts acknowledged how the “character of ‘wholeness’ meets us everywhere and points to something fundamental in the universe” (p. 86). Therefore, in this thesis, the term holistic refers to our tendency towards wholeness or togetherness in body, mind and spirit and by way of “that unity which constitutes the whole they mutually support, enrich and ennoble each another” (p. 266). It is notable then how ancient Indian education approached the well-being of the whole person or one’s health.

Unlike western philosophy, eastern philosophy has traditionally taken into account temporality and historicity and the resultant conditioning of the human being as a means to transcend the conditioning or to decondition the human being (Eliade, 1969/2009, pp. xxvii-xxxvi; Wijesinghe, 1987, pp. 237-238). This means the goals of ancient Indian philosophy and education were the same, meaning the primary focus was on the realisation that mental and
physical events are always changing, although beneath the flux is something unchangeable, complete and whole. In ancient Indian education the student was guided to live and study in the conditioned world to transcend temporality and historicity through the development of character and goodness (Bhatta, 2009; Wijesinghe, 1987, p. 238). The teacher however was central to the student’s growth, and so the personal contact and closeness among the teacher and student depended on the teacher’s personal inward method. The spirit of the teacher’s “life and work were even more important that the things he revealed in a formal manner” (Wijesinghe, 1987, p. 239). Also, because intellectual knowledge alone would not help a student towards self-fulfillment and greater knowledge and understanding, physical work, “yoga exercises, training of the senses, the will and the emotions, as well as the development of the intellect were part of the curriculum. The aim was to integrate all elements of human nature” (p. 239).

In ancient Indian education students were guided to break free from conditioning by building their ability to chant, recite and sing, developing their intellectual and cognitive skills, engaging in community service experience and learning about and practising meditation (Wijesinghe, 1987, pp. 240-242). Perhaps not all of the those activities are employed in India’s modern ashram schools premised on ancient Indian education, although mindful practise is incorporated at the beginning and closing of each day because *stilling* the mind enough to remain *connected* to one’s own and all of nature’s non-duality is important for an individual’s growth (pp. 237-243). In fact mindful practise has become so important that increasingly it is not specific to religion and schools not premised on ancient Indian education are including it in their curriculum. This phenomenon suggests it was central in ancient Indian education for students to assimilate concepts, a practise that people such as Vivekenanda (1973) said was more crucial than knowing a library of information by heart (pp. 285-304). But the Indigenous system was eclipsed by English schools that neglected the role of elementary education in favour of higher education geared to create economic and social advantages (Jalan, 1976, pp. 34-36).
Today education in India is growing more dynamic perhaps from necessity but nevertheless a certain movement towards inclusivity is noticeable. In Maharashtra in particular there seems to be a push for balance between the different social strata, groups and sexes. Perhaps that effort towards inclusivity is in part responsible for the state’s relatively higher per capita income without a decrease in equality between the sexes, because characteristically where there is a greater per capita income there is a lower equality for women (Arora, 2012). It seems undeniable though that there is a unique trend in Maharashtra that resonates with ancient Indian philosophy and education but in a modern context. Take, for example, the burgeoning city in which the participant children live. Pune is subject to malls replacing forest, apartment buildings replacing slums and urban life replacing more affordable means of living; and it is subject to many valued non-governmental organisations and non-profits, philanthropists of all kinds and children who are brimming with will and enthusiasm. In other words, despite the downsides of development, Pune is also subject to a growing connectivity between society’s well-being and the child’s education.

Pune is where the seeds of Maher took root. Maher is the non-governmental organisation (NGO) where the participant children reside. In 1991, in the same area where the participant live and attend school, Sister Lucy Kurien, a Catholic Indian nun, was working and living at a Catholic NGO helping marginalised women secure education and employment. Sister Lucy was alone at the Catholic NGO when a local woman 7 months pregnant and in an abusive marriage sought shelter at the NGO. Sister Lucy compassionately listened to the woman and wanted to help her, although at that moment she did not have permission to give shelter to anyone. Sister Lucy told the woman to return the next day and in the meantime she would make the necessary arrangements. Later in the evening though Sister Lucy heard a piercing scream, and when she ran outside to see what had happened, she saw the pregnant woman covered in flames. Sister Lucy did everything she could but the woman and her unborn child died from 90% burns. From
that experience Sister Lucy left the traditional ways of being a nun and founded Maher, a space where “there is always room for one more” (Maher, 2014, About Maher section).

The word *maher* is a Marathi term meaning “mother’s home”. There are Maher homes in Maharashtra, Kerala and Jharkhand. Maher provides shelter, rehabilitation and if possible reintegration into society for primarily destitute Indian women and children; it creates hope, belonging and understanding by helping “destitute women, children and men from all over India exercise their right to a higher quality of life, irrespective of gender, caste, creed or religion” (Maher, 2014, About Maher section). Eight female children ages 11 to 16 who reside at Maher in Pune are participating in this study. This study focuses around the participant children’s lived experiences of their mindful practise. The mindful practise they use is called Anapana Meditation as taught by Mr. Satya Narayan Goenka and all of the children who reside at Maher learn Anapana Meditation.

Briefly, *anapana* is a Pali word. It is generally believed that when Siddhartha Gautama (Gautama Buddha) enlightened (c. 563-400 BCE) he did not speak in Sanskrit but rather the local languages of the areas in which he taught, because then the local peoples could remember his teachings (Norman, 1983, pp. 1-5). It is more generally understood that eventually Buddhist monks used the ancient language Pali to interpret and translate those teachings (pp. 1-5). So the word *anapana* is a Pali term, *ana* means “in breath” and *apana* means “out breath” (Anapana Meditation for Children and Teens, n.d., Teens section). The word *anapana* itself has become more commonly used to refer to breath practises in general by people familiar with Gautama Buddha’s teachings. Unless otherwise stated, this study focuses on the use of the word with reference to Anapana Meditation as taught by Mr. Satya Narayan Goenka. Anapana Meditation focuses on concentration of the mind through breath awareness. The meditation practise incorporates Metta Meditation. The word *metta* is a Pali term meaning “good will” and “selfless love” (Goenka, 1987/2010, p. 85). Metta Meditation focuses on generating selfless love for
oneself, others and all of life and is practised at the end of Anapana Meditation (Anapana Meditation for Children and Teens, n.d.). In this thesis, further discussion on Anapana Meditation includes reference to Metta Meditation.

Sister Lucy, Maher’s executive director, says, “Meditation is as necessary as food and water.” Sister Lucy’s enriched childhood environment supported her to meditate, and so she in turn encourages children at Maher to meditate. Sister Lucy like many Catholic Indian nuns and priests have learned and practised different meditation practices, such as Zen Meditation and Vipassana Meditation as taught by Goenka. Although Sister Lucy continues to meditate when she can she does not attach herself to a particular meditation technique. She does however support and even insist the Maher children learn Anapana Meditation, which in fact is the first step to learning Vipassana Meditation as taught by Goenka.

India is a country home to many sacred sites and monuments and has a history of saints and sages who have openly shared their learnings and teachings with others throughout the world; it is a land where many people come from afar and travel for days within for purposes of well-being. Siddhartha Gautama, born in Nepal, travelled to India where in Bihar he sat under the tree of knowledge (Bodhi Tree) and innovated through using his inner means a way to cure human suffering first and foremost by curing himself. In fact Gautama Buddha was of a succession of Buddhas (Kariyawasam, 2006). Buddha is a name referring to someone who is awake to everything inside and outside of the self with a deep understanding and love (Hanh, 2001, pp. 7-9). But Gautama Buddha was unique because he attained enlightenment and died as a human being so that he could have a career as a bodhisattva, meaning that he enlightened as a human being in order to serve others on their path to enlightenment (Kariyawasam, 2006).

Gautama Buddha through practise discovered how to use virtue, concentration and insight to bridge the body and the mind in an accessible way; he became a Buddha using himself as his laboratory to explore and understand the science of the mind. As a Buddha, he offered
experiential teachings and practices suitable to each person (Kornfield, 2008, pp. 6-7). Vipassana Meditation as taught by Goenka is based on the original teachings of Gautama Buddha and is accepted from among people of different race, creed and religion in India and worldwide because it is universal, non-sectarian and solely run on a donation basis. Sister Lucy supports the Maher children to learn Anapana Meditation because it is cost-free, secular and helps the children self-regulate, and so overall it supports Maher’s interfaith and holistic practises (Maher, 2014, About Maher section). Maher is not alone though, and other individuals and groups of people, both in the private and public sectors in India, practice the secular meditation (Global Vipassana Foundation, 2006-2011).

The Approach

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience as we immediately experience it and prior to any reflection on it (van Manen, 1990, p. 9). This study engages phenomenological enquiry with an orientation towards pedagogy and relies on educational holistic attitudes and theory to approach the participant children’s lived experiences around the theme of their secular meditation practise. The three primary questions guiding this study centre around the nature of the participant children’s lived experiences or how they really experience their meditation practise. This means I engage phenomenology to investigate the participant children’s mindful practise and uncover the layers of its meaning because those meanings of lived experience are usually concealed (van Manen, 1990). The primary guiding questions are as follows: 1) How does the child experience meditation? 2) How does the child build morality through meditation practise? 3) How does the child’s meditation practise offer certain “protective” benefits?

This kind of qualitative research can be of implicit value (Cole, 1986a; Erikson, 1977; Freud, 1989; Montessori, 1947). It can especially be useful now though as we introduce mindful
practises in educational settings worldwide (Hawn Foundation, 2011-2013; Kim, 2011; Learning to Breathe, 2009-2013; Smith, 2010). In part, the increasing interest in mindful practices is influenced by western scientific studies on the effects of meditation on the human brain and body (Davidson & Begley, 2012), which are largely in response to crises such as the Twin Towers tragedy in New York City and the growing dis-ease in western countries (Lantieri, 2012). The results of those studies may be producing new insights, but they also support how the primary effects from meditation are knowable through practise. With this in mind and because children worldwide are currently being introduced to different mindful practices, this study focuses on listening to and learning from children who are experienced meditation practitioners.

I investigated working on this study with children in Canada, the USA and England, but at that time there was little if no response from people in those countries. This means few children were actively engaged in a mindful practise enough such that I could conduct a study and also the few adults I did speak with seemed hesitant to get involved. However the first person I contacted in India led to a quick turn of events that enabled me to choose from a list of potential projects that involved working with children who practise Anapana Meditation in India. Maher was included in that list, and after taking everything into consideration it grew obvious to me to approach Maher. Maher responded promptly, and soon enough I was sent a list of over 20 children, and all of whom attended English medium schools and either practised Anapana Meditation at school or were very familiar with Anapana Meditation. When I received this list, I decided to select a smaller number of children so that I could work more intimately with them. To help me pare down the list, I decided to interview only females. I worked exclusively with females because I felt I would better relate to them and I sensed it may help our society to develop more understanding if we were to listen to and learn from female children around the theme of meditation (Because I am a Girl, 2014; Segran, 2010; Virk & Cheema, 2011).

The eight participant children’s respective stories began unfolding in August 2011 in
Pune. We met for the first time in their Maher home, in which at that time 23 children and two adults lived in a three room ground floor house. I had approached the children unofficially as a volunteer meditation group facilitator, and my primary job was to help build trust with each participant child and the whole of their Maher household. I did not seek insight into the participant children’s histories at all. Then after several months the girls began sharing their personal stories, and their disclosures signalled to me the meaning and the purpose of our weekly phone contact and when possible monthly visits. Briefly, I travelled from Mumbai to Pune to visit with the children during those first several months. I was living in Mumbai doing an intensive 9 month International Montessori Primary Teacher Training program to gain the holistic attitudes and theory from which I could draw for this study. Following that training program I moved to Pune and lived in the same neighbourhood as the participant children. After 2 years of ongoing contact with the participant children, we started working together officially, which means I directly observed and held interviews with each participant child at least thrice.

Throughout this study people have raised concerns about conducting research with child participants; people who play such a role are referred to as “gatekeepers” (Christensen & James, 2000, pp. 182-183; Hood et al., 1996). Gatekeepers in this study included my thesis committee, the University of Toronto Review Ethics Board, organisations in India, professionals, caregivers, parents, teachers and community members. I would add though that the “final gatekeepers” in this project seemed to be the children themselves not only because this study relies on the children for their narratives but also because of the holistic nature of the study, meaning the project depended on a certain authenticity which would guide the children to participate as they did (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 210). Therefore the process of working with the gatekeepers was accumulative in the sense that as time went by the ongoing challenges of working with the gatekeepers helped me to understand the depth of care required to work with children, and how that responsibility is never to be taken lightly.
The process also forced me to see how we perpetuate the myths around what adult gatekeepers protect, which is bound up in why adults resist listening to and learning from children. To my knowledge there is no study focusing on this subject area, but indirectly it is addressed in studies like this one in its attention to children and their needs and tendencies. My sense is the myths are perpetuated because we do not incorporate in education the different aspects of life we need to work with if we were to live a more balanced life. The idea of meeting our needs and tendencies through education relates back to the discussion around Indigenous ways and ancient Indian education. Due to our choices and mainly through sheer habit we bias certain aspects that result in strengthening our conditioned behaviour. By our omission to decondition ourselves, say through the developing of character and goodness, we lose contact with our true nature. Perhaps this idea is more tangible if were to consider how western society biases a way of living tethered to things like efficiency, production and material gain. Such a bias can only lead people to generate beliefs that “protect” children in so far as the bias permits. In turn children inherit a mindset biasing such conditioned behaviour.

Research on and with children in the field of education and in other fields in the social sciences does exist (Burgess, 1998, p. xv). That said the definitions of children are limited and produce and perpetuate hegemonic research that is not inclusive of the child’s representative voice let alone the cultural differences among children (Glass, 2001; Masson, 2000, p. 34; Soto & Swadener, 2005, p. 32). The research on or with children therefore points to how we can take more seriously children as social actors (Christensen & James, 2000). Listening to and understanding the often disregarded child’s voice requires a researcher to remain open and vulnerable and willing to recognise and challenge even one’s own deep-seated assumptions and prejudices about the child (Soto & Swadener, 2005, p. 32). Ironically that openness and vulnerability are characteristic qualities of the child—its mind—that we rely on as adults to reflect to us our true nature. There is a Lakota proverb that says, “The ones that matter most are
the children. They are the true human beings” (Zona, 1994, p. 95).

Pedagogical research with the child requires a rare listening, patience and innovation because the researcher must build meaningful relationships with the participant child, and only then from that fertile space will the researcher be able to pay attention to what the child's voice points to and understand with what method to proceed if at all (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000; Soto et Swadener, 2005). This kind of innovative research is rarely funded and/or seriously because “the stakes are too high to risk not getting ‘good’ (in conventional terms) data” (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000, pp. 192-193). In other words, innovation is discouraged (p. 193). In fact, I was warned against researching on a mindful practise and was told that “these” (mindful practise) conversations are not happening. Discouraged, I consulted with a few more people, researched further on the subject and reflected and listened for insights through stillness, meditation and journaling. Step by step and in a relatively short time span the project was approved, and that confirmed to me how attempting to listen to and learn from female children in India around the theme of their secular meditation practise was important.

To support following the child on the theme of its mindful practise, this study engages holistic education attitudes and theory with a special emphasis on Montessori and her theory and practise. The kind of research this study attempts to do with children seems rare, and for this reason I feel it is necessary to engage attitudes and theory that maintain a certain degree of flexibility. This study encourages following children and understanding from that process how better to support their important work, because renewal is only possible when we listen to children and see how in their own unique ways they are social actors. Also, this study focuses on listening to children around a theme that is difficult to measure. Especially measuring the deeper transformations can be intangible, but because we are human we share likenesses, such as the need to care for the inner dimension of our human nature, and so research may “prove reasonable and helpful for learning and living” (Hart, 2008, p. 239).
In the previous section I referred to holistic education in the context of Indigenous ways and ancient Indian civilization. In western education however the term holistic education arose in the 1980’s (Miller, 2011, pp. 120-121). The term or specialisation in the field of education developed in response to what the Fordian era alone could not fulfill; ultimately it was inspired by a common desire to reconnect with a “sense of awe and reverence for life that arises from our relatedness to something both wonderful and mysterious” (Miller, 2007, p. 4). Jack (John) Miller (2014) has cultivated the holistic education field for over 30 years. Miller’s (2007, 2010) holistic education model includes three predominate holistic education characteristics—balance, inclusion and connection. I learned about the holistic education field from Miller when I participated in his Holistic Curriculum graduate course. Academically speaking, the course was foundational because in theory and practise I began to understand the model of incorporation of balance, inclusion and connection—nature’s interrelatedness and dynamism—in the classroom setting (Miller, 2007, pp. 21-22).

In the several months proceeding Miller’s course, I further researched the field of holistic education and simultaneously began to explore the possibility of conducting a study around the theme of children’s meditation practise. During that time not only did I learn of Maher and the participant children but also I observed a Montessori class for a graduate methodology course assignment. It was only a matter of time before I saw a point of intersection between Maher’s, Montessori’s and Gautama Buddha’s theory and practise: To grow beyond personal suffering we can transform experientially through systematically working with the reality as it is (Keepin & Brix, 2010; Lillard, 2005, pp. 102-109; Selim 2011, pp. 56-58). But to investigate that point of intersection more seriously meant further holistic education training with a focus on the child and lots of contact with Maher and the participant children, and hence I travelled to India to prepare for this study.

From the onset of the Montessori teacher training program, I was impressed not so much
by Montessori at that stage but rather by her focus on the child, and its profound abilities that awaken in an environment of balance, inclusion and connection. Montessori was moved by the child’s profundity, and such that her work with children led to three consecutive Nobel Peace Prize nominations for a foundational science of peace through education (Miller, 2002, p. 32).

Montessori’s life work with our youngest citizens continues to unfold, and notably as of late alongside the current activity around mindful education and the neurological significance of a whole education (Diamond, 2010, 2012; Diamond and Lee, 2011; Hughes, 2009; Lillard, 2011; Britton et al, 2014).

The teacher training program helped me to have courage, and trust in the child’s abilities, which experientially Montessori discovered without looking, expecting or even thinking about them. Her discovery “was a genuine and unforeseen revelation” (Standing, 1957/1998, p. 154). I learned more than I can possibly mention now, but overall I was introduced to me the myriad ways a child communicates, and how through following the child I can directly observe it so as to help guide it towards concentration—the primary step to being mindful (Hanh, 2011, p. 226). The child who does not build-up concentration is “agitated until he seeks something within the depths of his mind that he has not yet found for himself” (Montessori, 1970, pp. 81-82).

Montessori (1936/2003) observed how a child with proper guidance, patience and perseverance who “had at first very slight power of concentration found a way out of this state of chaos” (pp. 153-154). The adult’s role is to follow the child and not impede and threaten the child’s growth as nature and not the adult intends.

After the Montessori training I relocated from Mumbai to Pune, and shortly thereafter I learned of Robert Coles’ and his work with children using a phenomenological approach. Coles is a paediatrician, child psychiatrist and English professor who worked with children from diverse backgrounds to elicit their help on matters affecting them. Erik Erikson had explained to Coles how “we can learn about the world through the eyes and ears of children; What they notice
and remember hearing gives us a good idea of what is out there, waiting for them to attend to” (Marten, 2002, p. xi). Guided by Erikson, Anna Freud and William Carlos William and more, Coles began gathering children’s lived experiences in their own words because he realised their stories spoke for themselves (London, 2012, para. 3). Coles (2003) found this to be especially true for children in crises. He says, “The whole point of this work has been to put myself ... in a position, with respect to a number of children, that offers them a chance to indicate a certain amount for themselves to me, and through me, to others. But each life, as we ought to know, has its own authority, dignity, fragility, rock-bottom strength” (Wronka, 1998, p. 249).

Phenomenological research begins in the world of lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). This means its subject matter is always the structures of meaning of the lived human world or the lived experiences of humans (p. 11). Edmund Husserl used the term “lived experience” to signify “a givenness of internal consciousness, inward perceivedness” (Husserl, 1964/1928, p. 177). Husserl described the “givenness” of internal consciousness as something pre-reflective and pre-theoretical, and that once we reflect with awareness on a phenomenon it is through that reflection “we are able to transform or remake ourselves in the true sense” of education (van Manen, 1990, p. 7). The methodology engaged in this study was largely inspired by what Coles (1997) referred to as his literary documentary work with children. Coles seemed cautious about labelling his work though, and especially when he referred to his methodology. Eventually he suggested that his work was along the lines of what was at that time more of a European practise—phenomenological enquiry—because it did not seek to reduce, simplify, explain with a definition or conclusion that accounted for or took care of everything (Brainard, 1990, p. 41; Coles, 1997, pp. 37-38).

Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory but rather the possibility of plausible insights that brings us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen 2001, p. 9). Carina Henriksson (2012) referred to phenomenology, and specifically in terms of
hermeneutic phenomenology and pedagogical practise, and said that it “teaches us to open our minds to wonder; to appreciate the unexpected; to keep an open mind and to begin to cherish what is unique in every human being” (p. 131). Phenomenological enquiry then encourages a reductive approach inclusive of diversity and even holistic in its inclination towards receptivity (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89; van Manen, 2014, p. 218). Notably, that open system of approach since the mid 1990s has grown more popular in the practical, applied and professional disciplines such as law, health science and education (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 615). Max van Manen is responsible for introducing phenomenology into education as a practise, and so his work emphasises empirical and reflection methods for an action sensitive pedagogy as parents, teachers or educators (p. 616).

Practise phenomenology means trying to subordinate the personality so as to parenthesise (Husserl, 1982, pp. 131-132) the phenomenon studied and “place outside of it one’s own knowledge” to study the essential structures of the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). This phenomenological mode is also termed “reduction” and requires reflecting such that space is created in which to not “analyse, explicate or evaluate” but rather to “extract the experience made manifest by means of the work” (Greene, 1971, p. 254). To reduce is to try and bring the lifeworld to light as it is so that the reflection itself mirrors the un-reflective life of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). According to van Manen (2007), the phenomenology of practise “operates in the space of the formative relations between who we are and who we may become, between how we think or feel and how we act. And these formative relations have pedagogical consequence for professional and everyday practical life” (p. 26). Even though this study relies on Coles’ experience and method of working with children, his work is grounded in van Manen's development of the phenomenology of practise with a pedagogic orientation because of it foregrounds action sensitive pedagogy.

Phenomenology draws upon subjective experience, “but the description and interpretation
that are its method are also prerequisites in everyday communication. We regularly share stories about our experiences: Phenomenology is thus also a matter of intersubjectivity and interaction” (Henriksson, 2012, p. 121). Phenomenology then can help us in our relations to be better because it is through such method that we turn and face—although inviting uncomfortable feelings and more work, adversity, diversity and complexity—the world (pp. 121-122). van Manen (2012) states that “the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the meaning of something” (“Inquiry”). But he suggests the determination and explication of something is difficult because of our pre-reflective lived understanding of something and a self-reflective grasp of the phenomenological structure of the lived meaning of something (“Inquiry”). Moreover, the later tends to be trickier because it requires working with the complexity around internalising, clarifying and then explicating the aspects of meaning of the lived experience.

Coles’ approaches that complexity by building a friendship with the children (London, 2012, “A Way of Seeing,” para. 5); by asking children significant open ended questions, and then letting them speak (Coles, 1989, p. 11); he looks for setting, character and plot as he pieces together story fragments drawn from a series of semi-structured interviews and direct observations (Coles, 1989, pp. 6-8; van Manen, 1989, pp. 131-132); he loosely circles around themes, refers to theory, if necessary, but later, and occasionally adds to the children’s stories his own self-referential reflections (London, 2012, “A Way of Seeing,” paras. 4; van Manen, 1990, pp. 78-79). This means Coles extracts the meaning of the work after careful listening and reporting of the narratives and all the while “mindful of the dangers of sweeping generalizations and hastily drawn conclusions” (Coles, 1990, p. 334; London, 2012, “A Way of Seeing,” paras. 3-4). In other words, he accepts the ‘maybe-ism’ of phenomenology (Henriksson, 2012, p. 135). This approach leads to an atmosphere in which the child becomes “an authority and all the meetings occasions for a teacher—the child—to offer, gradually, a lesson” (Coles, 1990, p. 42).

Understanding then begins with the “facticity” of lived experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii).
This phenomenological approach dovetails with how mindful practices encourage an attitude of awareness in the present moment with acceptance and non-reaction. Husserl (1981) referred to phenomenology as a “science of endless scope ... inferior in methodological rigour to none of the modern sciences” (pp. 9-10). He said that all philosophical disciplines originate from phenomenology, and from the development of phenomenology alone those disciplines will “gain their proper force” (pp. 9-10). Similarly, children who practise mindfulness are encouraged to work with and develop the “facticity” of their lived experiences with the intention they themselves will “gain their proper force”. Most mindful practices though do not rely on language to convey their meaning, but the field of human science does, and so I use language in order to understand and convey the participant children’s lived experiences around the theme of their mindful practise (van Manen, 1990, p. 23).

Although this study relies on Coles’ method to gather the participant children’s lived experiences, a few developments around methodology require further explanation. First, the semi-structured interviews with the participant children lasted from 1 to 2 hours at a time. It was the first time the children and I had sat alone and spoken in an intimate way; and I was unsure if the participant children due to cultural, societal and personal reasons would be able to sit and communicate with me one-on-one. I was in awe from our interactions. I also felt confident the interviews succeeded because of the children and their respective natures, because of our focus on a mindful practise in theory and practise and because this study remained rooted in its phenomenological guiding questions (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 58-59). From this a certain natural order seemed to transcend anything that was prescribed. Montessori (1949/2002) says, “The law of nature is order, and when order comes of itself, we know that we have re-entered the order of the universe,” and that by taking care of the natural order and allowing the children to live to their capacities the material problems will be solved (pp. 297-298).

Second, the semi-structured interviews with the adult participants were held after or
towards the end of the interviews with the children, which fell into place as a result of people’s availability. It soon grew obvious that this ordering of events was best because the children had a lot to share and what they said was supported by what the participant adults’ contributions. Sometimes I doubted the children’s stories were enough, and that would require I do more literature review, speak with my academic guides and reflect in different ways. Eventually I would proceed despite my own and other’s conditioning that the child’s story is not equally as important or is less important than the adult’s. Certainly remaining close by the children to work together around their mindful practise consecutively for 2 years and 8 months and maintaining my own personal daily secular meditation practise was invaluable and helped me to face and root out more deeply what I understand as western theory and practice around children and childhood.

The third element refers to three key aspects of the phenomenology of practice—listening, reflecting and writing (van Manen, 2014, pp. 311-391). van Manen said how “writing and research are practically inseparable pedagogical activities. The type of reflection required in the act of hermeneutic phenomenological writing on the meanings and significances of phenomena of daily life is fundamental to pedagogic research” (van Manen, 1990, p. 4). As van Manen intimated and I learned through this study, listening, reflecting and writing in the research process could be confused as a solitary act. The research process and specifically doing phenomenology means accepting how the “meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one dimensional” because meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered (pp. 77-78). Importantly that process is ongoing.

With that in mind, I want to refer to a meditation journal I began in Jack Miller’s graduate Holistic Curriculum course in 2010 that documents a lot of this study’s backstory in a mindful way, meaning I try to reflect on the events around this study with an awareness of my mindful practise in theory and practise. Overall the meditation journal not only helps me with my
secular mindful practice but also it helps me to put into practice a moment to moment awareness throughout my studies. I always thought I put my mindful practice first, but then I joined the doctoral program and I heard myself say that I would only remain in the program if I did not compromise my spirit. At the time, I did not know what that meant other than to continue with what I was doing, meaning I would maintain my daily 2 hour daily meditation practice, develop my morals and virtues and serve others. The meditation journal however helped me to discover what that promise actually entailed.

The meditation journal forced me to slow down enough such that I began to pinpoint better what was and was not essential. Overall the energy of concentration developed around maintaining the journal helped me to look into my “blind spots” and challenge myself to investigate not only how I was living the practise as a person but also for the first time as an academic student. I faced and continue to face uncomfortable and challenging aspects of maintaining a living practise as a doctoral candidate preparing to lead others. In this way, the meditation journal can be said to be the catalyst for some personal “measure of pedagogy” standard of my own research (van Manen, 1990, pp. 135-160). Through trying to balance the varying influences, and be pedagogically responsible by relating “the particular to the universal, part to whole, episode to totality” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36), I better recall that the mundane world is a means for mindful practise (Henriksson, 2012, p. 314).

Journals and logs are used in quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research studies and also excerpts from journals/logs have been included in academic documents (Bolin, Khramtsova & Saarni, 2005; Bringer, Johnston & Brackenridge, 2004; Esbjorn-Hargens, 2006; Ortliipp, 2008). But to my knowledge there is no academic scholar or academic peer whom I can quote with reference to this study and how the meditation journal, and indirectly meditation, was used as an applied method in the phenomenology of practise, and especially with reference to pedagogy. That said phenomenological methodology encourages research on anything that is
presented to consciousness, and so anything pointing to the lived experience and the
development of a sensitivity to the wonder in and around us (van Manen, 2014, pp. 31-36). That
focus highlights how those things matter because consciousness “is the only access human
beings have to the world” and the depth and degree to which we are conscious largely depends
on the approach we choose (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

**Educated Defences or Educational Ability**

Robert Coles was teaching a fifth grade class in the USA when he asked the students, “If you
were someone running this school, what would you do to make life better for the boys and girls
whose education you were trying to make as sound and solid as possible?” (Coles, 1997, p. 18).
The students responded with silence, that is until Martha Anne, age 10, said, “Why—mean, why
ask us?” (p. 18). Coles’ reply was wordy and something he admitted to himself was weak. He
moved onto the next activity, the spelling lesson, and that’s when he realised how he could
readdress his earlier question through careful word choice. “Advocacy,” said Coles, following
which the students began to write (pp. 18-19). After a moment or so, Martha Anne raised her
hand and asked, “Can you do this ‘advocacy,’ if no one out there is going to listen to you? My
momma says: ‘People don’t pay us mind, only big shots.’ She says, ‘Big shots talk to big shots.’
That’s what goes on, and that’s how it’s decided what happens. If us kids, if our folks, even if we
tried to dialogue, the people who run the show would get huffy. My grandma, she says people
‘up there,’ they get huffy, even our own [Afro-American] folks” (pp. 18-19).

What followed was a lively and even agitated conversation on class, race, money and
power and how all of that connects with everything, including education, their own and others. It
was towards the end of the lively conversation that Martha Anne said, “If you’re going to be
advocating, you should be making your connections; you should try to have on your tongue
what’s passed into your ears, from the folks you want to help. I mean, you see, you should make
those folks your teachers, and you’re learning your lessons from them, and then you write the lessons down for somebody else to know ... get more and more people to be ‘in the know’” (Coles, 1997, pp. 18-19).

That conversation was published as an article entitled, “Learning advocacy from children,” in a journal called, “School Administrator.” It depicts an adult who is interested in speaking with children on their lived experiences; it conveys how children when they feel relatively safe to speak have a lot to say about their lived experiences; and it points to divisions within society in different ways but importantly a division in the child because a child would not wonder why its lived experience matters if the child knows its lived experience matters. Notably within the context of education the conversation highlights how the child’s education has led to the build-up of defences or what Montessori referred to as “deviations”, “fugues” or “psychic barriers” (Montessori, 1936/2003, pp. 159-185). The defences derive from the idea of being defensive, a behaviour of which causes the child to flee reality or deviate from its natural course of development because of “road blocks” in the developmental process. In other words the child who flees reality is a child whose “environment cannot lead to any concentration of the spirit and which has no purpose” for the child, and so the child will flee into, for example, fantasy, disruptive behaviour and anxiety (Montessori, 1936/2003, pp. 160-161). Montessori concluded that all defences were a direct result of the child’s environment, an environment in which the child’s spontaneous movement was inhibited by obstacles preventing its normal growth.

The conversation also presents the possibility of a greater freedom for everyone. The possibility though begins with listening to the child’s lived experience to understand how to support the child’s dynamic educational abilities. Montessori (1947) sent a letter to all governments to address the child as the “forgotten citizen” and how “if statesmen and educationists once came to realise the terrific force that is in childhood ... I feel they would give it priority above everything else. All problems of humanity depend on man himself; if man is
disregarded in his construction, the problems will never be solved” (Montessori, 1947). In a speech Gandhi (1971) gave at a Montessori Training College in London he says, “The greatest lessons in life if we would but stoop and humble ourselves, we would learn not from grown-up learned men, but from the so-called ignorant children ... if we would approach babes in humility and in innocence, we would learn wisdom from them” (p. 240). In other words, through education we can shift our focus from the building of defences to the building of ability.

That shift though means thinking less positivistically because that mode of thinking is rooted in a Greek ideology of knowledge devoid of true learning (Dewey, 1916/2004, pp. 143-145). As a society we bias knowledge based on hard science. In turn, the value of learning inclusive of uncertainty, making and learning from mistakes and intuition is overshadowed. This is not new information and people across the centuries have tried in different ways to create opportunities for more inclusive thinking. For example, in the field of education, Johann Pestalozzi toiled to help humanity improve by innovating a method of learning and teaching that was oriented to the child (Bowers & Gehring, 2004; Horlacher, 2011b). Pestalozzi worked extensively with orphan children at a time when people questioned enlightenment and said that it should only be called enlightenment if everyone could attain it. Pestalozzi’s response to popular enlightenment was to develop an educational institution focused on a natural education for all children that put what was right and good ahead of the quest for what as correct or certain (Horlacher, 2011a).

An ideal education then is one inclusive of both uncertainty and certainty or where knowledge is based on adopting an understanding of the internal phenomena in correspondence with external phenomena and technological advances (Levey & Levey, 2014, pp. x-xii; Hanh, 2011b, p. 298). In the east, Rabindranath Tagore synthesised the ideals of ancient Indian and western modern education to create an education based on the goal of attainment of freedom through the “complete harmonious development of individual personality” (Bhattacharya, 2014,
Chapter 3; Jalan, 1976, pp. vi-ix). In the west, Montessori drew from western anthropologists, psychologists and pedagogists and eventually ancient Indian philosophy and education to create a methodology and philosophy serving the child’s needs and tendencies. It is important to add how both educationists and more have worked to build an inclusive education emphasising more practise than theory, the lessening of abstraction and increase of contact with the lifeworld of children and the care for a connection of education with the lifeworld (van Manen, 1990, p. 135).

Montessori (1936/2003) said that if we were to build a healthy society through education we must realise “there are two social questions because there are two forms of life, and hence two needs to consider—the social question of the adult and the social question of the child” (p. 197). To approach the social questions of the child means to approach the child and its abilities with an attitude of openness, innocence and flexibility—those qualities most inherent to the nature of the child and which through different mindful practises we are currently reapproaching. People who have put their trust in the child’s abilities have also insisted education is the way to respond not only to the social question of the child but also the adult or society. That understanding is holistic by nature; it prioritises accounting for our wholeness. In turn we cannot help but acknowledge how that “vision of human wholeness can be traced back to the Indigenous peoples who saw themselves as part of a whole or an interconnected web” (Miller, 2010, p. 7).

The holistic way of life that was once native to the Indigenous cultures and ancient teachings worldwide was crippled by colonial agendas. Subsequently it was not until the late 18th century onwards that educationists, such as Pestalozzi (1895/1977), Friedrich Froebel (1887) and Montessori (1966/2003), started to actively address how reform in society could only come about with an education that began with the child and incorporated a holistic approach taking greater responsibility towards leading the child in such a way that enabled us to live better (Bowers & Gehring, 2004; Rohrs, 1982; Valkanova & Brehony, 2006). It should be noted here that the term pedagogy derives from the Greek word paidagōgos, “pedagogue”, denoting a slave who
accompanied children to school and generally supervised them or paidos, “child”, and ago, “lead”. Too, the term education is a derivative of the Latin word educere, “to lead out”.

Perhaps we are “coming full circle” as we reapproach Indigenous and ancient teachings in modern ways. If this were true it would suggest that what matters most has not changed, meaning we need compassion, proper care and an environment in which to explore and grow. With that in mind, in terms of education, western science research shows how the child’s ability to learn depends more on the teacher’s humanity than on the lesson or lesson materials and teacher’s skill; the child learns best through doing and assimilating knowledge rather than through transmission of information; and the child who feels loved, especially feels heard and understood, is a happier child who is more capable of becoming who it is capable of being (Diamond, 2013). These key understandings speak to nature’s supportive presence in the process of teaching and learning. Pestalozzi referred to education as the art of instruction or education that nature scatters before us and in confusion the art puts together in a boundary, orderly and thoughtful way (Hayward, 1904, p. 34). Although the art “depends on the harmony of its results and work, with the essential workings of Nature. Its whole action is one and the same with that of Nature” (p. 34).

Some educationists have emphasised working with the immediate perceptions by remaining with objects before words because doing that naturally leads to self-activity (Bowers & Gehring, 2004). For example, Montessori offered the child an experience connected with its life world and importantly something through which it could work independently so it could build-up its concentration and in turn respond to its internal guide (Lillard, 2005, pp. 102-113). Montessori (1917/1965) said that “freedom in intellectual work is found to be the basis of internal discipline” (pp. 108-109). This means the child who does not engage with its environment meaningfully is a child who cannot fix its attention on something but rather is lead like a slave by its sensations and flies. Today child development theorists notice a strong
correlation between self-regulation and attention (Ruff & Rothbart, 1996). In other words, a child’s focused attention is similar to the psychological moment when an artist who has realised the ideal expression is interrupted; although the child does not lose a single piece of production but its chance to create itself (Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 22-23).

A child that exercises its ability to concentrate and build-up its inner discipline is a child who can better regulate its attention and behaviour, and in turn its emotional regulation or psychological adjustment, competent social functioning, empathy, sympathy and more (Lillard, 2005, p. 103; Eisenberg et al., 2001, 2004). Again, the emphasis is on the adult and how the child is led (Diamond, 2010; Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 30-31; Pestalozzi, 1973; Ryan, 2012, pp. 80-82). If the adult is under stress and/or has an underdeveloped ability to be mindful enough to observe, reflect and listen closely, the adult will be unable to follow the child and recognise and/or respond to the child’s needs and tendencies. Montessori spoke of the term horme, a Greek term Percy Nunn adopted to refer to a person’s life force. Nunn said that if the horme was not used for its purpose it would deviate and channel into defence mechanisms, such as fantasy, disruptive behaviour and anxiety (Nunn, 1920/1949, pp. 10-23; Rohrs, 1982).

Montessori observed that the child was driven by an inner urge to construct itself. But if the child was obstructed from responding to that inner urge the ability to pay attention and remain focused on an activity, such as doing a math equation, listening to a story or eating a snack, was compromised because the child’s internal discipline was weak due to a lack of exercising its horme. This means when a child’s horme is weak any appearance of discipline is likely programmed according to the adult’s behaviour (Montessori, 1949/2002, pp. 261-269).

Today, western science increasingly shows that it is imperative for a child to access its core developmental skills to be enable the child to make decisions preventing it from developing or strengthening its defence mechanisms, e.g., inhibition, aggressiveness or depression (Britton et al, 2014; Diamond, 2014; Diamond & Lee, 2011; Lillard, 2011; Montessori, 1949/2002, p. 215).
In the Montessori (1949/2002) environment the teacher/guide is responsible for the learning environment in which the child constructs itself; although importantly in turn as the child constructs itself it guides the adult to live better (pp. 287-298). Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) referred to that reciprocal interchange as bidirectionally influential, meaning it sustained and enhanced a mutual trust and goal consensus between all levels of environments (p. 218). That said, even though everything is interconnected and interdependent, and the power of bidirectional influences is available to us, the adult appears “encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with what is positively perverse” (Dewey, 1916/2004, p. 20). Dewey (1916/2004) believed it was the school’s duty to omit what is “trivial” and “perverse” from “the environment which it supplies, and thereby doing what it can to counteract their influence in the ordinary social environment” (p. 20). That is to say that the child acts like a sponge and absorbs its environment, and subsequently becomes “encumbered” such that the reversal of character becomes very difficult and perhaps impossible (Montessori, 1936/2003, pp. 165-166).

Gandhi (1971) preached that if “we are to reach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children” (p. 240). Gandhi’s vision was to serve the weakest members of society first because “independence begins at the bottom” (Murthy, 1987, p. 189). He felt that creating an education based within people’s means would help the weakest members of society empower themselves and experience a more moral education focusing on the “integrated training of body, mind and spirit” (Allen, 2007). Although the peace that Gandhi referred to was not only a reference to a “negative peace” or a peace of non-violence but also a “positive peace” or a peace addressing and working on the underlying causes of “war and direct violence—such as poverty and racism” (Joshee, 2006, p. 6).

Usha Nayar speaks about children as a means to “positive peace”. Notably Nayar supports the inclusivity of children’s lived experiences on subjects that directly affect them and
stresses how the children’s voices must be heard and listened to respectfully because their experiences matter as citizens of the world. Nayar (2011) says that although worldwide adults are taking more seriously child participation, “children’s opinions, experiences, and voices should not be dismissed because their worldview is different from adults. It is important that both girls and boys as children are to be understood by listening to them and their viewpoints on matters that affect their lives directly” (p. 18). Although pathways have been made by non-traditional or self-supporting bodies to improve the way we meet the child’s basic needs and tendencies, listening to the child still does not coincide with our predominant global system.

Stepping towards “positive peace” means approaching how we as adults do not listen to and therefore do not understand our youngest citizens, and how as a result the “adult and the child, made to love one another and live together, find themselves in conflict through an incomprehension that corrodes the roots of life, and which takes place in impenetrable secrecy” (Montessori, 1936/2003, p. 197). Montessori (1946) focused on the development of a humane world through the child because “the child is the constructor” of the human being (p. 8). She directly observed and collaborated with children to understand the child’s abilities to such a depth that she created an educational environment for its life. That space was intended for the child to be free to work and grow by heeding to its needs and tendencies and not the adult’s. The child too has its own “great, important, difficult work indeed,” the work of creating the human, and so we must clearly understand how both the child and adult use the outer environment for their work (pp. 198-200).

Both eastern and western science now point to how with practise we can reorient ourselves, retrain our learned and/or inherited traits, to actively choose more and more meaningful and fecund ways to connect and live better (Kornfield, 2009, p. 58). Dewey (1917/1985) expressed how the “only power the organism possesses to control its own nature depends upon the way its present responses modify changes which are taking place in its
medium ... It is all a matter of the way in which its present reactions to things influence the future reactions of things upon it” (p. 15). And Montessori created an environment where children could explore the power of the mind. She wrote about a child age 2 looking perplexed “because he could not remember whether the fork should be set at the right hand or the left. He remained a long while meditating and evidently using all the powers of his mind. The other children older than he watched him with admiration, marvelling like ourselves, at the life developing under our eyes” (Montessori, 1914/1966, p. 24). It is important to remember how the power of the mind led Gautama Buddha to declare the mind is the chief of our mental states, and so our experiences our determined by our state of mind (Buddharakkhita, 1985/2013).

All of this suggests that what we do with our mind will direct the degree to which we are conscious enough to approach each moment mindfully, and be satisfied such that our hunger for more fades and is replaced by a sense of our own presence within the unfolding reality of which we are an integral part (Wolfe, 2002). Children by reason of the purity of their minds and discerning innocence, flexibility and openness live in a mindful state more than most adults (Palmer, 2007, p. 7). This means we can listen to the participant children express themselves on a matter concerning them and perhaps through that process better understand how to shift our focus through education from the building of defences to the building of ability. With that in mind, this study presents an opportunity to follow children and learn from their lived experiences around the theme of their mindful practise.
CHAPTER ONE

A Call for Mindful Education

There are different aspects to consider around what makes an education mindful, such as the teacher/guide, the curriculum, the class size, and so forth. In some cases mindful practice may be an integral part of the curriculum without being named a mindful practise, e.g., in the Montessori environment there is an activity called the “Silence Activity” that essentially incorporates the value of silence, stillness and subtler awareness (Lillard, 2005, p. 173). However a mindful practise is incorporated in education it needs to lead to an experience of connection. Importantly, what the current movement towards mindfulness indicates is a need and tendency for a deeper connection with oneself, others and life. Evidence of this is recognisable in how people are reconsidering ancient ways (e.g., yoga, meditation and naturopathic medicine), incorporating holistic elements into school curriculum or schools (e.g., Indigenous wisdom ways or the Montessori methodology and/or philosophy) and turning to nature (e.g, nature walks or time with an animal).

This study focuses on the child’s experience of that deeper connection mainly because of the pivotal role it plays not only in the child’s development but also humanity’s. It has been proven how the child requires space and time for the experience of “moments of consciousness” (Malva, January 12, 2012) or psychological moments of integration (Montessori, 1967, p. 22). That kind of consciousness in childhood leads to a healthy adaptation of the self to the environment or to the network of parts and whole to which all life is bound (Capra, 2005, pp. 18-29). Pestalozzi based his elementary education system on the natural world and the senses and he said that because thought began with sensation or proceeded from it that teaching should use the senses to its benefit and help children to train their senses (Anderson, 1931, pp. 61-86). He therefore introduced the child to objects from its environment that captured the child’s attention such that it could focus on the object and study it. Montessori’s work parallel’s Pestalozzi’s, but
Montessori appears to have been more sensitive to the child’s need to engage in and ability for meditative concentration (Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 105-106, 218-222; Montessori, 1949/2002, pp. 249-250; Lillard, 2005, pp. 78-85). Montessori (1917/1965) stated how the child needs periods of concentration, and the adult must protect the child's concentration until the child reaches a “polarisation of attention” (p. 68).

A “polarisation of attention” means the child becomes so concentrated in its work that the outside world ceases to exist until the child completes its activity, and after which the child would appear fresh, at peace and complete. Montessori observed children during periods of absorbed concentration and from this she understood the child was deeply constructing itself inwardly more than humans could possibly measure and understand. Notably Montessori (1917/1965) observed how silence and ordered movements led to the development of inward sensitivity or the child’s deeper experience of its connection to the web of life (pp. 220-221). Montessori (1974/2009) concluded from her scientific research with the child that a mental chemistry was taking “place in the child, producing a chemical transformation. These impressions not only penetrate the mind of the child, they form it; they become incarnated, for the child makes his own ‘mental flesh’ in using the things that are in his environment. We have called this type of mind the ‘absorbent mind’ and it is difficult for us to conceive the magnitude of its powers. If only it could continue” (p. 18).

That insight points to how the spirit of the child is something always “in process of realisation, an energy always freshly constructive, the unceasing labour of spiritual incarnation,” and that from which we await the advent of the adult (Montessori, 1936/2003, p. 32). For Montessori (1949/2002) this meant the “first essential for the child’s development is concentration. The child who concentrates is immensely happy” (p. 222). Concentration can lead a person to be more conscious and integrated with all things and events in the most subtle ways. This means “the constituents of matter and the basic phenomena involving them are all
interconnected, interrelated and interdependent” such that they cannot be understood in isolation but only as united parts of the whole (Capra, 2010, p. 131). Concentration can even lead to the practise of nondualism. Gandhi visited at Montessori school in England and he observed children approaching integration. He observed human nature struggling to express itself in the children; he was overjoyed to see the children expressions—rhythmic movements, stillness in the virtue of silence, joyful obedience (Gandhi, 1971, p. 239). The children’s activity points to an educational environment that values the integrative process.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher (1912) visited Rome in 1912 to learn from Montessori about her educational experiment. From her close contact with Montessori, she felt that Montessori believed her “ideas, hopes and visions ... to be much more essential” than her pedagogical techniques (p. vu). Montessori’s life and work conveys the message that humans came into existence for “communion and self-transcendence” (Merton, 2002, p. 27) and not merely to be “champions of supremacy of reason and the autonomy of the individual in the pursuit and creation of knowledge ... that is considered valuable because it is reasonable and practical” (Dallaire, 2011, p. 35). In traditional schooling thinking takes precedence and eclipses other ways of knowing.

Michael Dallaire talks about how cognitive “knowledge is what separates one from the other (whether the other is a person, nature or a subject matter) ... the goal here is individual power, giving rise to the oft-heard creed: knowledge is power” (pp. 35-36). A holistic education however celebrates the understanding that although we are separate we are also one because of an interdependence among the parts and whole, and descriptive of everything know to us (Plotinus as cited in Huxley, 1945/1985, p. 20). It was Martin Buber (1937) who placed relationship at the heart of education because we are continuously in relationship with the other, the parts that we need to be the whole (p. 118). Again, that part-whole relationship is the principle of holism. Holism addresses our tendency towards whole-making as integral to our
fundamental nature and evolution as “nothing but the gradual development and stratification of progressive series of wholes” (Smuts, 1926/1961, p. v).

The constant movement towards making wholes through holistic education derives from a “core wisdom underlying various spiritual traditions and teachings ... referred to as the perennial philosophy” (Miller, 2007, p. 16). Aldous Huxley (1945/1985) described the perennial philosophy as the interdependence of all life in the universe, which is an idea traceable to most religious and spiritual psychologies, e.g., in Plotinus’ work in the West and Gautama Buddha's teachings in the East (pp. 20-33). That “core wisdom” or perennial philosophy is still a relatively nascent practise in today’s predominantly technocratic era, which is said to encourage people to live with a “continuous partial attention” (Levy, 2006). As a society we bias reductionist, materialist and capitalist agendas that tell us we will find security outside of ourselves. Eve Ensler (2006) said that people in the USA are obsessed with security when in fact “security is essentially elusive, impossible. We all die. We all get sick. We all get old. People leave us. People surprise us. People change us. Nothing is secure. And this is good news. But only if you are not seeking security as the point of your life” (p. xiii).

Ensler goes on to say how if people allow security to be their focus, people box themselves inside a world of their own making that leaves them unable to open themselves to any newness or fertile change because it may take them off course. This means that a person can’t know who they are because it’s more secure to cling to “hard-matter identity,” such as race, nation, religion, sexual orientation, job, house, children and us and not them, but all that does is shutdown a person’s mind (Ensler, 2006, p. xiv). If we “run on autopilot” or live with partial attention then we are not really present, and so “the body is not united with the mind, we are not really alive” (Hanh, 2011b, p. 336). Therefore the connection between the mind and body is vital and maybe this is why nurturing the relationship between the two is easily and readily accessible through our breath (p. 168). The breath is always available to us like a best friend— reliable,
attentive, supportive and responsive without ever asking for anything in return.

The Indian children I mediated with most often used the word “fresh” to describe how they felt following meditation practise. It is important to note that at no other time other than following meditation and once when a participant child was selflessly helping other children did I hear the participant children use the word “fresh” to describe their lived experience. I cannot help but wonder if the participant children’s response echoes Tobin Hart’s (2008) experience of contemplation and how practising contemplation leads to “opening one to see in a fresh way” (pp. 243-244). This experience of freshness is the result of witnessing our thoughts and experiences (Kornfield, 2009, p. 96). If we were to continue to experience that it can lead us to “begin to sense and interrupt automatic patterns of conditioned thinking, sensation and behaviour” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 122). To develop mindfulness using the breath, for example, can strengthen the ability to concentrate which in turn results in an increased awareness, an enhanced ability to understand and a deeper connection with the self, other and life (Hart, 2008, p. 243).

Mindful engagement stands in contrast to disengaging from one’s connection with life through clinging to possessions, defences and personal experiences (Kornfield, 2009, pp. 95-97). A mindful education then could be that which feeds the human spirit or the “integral part of normal, human cognitive-developmental mechanisms and processes” (Johnson & Boyatzis as cited in Benson, Scales, Syversten & Roehlkepartain, 2012, p. 455). Similar to how we nourish our body with food and water to maintain our physical health, this means that we can nourish the human spirit and experience the results internally and externally (Miller, 2002, pp. 233-235; Montessori, 1917/1965, p. 26). It is even suggested that the need for and capacity to nourish our human spirit enables us to focus on what vitally matters (Johnson, 2008, p. 26). That echoes Gautama Buddha who says, “Mindfulness, I declare, is all helpful” (Nyanaponika, 1994a, p. 74).

What is spirit is now the concern of the “religious or secular, young or old, atheist or
believer, educated or otherwise, because we inhabit a different world in which spirit is making new and quite extraordinary demands. ... We have not only outgrown the values and assumptions of mechanistic science and humanism, but we can no longer situate ourselves comfortably in the containment of the traditional religions” (Tacey, 2004, pp. 1-2). Supporting this understanding of spirit are two studies measuring happiness in hundreds of children ages 7 to 14 in Canada and India (Holder Coleman & Wallace, 2010; Holder, Coleman & Singh, 2012). The results showed how children were happier not from organised religious practises but from personal spiritual ones that helped them to feel connected to the self, to others, the environment and a transcendent other to the extent that the results “accounted for a unique amount of the variance in children’s happiness... Children who reported higher levels of meaning, purpose, and values in their own life reported higher levels of happiness” (Wallace, 2005, p. ii). The children who reported greater spiritual practise also reported being happier than children who did not report being spiritual. That connection prioritises the relationship between things, people, groups, ideas, processes, states of mind and much more (Miller, 2007, pp. 13-14; Miller, 2010, pp. 120-124).

Montessori directly observed the spirit of the child for over 2 decades and from this she manifested an education for “the forgotten citizen”. Montessori coined the term spiritual embryo to describe the child from birth to age 3 as “humanity’s ‘most precious treasure’ because it was only this divine formative power that could transform the world” and promise the redemption of humanity (Miller, 2002, p. 234). Today the child is vulnerable to society primarily because we lead it away from its true nature. The depth of the child’s susceptibilities led Montessori to declare that we “need to protect the child’s concentration” (Montessori, 1949/2002, pp. 290-293). Montessori’s insight on the power of concentration is now better understood and recognised in western science; her work around the child and education is even referred to as the work of early neuroscience. Even though empirical studies have not yet been conducted to show the effects of Montessori’s technique, western science points to her assertions on neurology as
Western science and its emerging validation of Montessori’s method and philosophy based on the laws of nature corresponds with an increase of holistic educational approaches employed in all kinds of educational settings to help individual’s align with “the fundamental realities of nature” (Miller, 2007, p. 3; Miller, 2002, pp. 30-33). Again, western scientific studies on mindful practices reveal how mindful practices such as breath awareness and loving kindness meditation affect positively a person’s neuroplasticity or the person’s response to stimulus (Hoekstra, 2012; Lillard, 2011, p. 80; Ryan, 2012, Chapter 4; Salzberg, 2011, pp. 25-32). This suggests that mindful education attempts through constructive means to guide the individual to experience nature’s core or its interrelatedness and dynamism (Miller, 2007, pp. 21-22). Society has biased a fragmented education though and so our cohesion is weak (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworksi & Flowers, 2004, pp. 190-193). The imbalances between the regard for the economy and environment, individuality and community and intellect and spirit point to that weakness. Furthermore, the disconnection around us mirrors the fragmentation within us (Miller, 2007, pp. 3-5). The increased interest in mindful education in different ways support how the energies of concentration, insight and wisdom “can be gained only by practise, never by mere discussion” (Goenka, 1987/2010, p. v; Goenka, 1987, Chapter 1).

**Meditation in Education**

The word *meditation* originated from the Latin *meditat*-, which means “contemplated” and is a derivative of the Latin verb *meditari*, from a base meaning “measure”. The Latin verb *meditari* originates from the Sanskrit translation of the word *dyhana*, the root of which, *dhyai*, means “to contemplate” or “to meditate” (Macdonell, 1929/1965, p. 134). Some companion names for *meditation* are *centring practice* (Miller, 2007, p. 180), *mindfulness* (Hanh, 2011a) or *contemplative practises* (Hart, 2004, p. 29). The terms used generally refer to similar aspects of
different practices. For example, Tobin Hart (2004) uses the general heading of *contemplation* which includes *wisdom traditions* such as the Buddhist meditation practices thousands of years old, various practices of yoga in the Hindu tradition, Christian contemplative prayer, Plato’s questioning through dialogue, Jewish Kabalah’s extensive pondering and more (pp. 28-29). But besides the terms these practices share a critical understanding of the role moral practice plays in the deepening our awareness that in turn enables us to grow beyond convention.

The practice of “measuring” or meditation fell out of favour in the western countries in the 12th and 13th centuries with the prevalence of “Aristotelean logic, the natural sciences, and theology” followed by the scientific revolution (Stokes as cited in Hart, 2004, p. 30). Then in the 18th and 19th centuries, during the Industrial Revolution, the factory model applied to manufacturing of products was extended to society to make it run efficiently (p. 30). Notably, the field of education worldwide began following the same “factory model” system that persists in schools today (Friesen & Jardine, 2009, p. 4). Even this scant amount of history begins to shed light on why there is a growing interest in educational settings of all kinds, including in school curriculum and teacher education programs, for *connection*, be it through Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), wisdom practices, social and emotional learning (SEL), meditation, contemplative practice and more. People “sense something is missing” and so they seek *connection* (Miller, 2007, p. 4). There are now so many people worldwide connecting through mindful practices that a recent issue of *Time Magazine* featured “The Mindful Revolution” (Pickert, 2014).

Again, this study focuses on a meditation practice based on the discoveries of Gautama Buddha. The Theravada is the original teachings of Gautama Buddha and the term in Pali refers to the “teachings of the elders” (Nyanatiloka, 1980, p. 114). The Theravada led to three forms of Buddhism called Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan (Goldstein, 2002, pp. 24-25). Many schools of Buddhism grew from those forms and each school practices ways leading to insight.
All three forms and their schools train in mindfulness or “the basic practise of paying attention, resting in awareness, of listening, which is central to any path of awakening” (Goldstein, 2002, p. 92). Vipassana Meditation, which is inclusive of Anapana Meditation, as taught by Goenka practises Theravada but does not adhere to any religion such as Theravada Buddhism. Although there are many forms of vipassana meditation this study refers to the secular form as taught by Goenka.

In this thesis the term meditation or mindful practise includes discussion and examination of contemplative, mindfulness and other meditative techniques to demonstrate how different practices can lead people to a more mindful way of being. Thich Nhat Hanh (2011b) said anyone of any caste, creed and religion can grow more mindful and not only “Buddhists, but also Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Marxists can accept that each of us has the capacity of being mindful, that everyone has the seed of mindfulness in himself or herself. If we know how to water this seed, it will grow, and we will become alive again, capable of enjoying all the wonders of life” (p. 80). This means that if we truly want to live in the present moment we require a certain degree of mindful awareness to see what is in our field of awareness or territory (p. 178). As Thich Nhat Hanh (2011b) says, “There are two worlds, and we can choose which one we want to live in: the world of awakening or the world of ignorance. Ignorance doesn’t have a dwelling place. It has no beginning and no end. If we live in the world of awakening, we will be happy in our daily life” (p. 258). What follows are a few ways people are currently approaching mindful practices in education.

Tobin Hart (2004) in his essay, “Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom,” refers to knowing through “the contemplative” instead of the favoured “rational-empirical approach” in education (p. 28). Hart states contemplative knowing is a missing link, one that affects student performance, character, and depth of learning. The contemplative mind is opened and activated through a wide range of approaches—from pondering to poetry to meditation—that
are designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to cultivate a capacity for deep awareness, concentration, and insight (p. 29). Hart suggests that such contemplative practises can result in different outcomes, such as an experience of compassion or a creative break through which he referred to as “an inner opening of awareness” (p. 29). All practises involve a non-linear consciousness leading to an expanded awareness. It is from the space of expanded awareness that understanding and compassion for others and life grows. Hart goes on to suggest different contemplative practises may be necessary depending on the student’s goal, e.g. if the student needs “calming versus insight contemplation” (2004, p. 36). The following are three contemplative activities Hart (2004) suggests teachers can include in the classroom: 1) “Not Doing” in which students at the start of class sit with lights off and are walked through returning to the breath, sitting in silence and releasing their thoughts. 2) “Where are you know?” invites students to take a few deep breaths, and then become aware of one’s thoughts. 3) “Freely writing,” which invites students to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths, and then open their eyes and write without censoring themselves, stopping for spelling errors, etc. (pp. 36-43).

Susan Kaiser Greenland (2010) in her book, “The Mindful Child,” speaks about her work with children and mindfulness in the American public classroom. Greenland analogises the mind to a clear liquid, e.g. water, and the thoughts to a granular substance, e.g. dirt, and that when those substances are mixed together a reaction occurs (pp. 63-64). Thich Nhat Hanh (2001) describes an insight similar to Greenland on water and dirt mixed together (p. 59). The particles of dirt swirl around in the water. This “reaction” is said to reflect when the mind is unbalanced and clouded with thoughts such that a person becomes irritated, restless, confused and so on. If a person does not react to the thoughts, and mindfully observes them, the mind and thoughts quiet. In other words, the dirt settles to the bottom of the water and the water becomes clear.

It was a family crisis that led Greenland (2010) to learn to meditate. When Greenland’s husband was diagnosed with stage four lymphoma, Greenland’s husband took her to a Zen
meditation centre. From her experience with Zen meditation, Greenland began working with Jack Kornfield’s and Joseph Goldstein’s teachings. Once Greenland herself recentred through meditation practise, she was drawn to John Kabat Zinn’s work with mindfulness, which includes the fusion of western science and Buddhist practise (pp. 3-4). Greenland refers to Kabat Zinn’s secular mindfulness program called Mind Based Stress Reduction, which encourages people to take time to be with their experiences before reacting or analysing the stress (pp. 23-24). Soon, Greenland (2010) began working with her own children, helping them to grow mindful through breath awareness practises, e.g. lying down and placing their hands on their stomachs and being mindful of their breath by means of their hands’ movement up and down and corresponding to their in and out breath (pp. 7-12). Greenland taught her children to be still and observe the breath and thoughts as they are. Those mindfulness teachings, which she altered for her children, she then offered to other children, e.g. at a boys and girls club and as part of a school’s curriculum. Although Greenland teaches a mindful practise influenced by western practises, the teachings do originate from the teachings of Gautama Buddha.

Anapana Meditation (Anapana) adheres to Gautama Buddha’s original teachings and, as stated earlier, is the first step towards learning Vipassana Meditation (Vipassana). Briefly, Vipassana is a secular form of meditation often referred to as a science of the mind. In 1969, Goenka and his family, all Burmese born Hindus, moved from Burma to India. In that same year, he and his wife, Mrs. Ilaichidevi Goenka, began conducting Vipassana courses together in India. Vipassana Meditation centres are located worldwide, run by volunteers and frequented by people who live on the charity of others for 10 days to learn a technique of meditation that leads to purification of the mind (Vipassana Research Institute, 2010).

Anapana Meditation invites children ages 8 to 16 to observe the natural breath (e.g., the breath coming in the right nostril, left nostril or both) and bare breath (e.g., free of any counting, visualisation or mantra) (Shah & Katakam, n.d., para. 10). Anapana Meditation helps children to
acquaint themselves with the mind, its tendencies, through concentration anywhere from for 5 to 30 minutes. Knowledge of the mind and sitting in silence and observing thoughts leaves children feeling fresh, happy and peaceful. As stated Anapana Meditation incorporates Metta Meditation, a selfless, loving kindness practise whereby children share their peace and happiness in thoughts and feelings with oneself and then family, friends, and neighbours and so on. Children are encouraged through Anapana Meditation to use breath awareness anywhere and at anytime.

Goenka began teaching Anapana Meditation to school children in 1986. The response was encouraging, and the educational value of such courses became quickly apparent (Anapana Meditation for Children and Teens, n.d., Parents section). Since 2008 worldwide 50,000 children or more annually participate in Anapana Meditation courses (Vipassana Research Institute, 2011). Course duration ranges from 1 day to 2 or 3 days (Anapana Meditation for Children and Teens, n.d., Courses section). Course size varies but don’t exceed 40 to 50 students and are segregated boys from girls. The courses are run on a donation basis and by Vipassana Meditation meditators trained as Anapana Meditation volunteers. In a fragmenting education system, Anapana Meditation is encouraged increasingly in India as an inward focused educational approach helping children to care for and protect themselves through learning about their mind and body connection (Raja, 2002, pp. 75-79; Shah & Katakam, n.d.)

To reiterate, empirical studies have recently been made on breath awareness and loving kindness and other meditation practises by children. Linda Lantieri (2008) refers to Daniel Goleman, a leader in Social and Emotional Learning, and how his findings show children’s increased brain circuitry strength for managing distress (p. 10). Lantieri states how teachers’ incorporation of contemplative practises in school suggests “improved concentration” and “greater control on one’s thoughts and less domination by unwelcome thoughts” (p. 10). Meanwhile, Richard Davidson, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Madison says, “A simple anchor like one’s breath is a centuries-old meditation technique, but it
turns out to have some very beneficial qualities in terms of changes in both the brain and behaviour” (as cited in Hoekstra, para. 14). Davidson, influenced by his own Buddhist practise and inspired by the Dalai Lama’s queries into western science and meditation, conducted research with 200 children at four elementary schools in Madison, Wisconsin who practised breath awareness techniques (Hoekstra, 2012, para. 3). The results from that research are “so widely popular and successful, the district wants to scale it up to the entire school system” in Madison (Hoekstra, 2012, para. 4). Davidson’s studies focused on the brain’s plasticity, and how we can affect our brain from practising meditation (MacCoon et all, 2012, pp. 3-12; Slagter et al, 2011, pp. 1-12). This means we can alter our life through mindful practise.

Jack Kornfield (2008) said that the concentrated mind is like a powerful telescope which a person can use to go “to an atomic level of perception” where we can witness the nature of creation and its flow (p. 312). Our innate power to concentrate has led us to scale the highest mountain in the world, use a poison to cure a disease, understand how to employ water to travel, generate energy and play. Outwardly we have used the power of concentration to perform wonders. There are people though who have used the power of concentration to explore and understand the grassroots nature of every creation. These people developed skill at balancing their inward and outward focused preoccupations. Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo (2013) is a revered Buddhist monk who spoke of how hindrances or defences result from external preoccupations “because our internal preoccupation is weak. To say that our internal preoccupation is weak means that our mind doesn’t stay firmly with its object. Like floating a dipper in a barrel of water: If it doesn’t have anything to weigh it down, it’s bound to wobble and tip. The wobbling of the mind is what creates an opening for the various hindrances to come pouring in and make the mind lose its balance” (Coming Home section).

Montessori (1999) observed how things in the environment must “call” to the child to arouse its sensitivity and enthusiasm such that the child constructs itself through working with
the objects (pp. 34-39). How things must “call” to the child not only points to how each child is responsible for its creation but also how each child is unique. For example, a child of Aboriginal heritage will need its educational environment to be inclusive of familiar Aboriginal cultural activities of which “call” to the child and lead the child into concentration. Meeting the child’s intellectual and physical needs can serve to meet the child’s inward needs because the child who engages with what “calls” to it is able to concentrate and sink into those “moments of consciousness” from which it will emerge “fresh”, “connected” and “complete”. The child’s important work prevents “the wobbling of the mind”. Montessori (1955/1991) observed how children who worked meaningfully in a supportive atmosphere “walked about by themselves, like monks in meditation” (p. 122). This means that when our behaviour aligns with nature, “mindfulness and alertness will take charge within us. Concentration will arise, discernment will arise, awareness will arise within us” (Lee Dhammadharo, 2013, Coming Home section).

We have led the child to master and know almost everything but the immeasurable powers and wealth inside. “We know how to find pearls in the shells of oysters, gold in the mountains and coal in the bowels of the earth, but we are unaware of the spiritual gems, the creative nebulae that the child hides in himself when he enters our world to renew mankind” (Montessori, 1949/2002, pp. 249-250). Perhaps as studies have begun to suggest though the more we mindfully turn our attention inwards the more we will grow wiser (Walach, Schmidt & Jonas, 2011, pp. 23-28). This means mindful practice may increase the ability to make better decisions that in turn leads to more mindful practise and so on. Ajahn Chah says, “When you have wisdom, contact with experience is like standing at the bottom of a ripe mango tree. We get to choose between the good and rotten mangoes. It is all to your profit, because you know which fruits will make you sick and which are healthy” (as cited in Kornfield, 2009, p. 59). Slowly we seem more interested in using our knowledge and education to “understand the importance of engaging in more wholesome actions and bringing about discipline within our minds … to effect
changes from within that develop a good heart” (Dalai Lama cited in Goleman, 2004, pp. 258-259).

Again though it must be stressed that the adult’s ability to serve the child deeply effects how the child will grow. Montessori (1924) says, “Children have, especially in the first five years, an internal sensibility as to their spiritual needs, which repression and wrong education can cause to vanish, to be replaced by a kind of slavery of the external senses to every surrounding object” (para. 30). This means the adult must observe the child “for the dawning of the phenomenon of concentration in the child is as delicate as a bud just about to open,” and one careless step alone can crush that bud (para. 30). The idea is that mindful practise may offer the child some way to meet its personal need to concentrate because mindful awareness bridges the mind and body. Montessori said that for an action to be of benefit to development it must be connected with the mental activity going on (Lillard, 2005, p. 50). Potentially the child can with practise engage itself mindfully to make its growth more meaningful and despite the obstacles, and in turn build-up the power of its concentration such that it will inevitably lead to an inner calm that can be carried into other activities.

Angeline Stoll Lillard relates current research on meditation to Montessori’s research on the child’s concentration and behaviour normalisation or dissolving of defence mechanisms (Lillard, 2005, p. 105). Lillard says, “In meditation, one’s task is to attend fully to the here and now. Meditation can be seen as an attention-training exercise. After meditation, people report feeling calm and refreshed. Studies suggest that people who engage in meditation derive lasting mental and physical health benefits from it” and evidence shows that people engaged in regular meditation sessions had more left than right hemisphere activity, which is referred to as a “happy pattern” (p. 105). Lillard goes on to say how in some ways meditation corresponds with the depth of concentration children experience in the Montessori environment. She noted how several of the findings found from meditation studies, e.g., by Richard Davidson et al. (2003),
and studies looking at the correlation between left brain activity and well-being, e.g., by Urry et al. (2004), “reflect what Dr. Montessori said occurred when children began to focus their attention on work in her classrooms: ‘Each time that such a polarization of attention took place, the child began to be completely transformed, to become calmer, more intelligent’” (Lillard, 2005, pp.105-106).

The current international interest around mindful practise does suggest we are “thinking globally” better. Certainly mindful practise approaches something more satisfying. Matthieu Ricard says, “If we aspire to contribute something to our society—to achieve a new vision of things—we need to begin with ourselves. We need to transform ourselves, and that can come only through training, not through fleeting ideas” (as cited in Goleman, 2004, p. 213). Montessori observed that if the child was provided the opportunity to construct itself through meaningful work it would by choice return to a concentrated state and work. That is why Montessori believed to protect the child meant to protect its concentration (Lillard, 2005, p. 20; Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 161-165). To reiterate, the child who satisfies its personal need and tendency to concentrate is able to steady its mind and therefore support its overall well-being. By supporting the child to concentrate we begin to answer the child’s silent plea, “Help me to do it by myself!” (Montessori, 1936/2003, p. 208).

With that in mind this study draws special attention to the participant children’s practise of Anapana Meditation (Anapana). However it is also important to address developments around Anapana in Indian education. Notably, in October 2011, the Maharashtran Government sanctioned the teaching and learning of this secular meditation practise in Maharashtra schools (Global Vipassana Foundation, 2006-2011, “Introducing Vipassana Meditation in Schools”). Anapana has been taught to Indian school children since 1986, but the Maharashtra Government is taking stronger action to encourage in Maharashtra schools secular mindful practise by 100,000 teachers and school administrators and 2.5 million children from 5th to 10th standard
To prepare schools for the learning and teaching of Anapana the designated schools assign teacher/s and school administrator/s on paid leave to attend a 10 Day Vipassana Meditation (Vipassana) course followed by a Value and Appreciation Workshop. The Maharashtra Government also legislated a bill encouraging people who instruct children in any state institution and people entering state teacher education programs to attend a 10 Day Vipassana course (MITRA Upakram, n.d., Govt Resolutions section, 9).

From April to June 2012, the Maharashtra state teachers and school administrators on paid leave began attending 10 Day Vipassana courses followed by a Value and Appreciation Workshop (Shinde, personal communication, May 29, 2012). Mr. Shantaram Shinde, the Joint Municipal Commissioner for the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai, explained to me the implementation of Anapana learning and teaching in Maharashtra. He helped me to understand how the state’s estimated 127 million people was already divided into 35 districts, and subdivisions within those districts and in turn tulakas (villages/towns) within those subdivisions, and so the implementation of Anapana meant working with that infrastructure and ensuring that there was at least one experienced Vipassana meditator to support the implementation process within each area (Personal communication, May 29, 2012). According to plan, by June 15, 2012 the teachers who had attended a 10 Day Vipassana course and the Value and Appreciation workshop began implementing Anapana into their school curriculum. It should be noted that prior to the Maharashtra Government’s sanction, other state schools and organisations were already incorporating Anapana into their curriculum or program.

The government regulation was legislated 4 months after I arrived in India. The timing was uncanny. I was more surprised though by how people from different parts of India united and responded with enthusiasm and dedication to mobilise the learning and teaching of Anapana.
in schools. I was surprised because this was a large scale government led initiative largely mobilized by volunteers to introduce a secular mindful practise for school children. In my experience this is an uncommon collective mobilisation. In fact, the response to the October 2011 government regulation was so positive that in January 2012 the Maharashtra Government officially formed a project called “Mind in Training for Right Awareness Upakram” (MITRA), and increased the number of teachers, administrators and children to participate in the project (MITRA Upakram, n.d., Govt Resolutions section, 9). The size of the Anapana Meditation through MITRA courses have ranged from roughly 50 to 1000 students. It is important to reiterate that the courses are run by donation and on a voluntary basis. This means a few coordinators may be paid for their duties but MITRA is run by donation and organised by volunteers, such as retired people, housewives, teachers, musicians, principals, business people, government employees, doctors and more.

A diverse range of Indian peoples who self-identify as Muslim, Christian, Hindu and more practise and encourage the secular meditation because of its universality supportive of diversity and the goals of “national integration, equality, and development of a common culture” (Joshee, 2003). Many people understand that they can maintain their religious or faith practise and engage this kind of secular meditation. That said, it may be important to be selective when discussing Anapana, e.g., it can be unwise to refer to “Anapana” and Gautama Buddha’s teachings because doing that can lead to communities and parents feeling their children are being converted to an organised religion. Instead MITRA states how children are asked to observe their natural breath without trying to control it, and how doing that leads the children to experience the beginning steps of self-awareness (MITRA Upakram, n.d., Mitra Vision section). MITRA is premised on research results showing Anapana helps children “face with confidence the fear of examination, anxieties and pressures of childhood and adolescence. Anapana gives them the insight into the working of their own minds, making their thought process positive and helping
them build inner strength and confidence enabling them to control their conduct and thought process” (MITRA Upakram, n.d., Govt Resolutions section, 2).

India and Canada are socially, culturally and historically disparate from one another and in the same breath they share an important commonality—diversity. The unity within each nation depends on supporting that diversity. In the last decade *diversity* “is a term that has gained currency in the West” as minority groups and their needs and national identity have grown more focused (Joshee, 2003, p. 283). Reva Joshee states that in India the term *diversity* is rarely used but the concepts supporting are practised. In fact an “analysis of key educational policy documents since Independence shows that there is a diversity framework implicit in the Indian approach to education” (p. 283). That framework is based on three interrelated goals: national integration, equality and development of a common culture.

In 1929 Rabindranath Tagore visited Canada and addressed the young nation on its high achievements in education, but stressed the rapid rate of material progress was not a “comparable expansion of the deeper creative forces of the personality” (O’Connell, 2008, p. 984). Tagore said that an individual’s goal was never achieved alone and so whatever a person creates and because of our wholeness the wider collective consciousness of civilisation was affected; he said it was important to balance what we construct by “a realization of a creative truth of interrelatedness” to prevent conflict of interest and pride (p. 984). He felt Canada was too young to succumb to disillusionment and skepticism and instead it must believe in great ideals despite the contradictions. In fact, Tagore said Canada’s gift of youth could solve our most difficult problem, the problem of race, which had became insistent because of increased contact between communities. He said Canada “will have to reconcile the efficiency of the machine with the creative genius of man which must build its paradise of self-expression; reconcile science with religion; individual right with social obligation” (Mahalanobis, 1977, p. 67).

Tagore (1917) believed the object of education is to give humans the unity of truth and
that when life was simpler the different elements of a person were in harmony (p. 126). He referred to the separation of the intellectual, physical and spiritual aspects and how in education the emphasis became giving information without understanding doing that accentuated a break between the different elements in a person. In other words, Tagore advocated nurturing the spirit as much as the intellect and the body because it was the spirit that could draw from life the innermost truth to which the breath gave us privy (pp. 126-130). “With the breath we draw, we must always feel this truth” (p. 126). Those words highlight the importance of breath as a means to everything. Yet certainly in Canada we have not balanced what we construct by “a realization of a creative truth of interrelatedness,” and so we still have a long way to go even though within the last 5 years we have as a nation grown more aware of the value of the breath. In India though there is a great deal of enthusiasm around breath awareness education, and so perhaps by following the participant children around the theme of their mindful practise we can better understand how to approach balance.
CHAPTER TWO

The Adults

Four adults familiar with Maher and/or the participant children contributed their lived experiences around the theme of children and secular meditation as an educational means. The adults’ participation is nowhere near as in-depth as the participant children’s but because of the vast diversity directly shaping the Indian child, and especially the children who live at Maher, this study benefits from the adults’ contributions. Importantly, the participant adults have first-hand experience with the participant children’s environments. This means the participant adults’ have insight into the complexities surrounding the participant children, such as poverty, marginalisation and colonial effects, and so their contributions are meant to point to those complexities and the children’s responses to them. The idea is to support parenthesising the child’s lived experience to bring to light what is taken for granted (Husserl, 1964/2010).

To return briefly to the complexities of the effects of colonialism. It is from the harmful effects of physical colonisation that a psychological colonisation persists in India, e.g. western materialist ideology predominates in Indian education (Nandy, 1983, p. 11). That said, it is also believed that we are all now colonised by western ideology regardless of our physical location (p. 11). The adult’s role therefore to assist the child to reach for a dream authentic to its nature is therefore one of the greatest challenges we currently face. With the prevalence of the psychological colonisation not only does the adult need to have some measurement of control, understanding and balance of the mind, but also the adult must guide the child on a like path. This means that especially where the effects of colonialism are persistent we “need to think of healing as a kind of relationship with death” (Das, 2007, p. 48).

The participant children in this study face in different ways the pain integral to healing from violence; they are supported in a kind of relationship with death. That process of healing is possible not only because the participant children are who they are but also because of the adults
around the children who are holistically supportive. Notably each of the participant adults encourage children to practise breath awareness as means to dealing with violence in a courageous, non-violent and non-dualistic way. The participant adults notice how through a mindfulness of the breath children are realising in a sustainable way that they don’t have to struggle as much with anything. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2011b) says, “Treat your in-breath and out-breath tenderly, nonviolently, as you would treat a flower. Later you will be able to do the same thing with your physical body, treating it with gentleness, respect, nonviolence, and tenderness. And when you are dealing with pain, with a moment of irritation, or with a bout of anger, you can learn to treat them in the same way” (p. 170).

We have a rare ability as human beings to consciously use our different elements to approach wholeness over and over again as though it is the continual act of approaching wholeness that is the aim (Capra, 1996, pp. 294-296). Understanding the nature of whole-making and the nature of relationship between all living things can shed light on how we can grow individually and collectively. This is to say that everything is directly to indirectly interrelated such that we can holistically affect our growth, which western science increasingly supports (Diamond, 2007, 2012, 2014; Diamond & Lee, 2011). The participant adults recognise the value of holistic education in theory and practise, and so they realise in order to help the children they themselves need to engage with mindful practice. Each of the participant adults’ choice to do that reflects the understanding that “the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change our-selves, the tendencies in the world would also change” (Gandhi, p. 158).

**Time for Connection**

Maher is a community of homes using holistic approaches to help destitute women and children in India heal and grow towards wholeness. The women, children and staff at Maher work
together seriously and joyfully to understand and address the root causes of violence and create a deep peace. Briefly, Maher has established 28 children’s homes, five women’s homes and one men’s home in three Indian states—Jharkhand, Kerala and Maharashtra (Maher, 2014, About Maher section). Specifically in each of the children’s homes live 20 to 25 children and two adults or housemothers. The houses are either rented or Maher owned and tend to at a minimum have two or three rooms. Almost all of the children in the houses attend school or college and although the housemothers are responsible for all of the house members, the children are of mixed ages and work together to care for one another and their home. Currently 850 children reside with Maher and there are also 1832 beneficiaries (About Maher section).

Sister Lucy expressed that the techniques at Maher may not be working one hundred percent but that the atmosphere at Maher is working. Perhaps one reason why Maher’s atmosphere is successful is because Sister Lucy places more importance on the person rather than on the method, meaning because the emphasis is on the whole person in turn the holistic methods will follow. Too Sister Lucy believes the child comes first, and so perhaps even more so by placing the needs of the child first and foremost the atmosphere at Maher naturally leaned towards holistic practises. Montessori (1936/2003) herself did not refer to her method of education as “holistic education” although she fervently approached the whole child and its needs and tendencies, which led her to say, “One cannot see the method; one sees the child” (p. 144). Regardless of how beaten, rejected or diseased people may arrive at Maher, they are received as essentially whole.

The holistic methods used therefore also derive from careful listening. For example, if an adult were to listen to a child and guide the child accordingly, the child largely through self-activity could build-up its different aspects using the appropriate approaches. Importantly from this process the child will come to learn the value of listening and therefore will be more likely to be someone who listens carefully. Regardless, some development of mindfulness by some means
helps us to be listen. Then when we build-up mindful energy we can come to rely on that energy like a “big brother or sister holding a young child, taking good care of the suffering child, which is our anger, despair or jealousy” (Hanh, 2004, p. 67). Sister Lucy spoke to this point succinctly when she said that from sitting in meditation the children can remember who they are in relation to where they want to go.

What follows derived from one interview with Sister Lucy in Maher’s Pune office on a busy yet calm Saturday morning. Sister Lucy and I sat across from one another at her desk. Before we began she called, “Sh, sh, sh,” to the 10 to 15 office staff in the one room office. The noise level quickly quieted to a low murmur, and remained that way for the duration of our interview. By and large Sister Lucy carried the interview with her stories, experience and keen intuition, although once in a while I would ask a question to clarify a point or focus on a certain broad theme. Also, to clarify, because of the nature of the work Maher does and considering the subject area of this study is gentle it was agreed to use Sister Lucy Kurien’s and Maher’s proper names. The remaining participant adults and the participant children all have been assigned pseudonyms.

The first subject Sister Lucy spoke on was Maher’s interfaith practise, and specifically why interfaith practise is important at Maher. To reiterate, Maher supports women and children irrespective of their religion, social strata and beliefs. Sister Lucy felt that because the children, women and staff all come from different faiths, it was not a good idea for her to teach or instruct them in her religion. She especially wanted the children to grow up in a comfortable manner where they could feel at home, and that is why, for example, in terms of religion she ensures the Bhagavad Gita, Koran, Christian Bible and more is available to the children in the main Maher libraries. “That way,” said Sister Lucy, “if the child feels like it wants to read any of these books the child is welcome to.” However Sister Lucy also encourages the children to worship the divine, which she believes is inside of us and everywhere and not attached to any religion. She
expressed how meditation as such is connecting into that. “This is what I am trying to teach the children, to connect, to the divine,” said Sister Lucy, “but not to any particular God. I will not say no too, but if they want to connect they are free to.”

In every Maher house a common prayer time is encouraged usually for 40 minutes or more preceding at least one daily meal. That prayer time is set aside for connecting through the recitation of an inspirational quote or story, the practise of a secular meditation and vocalisation of prayers from different beliefs depending on the house members’ needs. “When people are in a common prayer in Maher it is to the divine,” said Sister Lucy, “and I found that approach very successful because every child, woman and even staff who came to Maher felt at home. They felt, ‘Oh, even my religion is respected, my caste is respected...’ You know, in that sense every child is respected, every person is respected. In that way I want the children to grow up.”

The conversation suddenly shifted when Sister Lucy began speaking with me about her childhood, and how it has influenced her and her choices. Sister Lucy was born and raised in a very united and yet poor family from Kerala. She is one of nine children whose home life was abundant with moral and spiritual values. Importantly Sister Lucy’s mother despite societal pressure believed very strongly that a girl child should have a lot of freedom to be natural. Sister Lucy remembers her mother saying, “Why do girls have to be that way?” Her mother was referring to girls’ suppressing their life force. However Sister Lucy’s parents also had to ensure their daughters’ safety, and especially because their daughters were female, generous in spirit and pretty. Sister Lucy had to be very careful when she walked to school because she was especially loving and curious and could not keep her eyes downcast. Sister Lucy’s mother guided her children by helping them to understand what was fact, what was truth and what was essential. “I think the little things my mother told me went deep inside of me,” said Sister Lucy, “because I remember when I used to walk to school I used to pray. My mother would say, ‘You must tell Jesus to walk with you. Tell Mother Mary to be with you.’”
Sister Lucy referred to a dream she had one night when she was a young child. In her dream she was sitting on her bed praying when Mother Mary appeared to her with her hands joined in prayer. She said Mother Mary was smiling at her. “Mother Mary then turned,” said Sister Lucy, “and I wanted to see her smile again and so I went to her. She turned again. I said to myself, ‘Oh, why has she turned?’ Then I felt that she was asking me to be in meditation. So in the middle of the night, after this dream, I sat in meditation. I don't know why it happened. It was only a dream, I feel, but it happened. I feel that prayerfulness came from that time and what my mother was teaching us.” Sister Lucy said that at that time meditation had nothing to do with the breath, but rather every day she said some prayers and sat in silence. “Even this morning,” said Sister Lucy, “I sat, maybe, for 7 to 10 minutes. There was no time because so many things are waiting. I just sat there, and then I started my work. I found it very helpful. Because when I don't meditate at all, for days, then I also find I am not present. My heart does not get connected to people also, and then my life becomes very superficial.”

Moments after our interview began, Sister Lucy’s cell phone beeped to signal an incoming call. At the time, she quickly passed the phone to one of the office staff. The phone remained with the office staff and continued to beep. Even though Sister Lucy would look now and then towards the beeping, she always remained focused on our conversation. I sensed we both understood though that at any moment she could have received a call or been told information that would have taken her away, and that perhaps we would have not been able to meet again. That is the moment by moment life at Maher. In fact, as I was searching through my papers for a question to ask Sister Lucy, a call came that she had to take. I waited to see what would happen, and then she looked at me as though everything was okay. I went on to ask her about how she would respond to or reassure people who are fearful of the word meditation and the idea of meditation.

Immediately Sister Lucy said, “Prayer and meditation is the thing that is helping in life. It
is so valuable. You can ask any of my children how I instruct them when they go out of Maher. I say, ‘My child, you can let go of everything but don't forget meditation and prayer. Don’t, don’t forget that.’ Even on the phone I instruct them, ‘Be in meditation before you start anything, even if it's 5 minutes, pray.’ In general, Sister Lucy uses the words prayer and meditation interchangeably. Sister Lucy personally feels prayer largely means using words to pray, whereas meditation it is a matter of going within oneself, and being there in a timeless way that creates an inner peace. “The more words we use,” she said, “I feel the less we are with ourselves. So saying prayer as a child, we need it, maybe, okay? Maybe it is helpful. But here by the age of 4 I am already teaching the children meditation. Just for 2 to 5 minutes I make them sit, whatever happens, let that time of silence be there.”

Sister Lucy gave an example from earlier in the day when she was in pain because some children didn't behave the way she thought would have been best. At the time she said to herself, “Oh my God, I taught them this, I taught them that, and they are not getting it.” She conveyed how frustration was building in her. She said, “Do you know for a minute what I did? I said, ‘Dear God, help me not to think of the negative but to see the positive in those children.’ See, my expectations are like a mother, but the children are not ready for that. When I saw some kind of a frustration forming, immediately I prayed, and then went to sit alone in meditation, in quietness, for even some minutes and all of the details of the incident came back to me.” During the meditation Sister Lucy said she connected, and in doing so she remembered the incident in detail and saw it differently such that she then deeply prayed, “Help me to see what is positive, not negative. Help me not to dwell on the negative that I see but on the positive in the eyes of the children. Help me to love them where they are.”

We went on to talk about meditation and the children's overall well-being. “Meditation,” said Sister Lucy, “is connecting to yourself and to the divine. If you are not connected to yourself, you cannot connect to your divine. The method we are using is to breath in and breath
out, which I have found very helpful. Maybe some other methods are there, but I found this was helpful, because this has no religion and caste issues...” The method Sister Lucy referred to is Anapana Meditation, although she does not name the meditation but rather conveys to the children the importance of sitting in silence and using the breath to help them connect. Sister Lucy quickly added how the meditation is used with children who become overexcited and violent. She spoke about how most of the children at Maher have grown up on the street, and so they really become violent. Some of the children she said can kill somebody. Therefore she does not punish the children but tells them, “Bubha (young child), just sit there for 1 hour and don't move your body, and then let me know what is going on.” Sister Lucy said, “This is the only thing I am making them do, and I find, when I make the children to do that, there is a lot of change. They become very calm afterwards. They themselves come and say, ‘Sorry, Didi (older sister), I realised...’ Nobody is saying, ‘You have to say sorry, you have to do this...,’ nothing.”

The children at Maher are often agitated because of their life history. That history may include a child seeing a father killing a mother, a child whose father is in jail, a child who has been physically abused. As Sister Lucy said, “Those memories are there in their minds.” This means Sister Lucy understands that no matter what the children say and do their memories get agitated. “We had one child,” said Sister Lucy, “she was agitated, very, very agitated, and then I slowly introduced her into meditation. You know, her face was very aggressive when she came to Maher. Very aggressive. You can see that if she is given a chance she can kill somebody. That much anger, anger, anger.” Sister Lucy suggested to the child that she attend a 10 Day Vipassana Meditation course; she told the child that if she didn't like it she could walk off but she also said to her to be there. The child participated in the full course. Sister Lucy said, “Some time later this child told me, ‘That was the thing that helped me the most. Now whenever I am getting angry, what I am doing is meditation.’ After the course she was so calm. If we had taken a photograph of her before and after the course...” Sister Lucy expressed that this child must
have found consolation in the meditation. “She was thrown out of so many hostels (orphanages), because nobody wanted her and all that,” said Sister Lucy, “and so you can imagine her feeling of not being wanted by anyone, no? After that I didn't do anything.”

Sister Lucy spoke about society and how really everything comes down to the home life. She said, “If the people could learn to pray a little more, to be in meditation, just even a little it would help a lot in the family. Why do we want to create weapons and all of this conflict? It is all because the root of prayer and meditation is not there. In meditation and prayer we learn to respect one another, to love one another, to care for one another. If that is there, then we don’t have to create all these bombs and mistrust one another. There is a bigger picture to life, but it has to begin from that root. I was just saying that I am thinking of instructing all our children’s parents and relatives in meditation. So that when the children go home and sit for meditation, they don't have to think, ‘Hey what are you doing?’” Sister Lucy said that while the Maharashtra Government is taking steps to include meditation in school, it is a help, certainly, but also it has to be in the homes.

Maher's time of meditation or prayer is done as a community and so Sister Lucy explained how the children join in naturally. “Coming a little late and not coming,” said Sister Lucy, “that too can happen, as the point is understanding them much more than forcing them to do it. Sometimes they've come and told me they don't want to join for prayer. Okay, no problem, but I ask them to let me know why you don't want to join. I say, ‘You are free, but I want to know the reason for your not doing it.’ Sister Lucy gently laughed and said that afterwards the children themselves realise they were wrong and join in prayer time. The idea is that individually she does not tell the children they must sit, but rather the discipline comes through being a community. “Anapana, yes, once in 3 months when we have those courses for the children,” said Sister Lucy, “at that time I say to them, ‘All of you will go.’ In that way, I didn’t give them a choice. I feel they are children, and if I give them that type of choice now they will not know
what they are missing out on. They have to get a taste of it, and then they can miss out on it afterwards, later on. Now, how we give them food, how we give them a bath, this we also have to give them.”

Reverence

The Children at Maher are encouraged to engage in many kinds of activities which serve their whole development, such as studying martial arts (e.g., tae kwon do), classical Indian dance (e.g., Kathak) and music (e.g. tabla, which is a Hindi term referring to a particular kind of drum set), participating in Maher’s Children’s Parliament, joining in local to international social, cultural and athletic events, attending school and extra-curricular studies and maintaining and supporting their respective Maher homes and the Maher community. All of the activities the Maher children engage in are intended to help them create an inner to outer equilibrium between all of their elements. Importantly those children engaged in holistic educational activities can move towards joy by building-up different energies in themselves, such as the power of concentration, spontaneous self-discipline, love of order, love of work, attachment to reality, such as the energies Montessori envisioned and created (Hughes, 2009; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). The Maher children seem to develop similar energies as Montessori observed in the children with whom she worked. Ultimately the holistic activities lead the children to better respect themselves, and in turn to respect others.

Sister Lucy said that if she notices a child is “giving up” she says to the child, “You are not loving yourself, hunh? Something is not right there.” She said she teaches the children their life is their mandira (temple). Therefore she will say to the children, “So this is your temple, how are you going to respect this temple? How are you going to love this temple? If you love this temple, naturally you will love others.” The children at Maher work towards this love for the self through their self-activity under the guidance of those who also understand the value of working
to care for their respective mandira. In fact, the Maher children’s actions reflect their love for the self and the other. This kind of obedience or “higher actions” point to the development of an equilibrium between the different elements of a person and which is notable among children who experience a personal spirituality (Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 104-106; Wallace, 2010). The Maher children have been recognised by others for their discipline and spiritedness, and this conveys that the children have a certain degree of self-mastery by exercising their respective free will (Montessori, 1917/1965, pp. 170-172). Evidence of the children’s obedience or “higher actions” is discernible in their actions and outcomes.

For instance, recently the Maher children participated in youth games within Maharashtra and the Maher children received two awards for the best disciplined. Also, again recently, a group of Maher children were attending a football (soccer) match in a neighbouring state, and the match organiser, unknown to Sister Lucy, called Sister Lucy to say that many children from different organisations come for the annual match but the Maher children are different, i.e., always on time, always alert, always respectful. Last, three Maher teenage children who were awarded scholarships to attend private schools outside of Pune returned to Maher for the most recent Divali holiday. All three children said how at the private schools the food was served but not with love and how much the Maher training and values they have learned help them because the values outside of Maher are so different. The recognition by the children themselves and others point to what Montessori’s (1917/1965) understanding on discipline. She says, “Discipline, the first result of an order establishing itself within, is the principal phenomenon to be looked for as the ‘external sign’ of an internal process that has been initiated” (p. 87).

The Maher children engage in many developmental activities although integral to their discipline is the practise of connection individually and collectively. As said, Maher introduces Anapana Meditation to all of its children to help them learn to connect (Keepin & Brix, 2010, pp. 57-58). I happened to attend an Anapana Meditation Children’s Course Teachers meeting in
Pune, and I briefly spoke with a few of the Children’s Course Teachers (CCT) about the children at Maher. Without hesitation the CCTs conveyed how the children consistently participate in the courses with reverence. Pralhad is a CCT who has conducted courses at Maher for the last eight years, and he agreed to communicate with me by email and in person on his experience with Maher children. Pralhad was born and raised in Maharashtra and he is a husband and father who is a trained software engineer although he currently works as a stockbroker. Pralhad is of a Buddhist faith and is a committed Vipassana Meditation practitioner. During the last 8 years he has conducted around four to five 1 Day Anapana courses per year.

Briefly, the 1 Day Anapana Meditation (Anapana) courses at Maher occur on Sundays at a designated Maher house. The children who participate in the courses are usually ages 8 to 13. The courses commence around 9 or 10 a.m. or depending on when everyone arrives and everything is prepared to proceed with the course. The children use their meditation mats made of their personal bedding, e.g. blankets and bed sheets, and so in the case of this study’s participant children, they walk with their bedding to the designated house, which is about a 35 minute walk. Anapana courses are generally segregated, and so the boys and girls sit on opposite sides of the allocated room. Once the meditation mats are prepared, the children naturally take their seats and wait quietly for all of the children to arrive. The CCTs, usually a man and a woman, have arrived by that time and once they have organised the audio player and cassettes to be used throughout the course, they too sit and wait quietly with the children. Once all of the children are seated, the Anapana teachers hold an open discussion and pose questions, such as how much time do you practise meditation, how long have you Practised Anapana, how many courses have you attended.

Following that discussion one of a series of cassettes is played which conveys a little theory and a lot of guidance on how to practise Anapana. After the first set of instructions is played there is a 5 minute break. The day proceeds in much the same way with meditation
instruction and practise followed by a break, but also there are times for open discussion, storytelling and smaller group discussion to understand better what each child has understood and how each child is practising the meditation. At lunch time there is a longer break and everyone eats the food prepared at the designated Maher house. As much as possible the children eat segregated and in silence, which comes naturally for the Maher children because they eat in relative silence in general at meal times. The course concludes around 3:30 or 4:00 p.m. or directly following the instruction of loving kindness meditation or Metta Meditation. At the end, the CCTs give each child a card outlining what they learned and stating their participation in the course. The children then disassemble their sitting mats to be put away or carried back to their respective Maher house.

It is the schools or organisations that contact the regional Vipassana Meditation Centre to organise the Anapana courses, and so in turn the centre contacts the CCTs to schedule the courses. Pralhad has conducted at least 10 courses at Maher, two of which I was present at as an experienced meditator and the other as a volunteer. In our interview Pralhad said, “Maher children do the course very seriously, and they follow all of the discipline in the meditation hall. I always feel satisfied after the courses at Maher. I feel the time spent with the children was fruitful, and usually a Children’s Course teacher needs to travel 40 kilometres, one way, to conduct the Maher courses. Other CCTs known to me who conduct the courses at Maher have the same observations and feelings.” It is important to add that the transportation to and from the courses is the responsibility of the CCTs, which means all of the expenses are paid for by the CCTs. Not only that but in India travelling 40 kilometres can take up to three or four times the amount of time it would take in Canada.

Pralhad has also conducted Anapana courses at different Vipassana Meditation Centres, organisations and state and private schools. He said the children and their response to the courses varies, but the Maher children’s reaction is totally different and distinct compared to any other
schools, organisations or even those children who attend courses at the Vipassana Meditation Centres in Pune. “The Maher children do the course sincerely,” said Pralhad, “sit with closed eyes or rather do not open their eyes during the meditation sessions, maintain noble silence and discipline for the course duration, are responsive and enthusiastic during the question and answer sessions and small group checking, eagerly listen to the stories, do not show boredom at anytime, etc.” Pralhad expressed how that type of reverence is not observed during the courses held elsewhere.

We discussed if there were any exceptions to his experience and Pralhad said, “It seems at Maher, a child is allocated some task of cleaning utensils or serving in the kitchen or is assigned whatever duty, and so sometimes one or two children do not turn up for the next session on time and we have to send a sevak (volunteer server) to find them.” This is understandable in the sense that at Maher everybody works together to cook, clean and maintain the household on different levels, and because there are so many people living together in a relatively small space there is a lot of work to do and the children are used to doing it. “Usually there are one or two children per course who arrive late,” said Pralhad, “but I have complained about this to the management after the courses, and usually I see improvement only after two to three courses, after following up with them.”

Pralhad said that when he was a new CCT, initially in the first year, almost all of the courses taught him something in terms of conducting the courses with greater ease, such as how to respond to the children’s behaviours depending on their ages, how to maintain noble silence and discipline in the hall or meditation space, how to prevent mishaps and care better for the children during small group checking. “Normally all of the experienced CCT’s know how it is difficult for children ages 8 to 9 to meditate,” said Pralhad, “and so CCT’s pay special attention to this age group and we motivate these children to learn in a relaxed manner, such that we do not ask them to close their eyes when they open them frequently. Rather, we just observe the
children and later call on them to speak with us separately, and then inform them to meditate with closed eyes.” Also, Pralhad said that while CCTs do small group work checking they always try to create a rapport with the children so that the children do not hesitate and give whatever answers comes to mind, and that doing that helps the children to open up.

In fact it was helpful to conduct the interview with Pralhad both in person and by email because there was more of a time delay between our communications. Notably with regards to email, eventually when I sent Pralhad my follow-up questions he responded to me and relayed his most recent CCT experiences. In other words, in Pralhad’s last email to me he wrote about an experience conducting a course with non-Maher children in which for the first time he observed children who responded similar to the Maher children. Pralhad said, “I had conducted one children’s course at the Pune Vipassana Centre last Thursday for children of a public school in Pune. I had a similar observation and distinct feeling like I have had at the Maher courses. That may be because the children had been trained by MITRA Anapana and were doing 10 minutes of Anapana in school daily.” On that note, MITRA, the Maharashtra Government initiative encouraging meditation by school children in schools, continues to evolve. Most recently the MITRA program in Pune introduced the “adoption” of a school participating in the program by an experienced Vipassana Meditation practitioner.

**Listening**

The Sapling of Knowledge School is a Catholic English medium school in Pune that was in part inspired by the teachings of Gautama Buddha. The school’s founders, one of whom is Father John, a Catholic Indian priest and Vipassana Meditation teacher, envisioned a school inclusive of underprivileged children and incorporative of a secular meditation practise. Today the Sapling of Knowledge School doors are open to children from different social strata, cultures, religions and belief practices. To reiterate, the Sapling of Knowledge School is the school most of this study’s
participant children attend. The school since its inception in 2000 has encouraged among its students and staff a secular and non-sectarian meditation practise, namely Anapana Meditation. It is important to clarify how although the school’s students practise Anapana Meditation, the school is not officially part of the MITRA program that was sanctioned by the Maharashtra Government in 2011.

In addition, although a few teachers and a staff member at the Sapling of Knowledge School have to date attended the Vipassana Meditation 10 Day course, it is the school’s students who have participated in the 1 Day Anapana Meditation courses and practised Anapana daily at school. Currently, in the morning and late afternoon the students collectively practise Anapana Meditation in their respective classrooms. The time for meditation in the morning and late afternoon lasts anywhere from a few to 10 minutes or so and during the morning session the meditation is accompanied with the national anthem and a prayer and in the afternoon with a prayer. The prayer is directed towards “God” of no particular tradition but rather the child’s own understanding of it.

Father John suggested I speak with Iris, the school’s counselor, not only because of her life experience but also because she and her husband were involved with the school’s inception. In fact, Iris was the school’s first teacher. Iris agreed to meet me for an interview one morning in her office. When we met school was in session and so the murmur of busy children seemed everywhere. Iris and I began speaking on the school’s inception. She immediately said, “It was Father John’s dream to create a different type of a school, one in which he could inculcate this meditation part of it. He thought the meditation would help children to blossom into better human beings. He even introduced the teachers into meditation.” Iris said Father John understood that the teachers, when they deal with so many children, find teaching difficult, and especially because just as the children come from different families and backgrounds so too do the teachers and so they have their own issues. She said, “Father John saw how meditation could
definitely help the teachers to centre themselves and be able to put the problems they are having
at home aside to be more centred when they are at school, because they need to give their full
one hundred percent to the children.” According to Iris, Father John felt that if the teachers were
able to centralise themselves then they would be more into the moment. In turn, the teachers
would then carry that energy of awareness into their teaching.

Iris is a new counsellor at the Sapling of Knowledge School, although because she was
the school’s first teacher and has a lot of experience working with children, she agreed to be the
school’s counsellor. She said that when she returned working at the school she not only felt she
had “come full circle” but also that she had come to her maher (mother’s home). Iris made this
comment knowing I would understand what she meant; she too is very familiar with Maher
because her husband was formerly employed with Maher. Iris explained how in the early days
the school was only for the upper and lower kindergarten children and that every year one
standard was added such that now the school offers an education up to the 10th standard. The
school’s third batch of 10th standard students were to graduate in April 2014. Two years after the
Sapling of Knowledge School inception Iris left the school to become a mother and after some
time she returned to work elsewhere. Iris said, “Maybe they asked me to return the Sapling of
Knowledge School because of my experience with children. I have worked in different schools
and for 7 years I ran my own nursery.”

In addition to Iris’ experience as a teacher she has acquired important and vital skills
from other life experiences, such as she was a former volunteer Vipassana Meditation facilitator
with women inmates at Pune’s largest prison, she remains a counsellor with an NGO focusing on
child suicide prevention and she has a personal spiritual practise as an Indian Protestant who
believes strongly in prayer and the value of silence and meditation in day-to-day life. To clarify,
Iris has attended one 10 Day Vipassana Meditation course although today she is not a Vipassana
Meditation practitioner.
Iris said that at the Sapling of Knowledge School some form of anapana begins right from nursery age. She said, “We want the children to experience that—let them sit still. We don’t expect a child of 2.5 years to do Anapana Meditation, but at least we can teach the child to be still, to sit in one place and to concentrate. It is a very simple technique actually. We tell them, ‘See you are breathing in, you are breathing out.’ Children do understand that much, and if they don’t understand what we say in the English language we tell them in their own language. For the nursery children, we don't have it every day, we have a particular day for them to practise sitting very quietly.” There is a meditation room in the school for the meditation practise, and so the children all use that space periodically so they can also get used to sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor in silence. “We can’t really force them,” said Iris, “but the children gradually get used to it. As they grow from KG into the higher classes then they understand what it is exactly. As they grow, they know, ‘Okay, we are suppose observe the breath.’ By observing their breath they are being in the moment, and being in the moment is most important because the mind wanders otherwise, into the past or into the future.”

Iris gave an example of what she meant by a wandering mind. She referred to a child who has not done its homework. She said, “He thinks, ‘I have not done my homework, and the teacher is going to scold me. What am I going to do?’ He feels guilty about it; he feels worried about it. So we help him to focus on his breath, otherwise he will be agitated. By helping the child use the breath, that calms the child’s mind for that moment.” Iris said that the calming of the mind is very important because that relieves the child of the stress or at least helps the child not to create more stress. “Meditation helps calm the child down,” said Iris, “and then the child is less aggressive, not negative but very positive, and then maybe it will see the other side of the situation and say, ‘Okay, I did not do my homework, and that is why...’ In this way the child will be able to tackle the day better. That’s why we usually do this meditation in the mornings, when the children first come to school.” But Iris was quick to point out though that as of more recently
the teachers meditate together before the children meditate.

“Every morning?!” I asked.

“Every morning the teachers practise meditation,” said Iris. She went on to explain how a new meditation room was designed for the teachers specifically with air conditioning, so that the sound of the air conditioning would muffle the sounds coming from the hallways. She said, “It is a very beautiful, calm, quiet room with just cushions on the floor. We all sit on the floor, and we meditate for 15 minutes. So every teacher has to come back to the now, and once they are in that frame of mind I think they are able to relate to the children. Each teacher leads a different life, and the anger, the frustration, the many different emotions that each must be going through... But once they meditate, they feel so good.” At present, the teachers, principal and school manager all meditate together with closed eyes and observe the breath. They do not officially practise Anapana Meditation but as Iris said, “It is anapana because observing your breath is anapana. It is observing your incoming breath and your outgoing breath. It is meditation because when you are observing your breath you are within yourself. Your thoughts are going here and there, but you focus your thoughts on your incoming and outgoing breath.”

As previously mentioned the students meditate in the early mornings and the late afternoons, but they also work with their breath awareness at other times. Significant changes occurred around meditation at the school near the end of the 2012/13 school year and at the beginning of 2013/14 school year. Specifically in 2013/14 the students were asked to observe the breath as they walked from morning assembly to their designated classrooms and between each subject change for 1-2 minutes. Even though Anapana has been practiced in some form since the school’s inception, the practise needed strengthening. The reinforcing of meditation practise in the school occurred not long after the MITRA program was legislated and coincided with the dawn of “The Mindful Revolution”. In other words, worldwide there was an increase in mindful practise in education, and especially some form of breath awareness as an educational approach.
“Children need to know how to handle themselves,” said Iris, “and their emotions especially. Sometimes their emotions also get carried away, and meditation helps a person to calm down, to relax, and to again be within oneself. It helps so much. Otherwise, our minds are always confused, you don’t know what you want to, where you want to go, what your aim is in life—nothing.” Iris spoke about how when we meditate that confusion disappears. She said it is that simple. Too, she said how it is something children can learn from a young age to help them throughout their life. “There is a lot of confusion all over,” said Iris, “and there is such a lot the children have to face—the films, media, internet and environment where the children live. The school too is open to all those who need education, and so the children’s behaviour varies.”

“You have to listen, really,” said Iris. “Listening is the greatest skill! There is no skill like listening. And sharing half solves your troubles—but with whom you are sharing, that person has to be a good listener. I always tell everybody, ‘Don’t share your judgements and reproaches, listen. A person has come to you, and maybe he wants to pour out his heart to you, to share his sorrow or his concern, and that's all he needs.’ We can do only that, listen, be a good listener, and that can do wonders in society if we truly listen. It can change everything.” What Iris said echoes Thich Nhat Hanh (2011b) when he says, “As human beings, we’re exactly the same. But the many layers prevent other people from seeing you as a human being ... People are caught in these notions and images, and they cannot recognize each other as human beings. The practice of peeling away all the labels so that the human being can be revealed is truly a practice for peace” (p. 217).

Iris’ ability to listen helps her to see beyond a child's behaviour despite seemingly everything. When Iris spoke about today’s children she conveyed a deep concern for children's apparent helplessness and yet at the same time she also conveyed her deep faith in the child. Iris said she tries to help children by tackling the issues most apparent to her, and subsequently what she notices is a lot of anger in many of today’s children. Importantly, she noted that the anger
was not specific to children from any social strata. Iris’ experience with children who are angry is not isolated to India though and certainly in a country like the USA it has been noted that children appear angrier and less civil and congenial (Ryan, 2012, p. 60). Iris referred to the Indian children who live in the slum-like dwellings or in single parent households, where often the mother is a house cleaner. She said, “The child can’t help it, I mean we can’t blame the child for that anger, no? They are all confused. There is no clarity for them. In school a child will experience something and at home the child experiences the reverse. How is the child going to relate the whole thing? What conclusion will the child come to? Due to that confusion, the child’s behaviour changes. They don’t know what is right, they don’t know what is wrong.

“A child has learned whatever is around him. No child is bad or no child is one with all of these negatives things. As the child is growing, what all is happening around him he hears, sees, senses... Too, there are so many emotions, and everybody’s anger is connected to one or another emotion. That said, it is the same degree of anger expressed differently by the children, that is what I have noticed from going to counselling sessions at other schools also.” Iris was referring to the counselling work she has done for 4 years with the NGO aimed at suicide prevention. She said, “Suicide is happening in a very young age group. It is really mind-boggling. Most of them are youngsters, school going, you know, until age 21. In India after the 10th standard, you’ll see in the newspapers, the children commit suicide because they are scared of failing.” That is why Iris focuses on using simple things, holistic techniques to help the children be aware. “You can see the twinkle in their eyes,” said Iris, “they feel so good when you offer them a different way, a positive one. Some children try sincerely and some children the moment they go out of this door they forget it, but then they are children and too because they have so many distractions... So many distractions, my God.”

During our interview the lunch break bell rang and when it did the children charged into the hallways and down the stairs towards the courtyard where they could eat, play and relax a
little. Iris and I closed the door and all of windows to hear one another better. We then resumed speaking about Iris’ experience with the Sapling of Knowledge School students and what she has observed about their anger. It was then Iris told me that by and large a child is sent to her because of some problem, e.g., a child lashes out, a child curses, a child steals something.

“The basic reason for this negative behaviour is the anger,” said Iris, “that is what I feel.” She will ask the children to say why they are so angry and what happened in their body when they got angry. “At first, they are not able to understand the question. So I say, ‘When you are angry, do you notice how you breathe?’ ‘Yes,’ says the child. ‘What happened when you were angry, how did you breathe?’ The child says, ‘I was breathing heavily.’ We communicate about it like that. Sometimes a child will say, ‘I felt hot in the ears!’ and ‘then I felt like giving’ (punching someone).’ Iris said she listens to the children and reminds them to feel whatever they are feeling. She said that if she does not empathise with the children they will never open up to her.

Iris also said she tells the children, “When you are very angry there is a technique which you are practising, but you are using it only when you are asked to use it. But that same technique you can use when you are angry. Just stop and realise, ‘I am angry now.’ Then start observing, ‘I am breathing in, I am breathing out...’ Use that anapana, be conscious of your breathing in..., and see your anger calming down.” Iris even asked some of the children to come and give her feedback about using their breath awareness when they are angry. Iris said, “One or two children have come back to me, and said, ‘Maam, we have tried, and my anger has come down. I am able to get my anger down by observing my breath.’”

Iris gave an example of a child in 4th standard who was being disruptive in class. If the child noticed a classmate was very quiet, she would go and pinch that classmate and if the child was agitated while the teacher was speaking, the child would make some noises. Iris asked the child why she behaved that way. The child replied that the thoughts to disturb others come to
mind and so this child does what her thoughts tell her to. Iris said to the child, “Yes, always the thought will come first, and the action will come later on. So when this thought comes to you, then you start breathing in and breathing out. You are always breathing in and breathing out, but start observing that breath, and see if it will help you to avoid this negative action that you are thinking of—that negative thought.”

Often this child came for counselling during her free periods because she was too disruptive to remain in class. Then one day the school manager at last minute asked Iris to conduct meditation for a few classes and because this child was with Iris at the time she accompanied Iris to the meditation sessions. Iris said, “I saw that she was sitting with her full concentration. The same child that was distracting others so much and was behaving so mischievously. I went to three classes, and conducted 3 half hour sessions of meditation. This child was so focused, so composed and so peaceful. It was amazing to see her.” The next day the same child asked Iris if she could again accompany her to the meditation sessions, which Iris agreed to. Iris said, “She meditated perfectly.”

“We have to learn so much from these children. For me it is still a learning process—everyday I am learning something new from the children who come to me. We must learn about their experiences, because we have not experienced them in our childhood and we can’t compare our childhood with the children’s childhood today. It is completely different.” Iris repeated how if we are to understand children, we have to first start empathising with them. Also, Iris pointed out how something like Anapana Meditation helps the children. “It is fascinating to see the change in them,” she said, “they are healing themselves. We are only being a slight support to them. Children are like creepers, they need support, and we have to give the support to them, otherwise they will fall to the ground. But I also think they are able to understand what I say better, when I tell them to go back to their breath, because they have been practising concentrating on their breath everyday.”
Iris expressed that the time is right for meditation, and in fact she said it is the need of the hour. “It has to be taken up more seriously,” said Iris, “and that is what the school is also wanting to do. It is helping the students, the teachers and ourselves, and you can see the difference definitely even in a short time. The difference is there in a child’s overall behaviour, which changes once they start focusing and being more at peace with themselves.” While the behaviour change may be more obvious with some children, Iris conveyed how each child can find its own way in its own time but that definitely it will help in the long run because we all need to breathe. Iris said, “Concentrating on the breath, whether someone is a Muslim, a Hindu or a Christian, I don’t think anyone is going to object to this practise. Observing and being aware of the breath is such a universal thing. That’s why people from all over are willing to do this practise, wholeheartedly, because it is just about the breath, which we need to survive and without it we won’t be.”

A Drop in the Ocean

The following information is composed from two interviews with Father John, the priest who envisioned the Sapling of Knowledge School. The interviews were held in Father John’s office in a building on the same grounds on which he lives and the school sits. In fact, we spoke in the building that was the original Sapling of Knowledge School. The old school building has now been transformed into housing for destitute boys, a wellness centre and a daycare. Father John and I covered a lot of information in a relatively short amount of time and but for asking him a few key questions, Father John’s experience, insight and stories carried the interviews.

Father John was born, raised and ordained as a Catholic priest in the Indian state called Goa. Shortly after Father John ordained he was assigned as the overseer of a large geographical area located between Gujarat and Maharashtra that was under the Goa Diocese. During that posting Father John was responsible for many priests and nuns who worked with the Adivasi
peoples of the region, and among those peoples were 2000 children whose basic essentials were fundraised by the Goa Diocese. At one point Father John travelled to Japan to raise enough funds to secure the children’s essentials for 1 year, and although in the end the necessary funds were raised, half of the money in fact was procured by providence. In other words, when Father John returned to India from Japan he learned the Indian rupee had devalued by three times against the yen, meaning the required amount was raised. Father John carried on his ministry in the Adivasi region for several years and then from 1994 to 1995 he was permitted to take a sabbatical.

Father John’s intention was to use the sabbatical to deepen his understanding of Gautama Buddha’s teachings and Christian teachings. By that time Father John had been introduced to Vipassana Meditation (Vipassana) by a senior fellow priest who had attended three Vipassana courses. The senior priest gave Father John a book called *The Art of Living* by William Hart. Father John found the book very interesting. He said, “I started practising on my own, but I could not get the effect William Hart talked about in that book. There was no experiential experience there and so I asked this senior priest that if he went again to a meditation course to also book my name.” In 1990 Father John attended his first Vipassana course. He said he remembers it well. “It was a big bang,” said Father John, “not in the sense as the scientist people’s big bang but as a personal big bang. In my training, we had studied a lot of western psychology, Freud, Hume and all those guys, but it was not experiential. It was based on statistics, you were supposed to observe somebody and take notes and come to some conclusions. The lab was outside of me. With Vipassana I realised I am the lab. Well, it was not an easy course.”

Father John realised how he could come to know something through external and internal experience, and how the western science notion of a lab can offer a logical answer and the eastern science notion of a lab can offer an experience of the reality itself. “Something fantastic happened which had never happened before,” said Father John, “I learned of a technique, which I was told if you follow it scientifically, it should work, and for me it did.” Father John had trained
in theological studies for 4 years. He was required to study the scriptures and to make a psychosurgery of every word of the German scholars, the western scholars and a few Indian scholars. He said, “It was all intellectual and cerebral. Good, it helped me to explain the Bible geographically, historically and personally with some understanding. But then following the Vipassana course a simple reading of the Bible gave me a very penetrative perception of the same words I had read before but never understood.” Father John expressed that he would not say that he had not been touched by Christ earlier, but only after the Vipassana course did he realise something was different.

Father John served as a volunteer at the central Vipassana Centre in Maharashtra for the first 5 months of his sabbatical, and following that experience he was appointed a Vipassana teacher. For the remainder of his sabbatical, he went to Pune where he wanted to rationalise his experience of Vipassana, meaning he wanted to intellectualise the teachings of the Gautama Buddha and his experience of it. He said, “I came to Pune thinking I will stay here for a short time and have the opportunity to conduct Vipassana courses, since I was appointed a teacher.”

Father John did conduct courses and he also began to understand better how Jesus was saying something totally different from what he had learned intellectually. Following the Vipassana course and service at the meditation centres, he realised there was life, new life, every time he read the scriptures. “Intellectualism is not everything in life,” said Father John, “there is wisdom in each one of us. The capacity is in each human being, so it just has to be discovered, and there is a method. Goenka may be saying, Vipassana is the only way, but I would say, this is one of the ways, and it is helpful. Human beings have that capacity to go deep within, be introvert and make the journey within, and then discover wonderful things.”

Father John referred to a Taoist saying about taking root in one’s own tradition leads a person to fly, and he was quick to add that he questioned his own tradition because he could not get answers. He said, “Vipassana made me understand Christ. Not that Christ made a lot of
sense, I was programmed into it, from my parents and Indians, who are very ritualistic, religious and pious people. But when you ask honest questions, and when you come to theology with a lot of logical things, you ask more questions. The more questions asked, the more questions remain without answers! When I came to Vipassana, a lot of questions were answered. There are different ways of answering. But nobody answers these fundamental questions—Why we are different, yet at the same time we are one? It’s only experience that makes you. Vipassana gives you an experience of going deep within what you are, your limited self.”

As a child Father John learned there were three types of prayer: The vocal prayer, which includes singing; the discursive prayer, which is inclusive of reflection; and the contemplative prayer, which is a passive prayer without reflection. But as Father John continued to search, he realised there was also for some mystics a fourth kind of prayer—the prayer of silence. “For me,” said Father John, “Vipassana is a prayer of silence. No words, no rites, no rituals, no dogmas, you are just silent and observing. The mind has to be silent. Of course the technique leads you—your body is silenced, then your mind is silenced and finally you are still and know, I am God. Now this “God” business is just an anthropomorphic way of understanding the divine energy or whatever a person calls it.” Father John said how he was taught to pray always, to pray without ceasing, but he was never taught how to pray always. He said in the history of the church a person can read how even the desert priests used the breath, but that slowly changed because the priests started verbalising their prayers, and that created an obstacle to remaining aware of the breath. “Buddha had a purpose for the breath,” said Father John, “it was not simply to concentrate. It was to go to the unconscious mind. The nature of the mind is discursive, and it is only natural that a person has to go beyond the rituals and concepts—the discursive mind.”

We went on to speak about the history of the Sapling of Knowledge School, and how during Father John’s sabbatical one thing led to another and he slowly began developing his vision for the school on the land he has lived on since his sabbatical and which is now owned by
the Goa diocese. Father John’s religious superiors had conveyed to him how they were an Indian society and they would like an institute expressing the charism of India and attend to what it is that they do not know. Soon enough Father John asked his superiors if they could start a school with the background of Vipassana. It was Iris’ husband, a Hindu brahman and formerly a serious Vipassana practitioner, who suggested the school should reflect the Indian understanding of approaching knowledge with humility. Father John said, “Knowledge is an ocean, wisdom is an ocean, and we cannot fathom it. In school we only give information. The world is full of information now. That sells. But wisdom in its wisdom knows how to distribute wisdom.”

Father John said that the school and its leaning towards the meditation can help prepare the child, and yet the wisdom has to come on its own. This means that he feels what the school can offer is the equivalent to “a drop in the ocean”. Father John also said how meditation is as important as food and water because unless a person’s depth is satisfied, the depth is always seeking and yearning. As for why he chose Anapana for the children, he said because it was tested by the Vipassana Research Institute, he had been to schools and other locations where they practised Anapana and it seemed a viable way to introduce meditation in school and the practise was widespread with a clear method and teachers who conduct the courses. He said, “It was like, why invent a wheel when it is already invented. It should be for everyone! It could be healing for the poor, the broken, as well as settling for the lower-middle class. And definitely we have to help children with discipline—and self-discipline is the best discipline!”

In fact it was very difficult to begin the Sapling of Knowledge School, and primarily because the teachers were unwilling and unable to attend the 10 Day Vipassana Meditation courses. When the school was only for lower primary children, women were required to work with the young children, although maintaining or even hiring females who could be away from their familial responsibilities for 10 days of meditation was difficult. Therefore Father John and those involved with the school decided to do justice to the school’s academic part first, and then
slowly introduce the other ideas. Father John said how they began with next to nothing and in what was then a small shanty town. “Until the structure is there,” said Father John, “then we can only think of putting a roof on. But we maintained that it would be a wonderful idea, as the school grows, as structures are put in place, to include this meditation also.” Father John with a certain calmness expressed that the meditation part has remained.

With regards to MITRA, Father John said something is better than nothing. He said that even when Gautama Buddha established his teachings in India and they got washed away, something of them remained elsewhere, such as in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma (Nyanaponika, 1994a, pp. xvii-iii). “MITRA is a very strong support,” said Father John, “but anything that is forced boomerangs. The moment you make it compulsory, there is a reaction to it. Who knows, it might succeed. I don’t know it may be a universal expression, but it is said that God writes in straight and crooked lines. Now the Buddha’s teaching of the first noble truth says that we can liberate ourselves by watching our dukkha (suffering). Suffering is not a straight line. This is the given. In all the -isms you have the given. Even in technique there is the given. It is a mysterious world, and that mystery is not to be solved but understood. The paradoxes have to be understood, and we cannot connect the paradoxes in a logical way. Therefore, never push anybody. Promote, inspire people, but don’t push it, don’t make it compulsory, and if anybody is ready they’ll take it.”

Father John acknowledged the risk in adopting a western education because all of it is logical and teaches seeing in a logical way. He said teaching that is fine although logical is not the end of the journey. “Straight thinking” as he called it has led the western world to become very organised in spite of not having a deep philosophy. “Now life is beyond organisation,” he said, “and while India is in chaos for the last 5000 years it is okay. I am not saying it is proper. It does not have the order of the West, but there is an orderly chaos. That is why Thomas Merton said that the West and the East have to meet. The Indic philosophy can see but it can’t walk. The
West can walk but has trouble seeing!” Father John suggested that to balance our nature we need both a rational capacity and an intuitive capacity, because life is beyond any system or institution and that deep down we remain limited since everything is in flux. “It’s going to happen, consumerism, in India” he said, “but here we are a little bit more ritualistic society compared to Europe and America, so our rituals will remain a little longer. The nature, its existence, will force us all to evolve from rights and rituals to something higher though—there are so many stages. We are still evolving.”

Although Father John believes the East and West will meet, he said it happen in its own time and way. “Nature has its own way of synthesizing,” he said, “it’s own gentle way, like the morning dew has its own way of coming and its own way of evaporating. So nature’s a very good example, but humans, because of the mind, did things fast.” Father John’s understanding of the power of the mind points to our vulnerability when we use the power of the mind without understanding our limitedness. “Our civil laws are so limited,” said Father John, “our penal laws are so limited, our earthly laws are so limited, who can control this 120 layered mind multiplied by 52?” The 120 layered mind multiplied by 52 refers to the states of consciousness or qualities of mind attributed to Gautama Buddha’s discovering of the mind (Kornfield, 2008, pp. 50-56). Gautama Buddha explained how the masterwork of painting is designed by the mind together with the senses, and that “the mind is more artistic and creative than any created masterpiece; it is the source of all human creativity” (p. 52).
CHAPTER THREE

The Children

The eight participant children, three of whom are sisters, are female and range in age from 11 to 16. All of the participant children live in one of Maher’s houses within a 20 minute and 35 minute walk of their respective schools. Seven of the participant children attend the Sapling of Knowledge School, which is an English medium school, and as stated earlier they meditate regularly during the school day; and one of the participant children attends the Rising Star School, which is an English medium school, and she and her class meditate together for 5 minutes on Saturday mornings. The participant children have lived at Maher anywhere from 4 to 15 years. They live at Maher for different reasons but generally because their mothers are too poor or unable to maintain a home and the fathers have either died or are absent or the children do not have parents because one or both parents have died. For those children whose parent/s have died, Maher does its best to maintain or build contact with the children’s respective grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousin siblings (cousins) and when possible the children stay with their biological family members during the Divali and summer break holidays.

Maher assumes responsibility for all of the participant children’s housing, food, clothes, basic schooling (i.e., school fees, school supplies, school uniforms, back pack and lunch container), extra-curricular activities (i.e., the children participate in activities similar to the ones offered through their respective schools but which cost much less or are more holistic), social services and medical expenses. That said, Maher also encourages the children’s respective family members to contribute to the children’s needs if and when they can and a log book is kept to make note of what is provided (e.g., payment for school fees, financial contribution for food and purchasing of toiletries and essentials). Briefly, regarding food, Maher serves quality vegetarian food and some meals are served monthly or when possible (e.g., monthly Maher prepares masala dosas or fermented rice-like crepes served with a curry and coconut chutney).
Overall though the Maher homes run similarly, which not only means the homes can be created in different areas of India but also conceivably elsewhere, as outlined in a book on how to create Maher homes in other areas of the world (Cunninghman, 2013). To summarise, on a given day in a Maher home of 20 to 25 children and two adults or housemothers, the house members awaken usually around 5:30 a.m. or so and roll-up their bedding (i.e., a very thin cotton or synthetic mattress and replace it and a blanket and sheet) and place it on their designated place on a shelf which is a foot or so wide. The children then sit for community prayer followed by breakfast, and so the children remain seated and eat their meal in the same place on the floor where they meditated. During the community prayer, the housemother in charge of the food/cooking will have organised breakfast, and perhaps with some assistance from the older children. After breakfast the children dress and prepare for school. All of this is done by the children themselves and by the housemother who oversees the children. An important quality of Maher is that the homes are of mixed age, which means the children learn from one another and notably through the pairing of an older and a younger child (i.e., the older child helps care for the younger child’s washing, dressing, feeding, social guidance and emotional support).

The children make their own way or are chaperoned by a housemother or college age child to and from school. Some primary and secondary age children attend school Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and attend school for a half-day on Saturdays and some children attend school Monday to Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. or from 12:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., and this is because some schools cannot hold all of its students at once. The secondary age children attending schools with two sessions per day also go to school for half-days on Saturdays. The early years aged children usually attend school in the morning. The teachers at the respective schools are all informed of the Maher children, and especially if there are any issues with one child or another, and the school staff and administrators are by and large sympathetic to the Maher children’s needs. Seven of the participant children attend school from
8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. or one participant child finishes school at 12:30 p.m. After school the children return directly to their Maher home, where they change out of their school uniforms and then have a light snack, e.g. cucumber slices with chilli powder. Proceeding a brief repose the children commence their homework, and are usually assisted by the housemother who overseas the children and/or by volunteers who are Indian or foreign.

After the children complete their homework, the younger children play among themselves and the older children attend to their house duties and help to prepare food for dinner or wash their own and/or the younger children’s clothes and the like. In addition, Monday to Friday any extra-curricular activities at the children’s respective house or at another Maher house occur some time between 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. A community prayer time takes place around 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. and is proceeded by dinner, which again is prepared by the housemother in charge of the food/cooking and with help from the older children. Following dinner the older children wash the dishes and sweep the floor to prepare it for sleeping on and meanwhile the other children organise themselves for bed by bathing and attending to their personal hygiene and removing their bedding to lay out in their designated sleeping areas. When time and resources permit, the children watch the news or a movie on the house TV. The household quiets around 10:00 p.m. or so.

To reclarify, Maher children by age 8 begin to attend Anapana Meditations courses although Sister Lucy introduces silence and an awareness of the breath to children at age 4 or so. The 1 Day Anapana Meditation courses are held at the different Maher houses at least once per year. During Maher’s community prayer time the house members of each house sit in a circle on thin synthetic floor mats and engage in song, prayer and silence, which is the time in which they can choose to meditate or not. Again, the eight participant children have practised regularly Anapana Meditation anywhere from 4 to 9 years at Maher and/or the Sapling of Knowledge School. Briefly, one participant child identified as a Catholic, one participant child identified
more as a Hindu, three participant children identified as Maratha and yet they consistently expressed that all Gods are good and three participant children seemed to have a better understanding of Hinduism although they expressed that all Gods are good.

It is important to add that Maher fundraises locally, nationally and internationally on an ongoing basis. The Maher children are guided to understand that they unlike many children in India have a unique opportunity. Therefore the Maher children seem to take their opportunity to heart and do what they can to show their gratitude to donors and potential donors. Even the younger children often spoke on how they want to do their personal best because they live on the charity of others and that by doing their best they not only help to ensure Maher continues but also to do what they can as young citizens who make decisions that lead to a better world. Sister Lucy respects that each child has a right to dream, and so Maher works hard to help each child reach for its personal dream. That said, every child may not always be able to attain the dream it has in mind, and usually that is the result of too much hardship and lack of resources, and so each child is helped to realise what it can do and to do that with dignity and respect. Regardless of the path on which each child travels, Maher ensures every child has a bank account in which donations can accrue for future education or the like.

It is also important to note how already nearly every child at Maher has an opportunity to do something that its parent/s was unable to do, which is to attend school or to attend school past the 10th standard. The Maher children have spoken openly on such matters without any prompting; the children have also again openly shared how they and their families are very poor. The degree of poverty the children understand is something that can be talked about neatly enough but to be with the children at Maher regularly is only to begin to understand the poverty they live with and also how that poverty shapes them and their respective understanding of the world. Overall the children are truly humble. That humility is in part reflected by the second-hand clothes the children wear, by the food they eat which is paid for by donation and even
appealed for by Maher staff at the weekly outdoor markets in and around Pune and by the modest house they live in that is either rented or donated. All of this means that the Maher children rarely take things for granted, such as a piece of candy, and rarely do they not share what they receive, such as a piece of candy.

Also, because many of the children at Maher are poor, they do not speak their second national language, English, but rather their native language/s, which means they attend government state Marathi medium schools and colleges. Those children who live closer to the Pune centre city, such as the eight participant children, attend English medium schools. The English medium schools fees are costly, and yet Sister Lucy feels it is important for some of the children to study in English. Many parents today in India want their children to attend English medium schools not only for prestige but also because they feel their children will receive a better education and/or a better opportunity for advancement (Mooij, 2008). The speaking of English in schools full-time though can be a challenge, and in fact English may be rarely spoken. In other words, when the participant children and I began meeting, and although we were at first more shy to speak with one another, as time passed I understood how each child’s understanding of English varied, and so we worked accordingly. That said, I was uncertain how the children and I would eventually work together officially because of the language barriers.

Last, it is important to note how two thirds of the children who live at Maher are female, which in India means they are “the most disadvantaged sections of the population in terms of resources, access to healthcare, education, information and communication technology” (Sankar, 2010, pp. 2-3). Therefore because Maher’s techniques are holistic, and must address the root causes of issues, this means the organisation directly and/or indirectly addresses what is essential for personal, local, national and international well-being. That is to say female well-being is synonymous with a prosperous society—and especially female children require equality in the home, community and country. Eleanor Roosevelt (1958) spoke at the United Nations about
where universal human rights begin and the need to experience them in “small places, close to home—so close and so small they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in, the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works.”

That the participant children are female and attend school, and English medium schools, reflects how Maher supports the female child, and especially the poor female child, to develop the values and leadership the world direly needs to heal and prosper. “Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstone of freedom, democracy, and sustainable human development ... Education plays a critical role in demographic transition, female education, in particular, is seen as important in the process of economic growth and development” (Bajpai, 2006, p. 322; Virk & Cheema, 2011, p. 2). Education has the immense power to transform although the inculcation of values and leadership which support the child to develop ethical faith and quality of character in cooperation with nature is what a healthy democratic society depends on (Dewey, 1916/2004, Chapter XVIII; Ikeda, 2010, Chapter 7; Rockefeller, 2009).

**Unity**

*United we stand, divided we fall.*

*Aesop, Four Oxen and the Lion, 6th century*

Montessori (1936/2003) observed how “the child strives to assimilate his environment and from such efforts spring the deep seated unity of his personality” (pp. 31, 199). The will among the participant children to aim for wholeness grew increasingly apparent the more time we spent together. One example of their will to unite was reflected in their readiness to associate as a group that would meditate and work together on meditation. Another example follows from the suggestion of an Indian colleague to invite the children to name their nascent group, which I did,
and within a week and by themselves they chose a name their group—*Unity*. When I queried them on why they choose that name a number of children either quoted the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter and/or something similar to it. The epigraph refers to a fable that in fact has different versions attributed to it but the version I refer to depicts how two bulls are safe from a lion only in so far as they remain united (Aesop, 2002/2008, p. 32). This insight around remaining united speaks to our ability, need and desire for cooperation and how by working together we can transcend our limitations and prosper. Also, any increase in cooperation across boundaries points to an increasing tolerance towards our holistic tendency for wholeness.

When the children and I discussed the group name, I noticed how a few of the children were not as outwardly enthusiastic as some of the others, and so I waited for more signals from everyone to see if all of us were in agreement. *Unity* not only became unanimously the best name for the group but in time it also pointed to the children’s desire for unity within themselves, among themselves and with seemingly everything. Their call for unity reflects the child’s need and tendency for it. Montessori (1949/2002) says, “This unity born among the children, which is produced by a spontaneous need, directed by an unconscious power, and vitalized by a social spirit, is a phenomenon needing a name, and I call it *cohesion in the social unit*” (p. 241).

Montessori felt this idea of cohesion was spontaneously forced upon her by the children with whom she worked, and the children’s abilities were something which left her speechless with astonishment. She expressed how the “sense of solidarity not instilled by any instruction, completely extraneous to any form of emulation, competition or personal advantage was a gift to nature” (p. 242). The way the group members in Unity mobilised themselves left me speechless with astonishment.

The members of Unity were Dana (age 14), Sila (age 11), Panna (age 16), Viriya (age 13), Khanti (age 15), Sacca (age 14), Adhitthana (age 14), Metta (15 age), Upekkha (age 15). The child referred to as Khanti was unable to participate in this study’s interviews even though
she was a group member for over 2 years. Her story is relevant to this study and she is occasionally referred to in this thesis, such as in the dialogue at the beginning of this thesis. The children also insisted I was a group member and that I be called Nekhamma. To clarify, there were 10 children in the original group although after several months one child resumed living with her family and then much later Khanti needed to for her well-being temporarily move to a different state in India. Khanti remains a Maher child although she became inaccessible due to her living arrangements, and when we did speak in person during her Divali holidays she told me that she was no longer in an environment where regular meditation practice was supported.

The Unity members for over 2.5 years supported one another to meditate, discuss their experiences around meditation and keep meditation journals. Sister Lucy wanted the children in the group to focus more on their meditation because she felt it would help them to focus and reflect on their experiences and that by doing that remain more connected. Sister Lucy especially told me she wanted the children in the group to use their meditation journals to help them connect when they returned to their respective homes for the holidays. To help generate energy around meditation over the holidays each group member created at least one meditation journal activity to contribute to a list of meditation journal activities the group members could refer to over the holidays. Truly the list was thoughtful and creative and something from which we all drew again and again. Overall the children in the group worked alone on their journals except for the 3.5 months we met as a group twice a week for 1 hour after school.

The 3.5 months of group work was mostly exploratory because there was no real base from which to work. That said from my experience as a meditation practitioner, and even though our group time together was limited, it became apparent that when we did meditate together for 10 minutes we were more united—focused, understanding and supportive. In other words, it became essential for us to meditate together each time we met as a group. Otherwise, the children in the group contributed a lot to how we worked together, i.e., how we could address
disturbances within the group, how we could work with the meditation journals if at all and how we could spend our time together if what I had in mind was completed, not engaging enough, etc. Reciprocal teaching and learning was the best approach. There were times though when I had to read the group’s overall behaviour and make decisions on behalf of the group, such as no matter what we would meditate together as a group each time we met, we would end group early if there was too much disturbance and we would take a break of 1 month or more because there was too much going on in their Maher house to continue.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo’s long quotation at the beginning of this thesis speaks to the importance of reciprocal teaching and learning among children and adults. However it was not until the interviews with the participant children that I truly began to understand just how well they could carry themselves such that their experiences largely directed our interviews. With that in mind, it is important to refer to the participant children’s pseudonyms, which in fact are terms for virtues. The virtues were taken from a piece of paper I had held onto for several years to remind me to strengthen my virtues. I carried the list with me to India and once Unity formed it occurred to me that perhaps because there were 10 children, of which originally there were, and 10 virtues, that eventually the children’s pseudonyms could be the virtues. I was concerned though in part because the virtues could easily be associated with Theravada Buddhism, a religion, and not a secular mindful practise, such as Vipassana Meditation. As Dewey (1934/1986) expressed though religion and religious differ from one another—the former is a noun denoting an institution and the latter is an adjective denoting a quality or aspect of an experience wherein a person’s elements harmonise and cooperate with the changing conditions in the environment (pp. 16-17). My intentions with regards to the virtues remain with the latter meaning of the word.

Many people in Canada and elsewhere struggle with proper moral guidance. Referring to the virtues gave me a “framework for developing a fruitful attitude toward daily activities so that
any activity or relationship undertaken wisely with the primary purpose of developing” my virtue became more meaningful or satisfying (Thanissaro, 2013, Introduction section, para. 5). I could put into practise what as a child I was told to do but never showed in theory and practise how to do, such as “love thy neighbour”. The focus on the 10 virtues also became a reliable way of measuring my accomplishments. In our mundane lives accomplishments have “a way of turning into dust, but perfections of the character, once developed, are dependable and lasting, carrying one over and beyond the vicissitudes of daily living” (para. 6). When I chose to build on those 10 qualities, moral behaviours or virtues in myself, I discovered the guidance I needed.

The children in the group on a few occasions said that they wanted me to choose their pseudonyms, and so finally I suggested they pick their pseudonyms from the list of virtues. In the end I cut up the virtues one by one from that original list. Then when we were deciding on how to pick from among the pieces, the children said to place the pieces of paper face down on the ground. Soon enough and with excitement each child in the group took hold of a piece of paper. A virtue remained unclaimed though because there were only nine children in the group by that time. But to my surprise one group member said the name must be mine because I was a group member too and one piece of paper remained. The decision seemed to be unanimous. The remaining virtue was nekhamma, and its meaning in relation to my role has a significance that I refer to later.

What was uncanny was how each virtue “belonged” to each child in the group such that if a different virtue were chosen it would not have suited the group member but rather a different group member. By the end of our interviews it was evident just how much the participant children’s respective virtues were predominant themes shaping their stories. Even though I remain a bit hesitant about the pseudonyms because of how they may be interpreted, it is clear to me how each pseudonym speaks directly to each participant child’s uniqueness. Furthermore each child “blindly” picked her pseudonym as if it were hers to begin with. For those reasons the
pseudonyms remain in Pali and specifically with the Pali definitions in mind.

The interviews illuminated how closely the children’s lived experiences centre around their virtues and how the energy of those virtues seemingly grew stronger from the participant children's moral practise. Witnessing closely the participant children’s moral and virtuous qualities helped me to realise what Montessori (1936/2003) meant when she referred to the child as a social being of *par excellence* (p. 199). It is the child’s need and tendency towards wholeness that continually offers us a way forward because true “unity in the individual and between man and nature, as well as between man and man, can arise only in a form of action that does not attempt to fragment the whole of reality” (Bohm, 1980, p. 20). Children want and need wholeness—they are drawn to moral living—because they are essentially natural beings (Montessori, 1936/2003, p. 199). It can therefore be said that because the nature of the child or the qualities associated with it are accessible to us as adults that at any age it is only natural for us to approach firsthand knowledge or experience “the unity and continuity of nature” of which everything is made (Downs, 1978, Chapter 1). The participant children are not only exposed to moral living but also they practise moral living that they in turn carry into society with them.

Gautama Buddha taught how moral living and awareness lead to happiness although the first step is relevant to all moral living, and so “whether one believes in a particular religion or not, whether one believes in survival or not, everyone should practise the moral life” (Karunadasa, 2013, p. 99). A mindful practise is one way to strengthen the mind and strengthening the mind is preceded by some degree of moral awareness and/or practise. A mind that is tangled in immoral behaviour cannot rest long enough to be morally aware and thus strengthen the mind. However the child already lives within a relatively purer moral space and so if it can strengthen its mind to maintain truer to its nature from a young age then society can approach its wholeness better. The Dalai Lama says, “If every eight-year-old is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation” (Chan, 2013, para.
So pointing to each child’s story around their mindful practise means pointing to their virtue, but as I came to understand that first means addressing their moral practise.

**Mindful of Morals**

To participate in an Anapanā Meditation course children ranging from age 8 to 16 are asked together as a group to take five moral precepts. The first precept is to abstain from killing, which means trying to treat all beings with kindness without harming or killing them; the second precept is to abstain from stealing, which means taking only what is given with permission; the third precept is to abstain from a life of misconduct, which means treating other children as brothers or sisters or best friends; the fourth precept is to abstain from speaking lies, harsh words, or backbiting, which means speaking what is true, kind and gentle and not telling lies or saying hurtful things to anybody or about anybody; and the fifth precept is to abstain from all intoxicants, which means not taking any alcohol, drugs or any intoxicant which hinders clarity of mind (Anapanā Meditation for Children and Teens, n.d., Children section).

Unity discussed and explored morality extensively. As a group we studied the meaning of the morals precepts, and there were questions and confusion about what they meant and how to apply them in everyday living. For instance, we talked about what is backbiting and gossiping (e.g., does saying something about someone out of concern qualify as gossip), what is stealing (e.g., does taking a handful of sugar from the kitchen without permission qualify as stealing) and what is killing (e.g., does killing a mosquito when there is a fear of malaria qualify as killing). Some questions we did not find answers to other than return to the breath and do our best. Then in one of our group meetings we wrote out the moral precepts together, and when we arrived at the last precept one participant child, Dana, announced there was another precept, as though it were missing from the original five. Dana said we should abstain from blaming others and ourselves. Most of us seemed to heartily support her suggestion. I was also happy with her
initiative. But to be honest I was also unsure of what to think because I knew there were only five precepts. Later, through listening, writing and reflecting, it became obvious to me of how we blame others and ourselves. The child’s job from birth is to adapt, and so when their environment is not supportive of their growth and something goes awry, they tend to feel they are at cause. This would be an example of one of the effects of the previously discussed deviated life force or horme. Now perhaps try and imagine, for a moment, what is the burden of female children who are underprivileged, entirely dependent on the kindness of others and come from long histories in their short lives of personal suffering.

The work around morality or ethical behaviour was ongoing inside and outside of the time the participant children and I spent working together on meditation as a mindful practise. The group became a kind of womb in which questions and concerns were raised, ideas and dreams were explored and challenging experiences and feelings were expressed in different ways. But we could only be that cohesive and open with one another if all of us maintained working on our ethical behaviour, which the meditation practise was integral to and subsequently vice versa. How integral moral practise and meditation practise are to one another only grew more evident once the children and I addressed working with both practises in a given moment. As we discovered, working with both practices concurrently was easier said that done even though the children had years of experience with meditation.

It takes the strength of mind to stop in a given moment, grow aware of the breath and then reflect on what is and is not an ethical response. In other words, ethical behaviour precedes ethical living, which in fact points to how children are more likely to lead purer lives than adults. This means that although the children and I first addressed how to use the breath outside of formal practise, which in and of itself seemed like a new discussion, it grew clear how doing that was putting the cart before the horse. So we shifted our focus to ethical behavior and how to practise that in day-to-day life. The children seemed to take that exploration to heart because
within a short time they would spontaneously express to me what they had experienced either as ethical conundrums, successes or failures. The following are brief examples into each child’s lived experience around their ethical behaviour.

_Dana_: “What we have done wrong, we should not blame others for; it is our mistake. And if we have done wrong, we should not blame ourselves but we should improve that mistake. If we blame ourselves, we do not understand that mistake, we just get nervous and stuck and we don’t try to grow up and progress.”

_Sila_: “After first break, my bench partner was disturbing me, he was beating me, playfully. I did nothing, I was meditating, and then after meditation I told the teacher my partner was disturbing me while meditating. The teacher called him and shouted at him, ‘You are only not meditating and not allowing others to meditate!’ This is the first time I told the teacher. I was very—if anyone is shouting at us, water comes from my eyes like that. Every day that boy with his leg he's beating my leg.”

_Panna_: “When I was 8, I learned from Goenka, those cassettes, _anapana_. He’s saying this, he’s saying that. I remembered what he said, and since then I am following those rules. He said not to beat anything, and so I thought that we should not beat animals. Even when a mosquito comes near me, I am doing like this (she makes a shooing action with her hand). ‘Go, I am not beating you, go.’ I never beat the mosquitos.”

_Viriya_: “From meditation, I am fighting less, I am not speaking bad words and I am not teasing others. And I have improved in my studies, a little, little—English language, English literature.”

_Sacca_: “When I am not plucking flowers, I think in my mind, ‘Flowers look pretty only on trees or plants.’ And when I don’t beat insects, at that time I think, ‘Why should I beat them, they are also like us? God created us and also them. I do not have any right to beat them.’”

_Adhitthana_: “I am using my breath whenever I am angry, and I am going to hit a child. I
am controlling myself. In the morning only, my brother, I told him to go for a bath, and he said, ‘I don’t have clothes.’ I told him, ‘I washed them yesterday only, they should be dry.’ He said, ‘No.’ ... He beat me first, then I beat him, three or four times with my leg. I was hitting him and Dana said, ‘Why are you hitting him?’ I beat him one more time, and he started crying, and then I said to myself, ‘I will not hit him.’ I controlled myself.”

Metta: “When I was coming to our group, I was doing meditation, and at that time I had so much anger in myself. Then after that, when last year passed and this year came, and in school I started doing meditation and at home I started doing meditation, automatically all of the children started coming to me. First when the children were coming to me, I was feeling angry. I don’t know, but now something is different, and all of the children are coming to me with their problems and saying, ‘Tell this Didi (older sister).’ And I am taking them and asking, ‘What happened?’”

Upekkha: “If we want anything, and it is not ours, we have to think, we have to do meditation, then what our mind says, then that we have to do that—not to steal.”

Those examples are a few from among many of the seen and unseen ways the children put their ethical practise into motion. The ownership the children assumed for their moral practise paralleled the ownership they assumed for their duties at Maher, school and elsewhere. But it is important to point to how over time they began to carry their moral practise like a lantern into those other duties. The children showed a range of responses to their moral practise, anything from sadness for making a mistake, to elation for doing something charitable, to ambiguity for making the right choice even though it was difficult to make. Overall the group focus on moral practise highlighted how moral practise was required our effort although it led to more meaningful engagement.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Children and Meditation

Grace Feuerverger (2007) speaks of how we each have a sacred story—a story we identify with strongly enough such that through our interpretation of it we transcend some aspect of our personal life story (p. 11). Story is that place from which we all seem to originate, and so it can also be used as a means to help us transform and transcend. Feuerverger goes on to say how the telling and reading of stories can help us to reinvent our world. She asks her reader, “Can we transform painful stories into instructive ones?” (p. 48). I bore this question in mind as I approached the participant children and their stories around the theme of meditation. I also bore in mind what Robert Coles’ (1989) mentor, Dr. Ludwig, said to him about listening to people, “Remember, what you are hearing is to some considerable extent a function of you, hearing” (Coles, p. 15). But as Coles’ texts reveal it is difficult to parenthesise what a person says from one’s own perceptions, judgements and fears, and that is why he began working with others in a way that served his professional practices and everyday life practices too. His method of enquiry into others lives can be described as a phenomenology of practise (van Manen, 2014, Chapter 1).

To engage in a “process of sensitive listening is essential to all forms of professional development both for the learner and for the teacher” (Feuerverger, 2001, p. xix). Both Coles and Feuerverger conducted studies with people who live in conflict; and they both stressed that listening is intrinsic in the development of a sensitive pedagogy. However Feuerverger’s (2001, 2007, 2011) work especially creates an opening for the possibility of action sensitive pedagogy through demonstrating an education inclusive of the spectrum of human nature, meaning those social and emotional aspects that society traditionally has not taken seriously. Notably in Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel, Feuerverger (2001) reminds the reader that the two main ingredients for the Jewish-Palestinian village and its school’s success are right effort and dialogue. This means that people listened a lot to each
other’s stories; and those stories were inclusive of anger, fragmentedness, sorrow and more (pp. 109-110). To clarify, the participant children are not in armed conflict although they sought refuge at Maher because they were in grave danger and they continue to reside at Maher to maintain their safety.

Approaching the participant children in their environments with the intention to not solve anything but rather to listen with a pedagogical sensitivity to lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 23) or with a “sensitive ear” is an opportunity to directly approach the nature of the child. “The world is our home, our habitat, the materialization of our subjectivity. Whoever wants to become acquainted with the world of teachers, mothers, fathers, and children should listen to the language spoken by things in their lifeworlds, to what things mean in this world” (van Manen, 1990, pp. 111-112). During Coles’ (1989) early medical days he learned to better understand his subjects by realising people “come bearing their stories. They hope they can tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives” (p. 7). Listening for the story elements helped Coles realise that we all carry stories with us “on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (William Carlos Williams as cited in Coles, 1989, p. 30).

Mindful practice now more than ever seems to offer us a tangible and sustainable way to imbue the qualities best associated with the child—a discerning innocence, flexibility and openness. It is important to bear in mind though that the intention and motivation we bring to our mindful practice inevitably affects what we gain from our practise. The central mindset in Canada is individualistic and because that is rewarded many people turn to mindful practise with the intention to individualise and function more effectively (Schmidt, 2011, pp. 23-38). The central mindset in India is still by and large collectivistic and so mindful practise is approached more holistically (pp. 23-38). It is increasingly recognised though how over time and with practise a person’s individualistic intentions and motivations become more holistic (pp. 23-38).
That understanding coincides with research on meditation and how a person increasingly grows empathic the more they engage with a mindful practice (Davidson & Begley, 2012).

Listening to the participant children express themselves around the theme of their secular meditation practice is an opportunity to learn from children who are actively encouraged to be mindful for themselves, others and all of life. Ongoing at Maher painful stories transform into instructive ones as people work to unite individually and collectively as though the two experiences are inseparable. The power or qualities best associated with the child not only seem to enable us to unite but also by naturally choosing to unite elucidates how everything is connected to everything else so therefore our well-being depends on our cooperation (Hanh, 2011b, p. 271). Perhaps the possibility of transformation or a new sacred story begins with listening to the participant children and recognising in their stories the “taken-for-granted or our way of belonging together through our all-encompassing unity” (Husserl, 1954/1970, p. 31).

**The Ten Parami**

*Parami* or *paramita* in Pali means “perfection” or “completeness” and refers to the perfection of character in Theravada, although there are other noted lists of *parami* in the different forms of Buddhist practice (Thanissaro, 2013). The *parami* are also referred to as the “paramitas”, “10 parami” or “10 perfections”. As stated each child’s pseudonym is a virtue attributed to a previously mentioned list of 10 virtues. The order in which each child’s narrative is presented corresponds to the order in which it is suggested the virtues naturally develop, which means for example that by strengthening first virtue in the list a person is preparing the groundwork or quality of character needed to perfect the second virtue in the list and so on. The virtues are written in Pali and are listed sequentially as follows: *dana, sila, nekhamma, panna, viriya, khanti, sacca, adhitthana, metta, upekkha*. So, for example, *dana*, which means “generosity”, refers to how when the energy of giving strengthens greed and attachment to things loosens and
in turn that development of generosity prepares the groundwork for the development of *sila*, which means “morality” or “virtue”. The one amendment to that sequential order is with reference to *nekhamma* because it is association with me in the context of this study, and discussion around my lived experience follows my interpretations of the children’s lived experiences.

The children’s respective pseudonyms correspond to each child’s most outstanding virtuous quality, although each participant child also showed strength with many if not all of the virtues. The main virtue identified with each participant child though was consistently noticeable soon after we met and only grew more pronounced from that time onwards. What you read on each participant child is themed around her respective pseudonym/virtue. Some of what you read may at times seem violent and disturbing, and yet as the participant adult’s narratives reveal the anger among children is tangible and is in response to very difficult circumstances in the home, community and society. Each child’s story needs to be taken in context, and much of that context is in the preceding pages, but when necessary further information is provided. Finally, as Anna Freud told Coles (1986), “Let us try to learn from children all they have to tell us, let us sort out only later, how their ideas fit in with our own. Sometimes the children we see will even help us with our own problems, those of theory, because there can be many clues for theory in what a child chooses to say to an adult listener” (p. 23).

**Dana**

*Dana* the term as mentioned means *generosity* although this virtue can also be subdivided into three stages. The first stage can be the giving away of material things, such as monetary donations, personal items and one’s time, and this letting go of things is a strategy for learning how to let go in other ways; the second stage can be renouncing the rights of possession, meaning assimilating that we can own something only so far as we are alive; the third stage can
be relinquishing what’s in the heart whether or not we give things away (Thanissaro, 2013, Generosity section). The latter stage refers to how “we’re not willing to let anything act as an enemy to the heart by making us stingy or grasping” (Generosity section). The third stage is the more difficult to practise although the participant child Dana consistently showed her ability to work towards not allowing *anything* to grow into an enemy in her heart.

Dana has lived at Maher with her two sisters, Upekkha and Sila, for 8 years. Dana has practised Anapana Meditation since she was eight or for six years. As it happens Dana was the first child without any prompting to disclose to me some of her personal story. That incident happened in 2011 and marked a turning point in the development of friendship with the participant children. Although Dana has very little to give materially, and yet like most of the Maher children gifts and shares what she does have readily, she has a natural generosity of spirit. For example, Dana grew angry one day at school when a school superior made a decision to exchange a free period for a meditation period. Dana needed that extra time at school to do her studies. Importantly, every Maher child *needs* extra time at school to study in light of the children’s busy Maher home life. Although Dana was very angry she kept her feelings to herself because she felt that if she shared them with her classmates then her negativity would have spread to them too. Also, while the meditation was very difficult because she was so angry, Dana said she diligently persisted in trying to meditate for the duration of the class. Last, of her own volition, she generated *metta*, loving kindness, for the school superior who made the decision that led her to experience anger.

Consistently, when Dana felt safe enough, her generosity was reflected in her actions. Her generosity of spirit seemed so innate that often I perceived her as being generous without necessarily meaning to be. She seemed to act on matters when others did not and although others too were experiencing something similar to her. Certainly Dana’s actions throughout our group work helped to clarify situations and even move matters in a helpful direction, such as when
Dana disclosed personal historical information of which led to other children in the group making disclosures and in turn led us as a group to grow more united. Noteworthy is how Dana was the only child who said it was challenging for her to “understand” her breath even though it was obvious other children likewise were struggling to “understand” their breath. To “understand” the breath means that although Dana would sit straight and keep her eyes closed, she could not always feel or locate her breath under her nose. Dana worked on “understanding” her breath though through practising taking deeper breaths and receiving some group support. She began to feel her breath such that eventually she never again said she did not “understand” her breath.

Dana clearly extended her generosity of spirit to herself, too, because even prior to saying she did not “understand” her breath, she expressed that she used her breath to help herself even though she did not completely understand it. For example, Dana went to her home state for a summer break. During that time she engaged with her meditation practise and wrote about her meditation experiences. In her meditation journal, she expressed she was furious with her older sister, and knew that if she spoke out she would be in trouble, and so she closed her eyes for 5 minutes and meditated and found that afterwards she felt cool temperature wise; another time she noted that she meditated alone for half an hour and during that time she was unable to “understand” her breath, and so she took a few deep breaths and that overall helped her to focus for about 10 of the 30 minutes; last, she conveyed that she felt uncomfortable in her body and lazy, as she described it, and so she meditated and afterwards was aware that she felt comfortable.

Some of the preceding and all of the following information Dana communicated to me did not come from one conversation but rather from the three interviews Dana and I had together. This means that what follows is pieced together from our conversations which overall focused on Dana’s experiences of meditation at school and in her life in general. Dana was so
open, gentle and thoughtful that it caught me off guard and led me to want to work to stay present to anything she may say or do rather than hinder her from speaking freely and miss an opportunity to listen to her. Initially, I was anxious and felt a need to control our first interview and gather the information I thought I needed, but soon enough Dana’s nature, her generosity, guided me to let go of my attachments and experience everything she had to offer.

In fact when the interviews with the participant children began, and although most of the participant children and I had spoken by phone during their recent summer break, we had not worked together on meditation or regularly seen one another for roughly 6 months. That was the longest amount of time we had been apart since we had initially met, and therefore Dana and I naturally spent some time speaking about ourselves. It was then that I reminded her that I would need to leave India for Canada in a matter of months. When I mentioned leaving, Dana immediately grew quiet and teary. Eventually she said, “Everyone is coming in our life and then going. Didi, you should not go.” Needless to say we then sat in a heavy silence. Of course what she said challenged the grounds for this study itself. It also led me feel so proud of Dana for sharing herself and feeling had it not been for the study I would never have met her. I reasoned with Dana that even if I did stay that she too would leave Maher one day, which made her smile a little. Then I reassured her that the kind of research I chose to do, pedagogical phenomenology, means forming lasting relationships with my research participants and that I could only do something useful if I returned to Canada to finish the study. Admittedly, I was trying to reason with myself for leaving. We were both feeling sad, and so I asked her if she wanted to meditate, which she agreed to.

After a few moments, I opened my eyes and watched Dana meditate. We were sitting cross-legged and opposite one another, perhaps a couple of feet apart. She looked so focused and sat tall like a young tree. I watched her as she took a few deep breaths a couple of times. Then I noticed that she was wearing her physical education school uniform, her royal blue sweatpants
and a white short sleeve top and white hair band with her hair in two long plaits on either side of her face. I felt like I could keep watching her, but instead I closed my eyes and focused on my breath for a few more minutes.

After 10 minutes or so we opened our eyes, looked at one another and smiled. We sat in silence for a moment or two and then I asked, “How do you feel now?”

Dana looked me in the eyes and said, “Relaxed.”

“Is that sadness still there?”

“A little bit only. I was concentrating on my breath, and so no thoughts came in my mind. At first, I was not able to concentrate on my breath, I was not able to see from where the breath is coming and from where it is going out. So I tried, then afterwards, when I tried, I could feel my breath here (she touches the area under her nose), and then I was feeling my breath. And now I am feeling my breath here.”

“I understand things have changed at school, and you are meditating more?” I often asked the participant children how they were doing with the meditation at school because seemingly none of the students were taking meditation seriously and instead were doing masti (mischief). But all of the children in Unity began to take their meditation more seriously when we started to work together on a weekly basis. I did not know that they were taking things more seriously though until I joked with them about it during one of our group meetings. In fact, they seemed taken aback because I assumed they were still doing masti when they were meant to be meditating.

“Now after every period we have to do meditation, at least 1 minute. And there are two breaks, one is big and one is small, and after the breaks for 5 minutes we are doing it. The class gets disturbed, and so we do it now after every period too.”

“You said how you were playing masti you and your classmates, and so what is it like now in terms of your degree of seriousness?”
“I take it more seriously because I see changes in me and the other girls in the group. I mean they don’t fight as much, and so I also want to become like that. Also I am able to learn more, because when I meditate I remember what I have learned. Before exams we also are doing meditation, for 5 minutes, so I can remember what I learned and write my paper fast.” Dana smiled broadly. “This time I got nice marks in science, twenty out of twenty.”

We spoke more about Dana’s studies and her overall experience at school and how regardless of the difficulties in her life she wants to do better in her studies. Dana spoke with such clarity, determination and energy. In fact, Dana and all of the participant children in their own way increasingly began to express their will to do better and in more defined ways in different areas of their life. Although the participant children were willful from the day we met, the expression of their respective willfulness seemingly grew stronger, subtler and further reaching the more they worked on their meditation. It was as though they were increasingly living more often in a space of freshness.

We went on to speak about “fresh” and what it feels like. Dana said, “It means I forget everything, and I’m just not thinking about anything. There’s no tension about anything. I have more energy to do work.”

“Do you think anything in the world feels fresh all of the time?”

“Yes. Trees.”

“How would trees feel fresh?”

“Everything is blowing by them, always giving to others, and always in process. It recycles.”

“Nature can heal itself, if we all just stepped away, and just disappeared from earth and went to another planet, nature will re—”

“It will be in process.”

For some reason I thought of what I had just read in the newspaper about thoughts and
how many thoughts we have in a day. Without forethought I asked Dana, “How many thoughts do you think you have in a day?”

“Uncountable. At night it will be more than that. During sleeping time we also think, think, think and so we dream. Today I was thinking why do we name animals the way we do. If we will call a dog a dog, it means every child will see a dog and call it a dog, but why can’t it be called a cat? Who gave these names, Didi, dog, cat, parrot?” I began saying something about how words have a history, dating from Europe, Greece, India and elsewhere. Essentially I was unsure of how to respond but said that I felt her questions were great. Then I started talking about thoughts and how meditation might help us with our countless daily thoughts, and Dana seemed to understand exactly what I was referring to. She said, “Meditation can help to decrease the thoughts.” We talked about how we come to decide on our thoughts, because she had mentioned earlier how frustrated she had been one morning at her Maher house around a job that needed doing, and instead of reacting, she used her breath to stop for a moment, which helped her to reason and take action to do a job that she knew she could do. I mentioned to her that in that moment she had done something wonderful with her thoughts. She looked shy and laughed a little and then said, “After doing that I felt a little happy.”

Unexpectedly Dana then asked if she could read a book that Sacca and I read together during our interviews. I had not planned on Dana and I working on the book together, but she wanted to and so we did. The book is *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (1958/2010). It is story about a boy and a tree and how the relationship between the boy and the tree unfolds. By the end of the story the boy has grown into a haggard old man who has used the tree such that all that remains of the tree is its stump. Dana chose to read the book aloud and I listened mostly until towards the end when she grew tired, when her voice sounded strained. She does not often read stories in English aloud, and she was working hard to read it carefully and understand it. After we finished the story we paused for a moment. After a moment I asked, “What do understand
about the story? What does it mean to you?”

Without hesitation she said, “The boy wanted, the tree gave happily. The boy did not understand the love of that tree. He just asked for what he needed, and he took it, but he did not understand what that tree needed. That tree needed love. That tree needed only love from him. That tree understood what the boy needed, and the tree gave it peacefully and kindly and that boy did not understood that the tree loves him from her heart.” Dana was referring to the boy and how as he grew older he went from being with the tree to growing and using the tree. He went from seemingly loving the tree as he would a best friend to using it as a place for romance (canoodling with his girlfriend), to using the tree as a means to make money (selling the tree’s apples), to using the tree for the purpose of shelter (cutting the tree limbs to build a house) and to using the tree as means of entertainment (cutting the tree’s trunk to build a boat). Dana went on and said, “The tree understood that boy does not love her, but that what he wanted he took from her. The tree understood the boy had become weak, and he did not have love her anymore.

“He learned from the beginning to the end. At last he did not have anything, he did not have a house, he did not have a wife and children—maybe they left him.” Dana said that last insight very quietly, because of course she and her mother and sisters had to leave to her father. After a moment Dana said, “The life of the boy and the life of the tree were the same; and he used the tree from start to end.” Dana stopped speaking and we sat in silence. I was speechless with astonishment. I had never heard anyone interpret that story in that way. Again Dana started speaking and said, “If he had loved the tree well, they both could have gotten old and then they would not have felt like leaving each other. The boy could have been better and nicer and he could have enjoyed his life, easily and nicely and peacefully, the boy as well as the tree. That tree could have also helped that boy’s children, the next generation, by giving shelter.”

I was unsure whether or not to ask this next question as I had not even thought of what the answer might be but I said, “Does this in any way remind you of meditation?”
Immediately Dana said, “Yes, the tree was very kind to him, by what she actually gave to him and by how she did not worry about herself but worried about that boy. She told that boy, ‘You be happy.’ She took pains to herself. She did not fight with that boy, and say, ‘You don't take this, you don’t act like that.’ What he needed she gave to him. And so how is that like meditation, means, we should be calm and also help others.”

“Do you think the boy practices meditation?”

“No. If he had done meditation, then he could have understood the love of the tree and not have behaved like that towards the tree—cut off her branches and taken her apples. He did not think about the tree, after leaving the tree and how it will be alone.”

I finger through the pages of the book, look at the images of the boy as he grows year after year. I say, “He keeps coming back to the tree.”

“Yes, coming back like the tree is his mother.”

“So what does that tell you about the world?”

“Everything we pollute, and the nature forgives us, it doesn’t stop giving things to us. In this world everybody is only thinking about themselves, not about the poor people and not about nature, trees, water and everything. Nature worries about everyone, meaning nature doesn’t worry about itself. If we will save nature, nature will save us. Everyone is not united now. All peoples are not bad, and this we get from meditation and lots of prayer, that love, and so that love is in Maher. We are united, and so the government cannot close Maher. No one can close that.”

**Sila**

*Sila* is a term meaning “virtue” or “morality” and as mentioned moral behaviour proceeds naturally from the development of *dana* and in fact perfects it. *Sila* refers to the laws of our own species (Nyanaponika, 1994a, p. 26). It has three levels of which the first level directly relates to
the earlier mentioned five precepts the children take at the Anapana Meditation courses. Again those precepts pertain to the most basic laws we require as humans to live in harmony with oneself and others. The remaining two levels of virtue deal with guarding one’s words, deeds and thoughts to prevent harm and abandoning harmful mental qualities, such as laziness, ill will and anxiety.

The participant child Sila and I began working together on her meditation when she had just turned age 9; she is the youngest member of Unity and Dana and Upekkha’s younger sister. Sila’s experience while it was unique also seemed symbolic to me of what may be possible for children if they were to begin working with their *sila*, morality or virtue, at a deeper level by at least age 8. That is to say it seems to me true how the moral character of a child by around age 8 is ripe for further guidance, a guidance of which can help to carry the child throughout its life.

This insight arose from working with Sila and how I felt challenged by what I slowly recognised was a certain enhanced freshness about her and her behaviour in comparison to the other girls in the group. This means Sila seemed to assimilate what is moral behaviour more easily, and that tended to leave me questioning her when she said she understood something or acted in a way that suggested a certain activity was beyond her. Increasingly her behaviour signalled to me that she was still close enough to the age where she could work on even her most basic moral behaviour and not only prevent more easily any decay of her moral character but also strengthen what virtue was inherent to her so as to develop it at a deeper level. In a sense, Sila became symbolic to me of the normalcy of virtue itself.

What follows is from a few interviews during which Sila and I talked and drew images together. Sila from the time we met would often draw in her meditation journals and seemingly anywhere she was allowed. Noteworthy is how rare it was for her to have paper and supplies with which to draw freely. When Sila did draw she often composed images of nature, which I did not really understand the significance of and yet I wanted to more and more as time passed. As
we approached our interviews I thought maybe if she drew we could discuss her numerous images of nature. Previous to the interviews I had asked Sila if she would like to talk less and draw more in our interviews together, and her eyes widened and she smiled broadly and nodded slowly “Yes”. Watching Sila draw was itself engaging because she was a natural at it, meaning it seemed as though the utensils, paper and drawings were extensions of her body.

We began our interviews with looking through her journals, at some of her entries and drawings. I pointed to one of the drawings and asked her where the idea for the landscape image came from. She quickly said, “The mind. I didn’t see it anywhere. I saw it, but it was different. I love to draw scenery. I imagined it and drew.” Sila seemed to be hurrying us along and/or was a bit distracted by the drawings and painting materials set up to the side of the prayer room. However I persisted with more observations about her journal entries. Then I went on and asked about her meditation practise during the summer break… Eventually, Sila suggested we to stop talking and start drawing. We did start not start drawing just then but as it turned out much of what we spoke about we naturally addressed as a result of her drawings!

However there was something we went on to talk about that we did not address while drawing. Sila raised something that surprised me and also led to an important conversation. Sila said, “Didi, this Sunday you did not come to meditation.” Sila meant that I had not gone to Maher for their Anapana Meditation course. I instantly felt badly, as I had known about it, and because she was asking me about my absence she must have thought maybe I would have been there. I was surprised by her courage to refer to it.

“No, I did not go. Why did I not go? I wasn’t invited and also I met with Metta after that course, and usually I need to concentrate and be quiet and focus on the day of an interview with one of you.” What I said was true, but I wondered if she would believe me. In fact it was the first time I had articulated what I do before an interview, which is that early on the day of the interview I review again the materials I want to use with each child and then I stay quiet and
meditate and/or go for a walk. I found each interview took my complete focus, and subsequently I was usually tired the day following the interview. I heard myself ask Sila, “But how was that day?”

Immediately and animatedly she said, “Nice. Before meditation I was feeling bored, and thought about how the day will pass, and like that, and then after meditation I was cool.”

“You were cool? What does it mean you were cool?” That was the first time I had heard a child tell me she felt “cool” after meditation.

“Before meditation I was not understanding how the day will go and when the meditation will end,” she said, smiling a little shyly, as though she was not entirely enthusiastic about meditating that day. “And after meditation, I was so—,” said Sila, making a clucking sound with her mouth as she searched for words to express herself, “I thought that such a nice day had passed, that I was thinking again I must sit for meditation.”

“Really?!” I was a bit shocked but I knew by her openness, honesty and enthusiasm that she meant what she had said.

“Yes.”

“Do you remember any of your others thoughts or feelings in your body?”

Hurriedly she said, “When I sat, nuh, my knee, it had something in it. I was going like this.” Sila moved her knee up and down quickly a few times.

“Did it feel prickly and numb?” Sila nodded “Yes”. “Do you remember anything else from that day?”

“Someone was making noise. I was meditating, and I was sitting here, one boy was sitting there and one girl was sitting there,” she said, using her finger to point out where she and the two other children were sitting in relation to one another. “He was calling her. I ignored him and was doing meditation. Then I told her to tell him not to talk. Meditation was going on, and she didn’t listen only. During break I told Metta to tell that girl to keep quiet.” It was wonderful
to hear Sila speak about her enthusiasm to meditate, and clearly she was really bothered by the young boy. I went on to ask her more questions about the day, but that was when Sila, with downcast eyes, whispered so quietly, “Drawing.” In fact I had not heard her and asked her to repeat what she had said, although instead of repeating herself she simply pointed to the drawing supplies.

A moment or two later, Sila, wearing her navy blue school uniform, leaned into her left elbow, bent her legs to one side and began to press the oil pastels, one after the other, against the drawing paper. Now and then she would cough or stop to briefly survey her work before diving back into her drawing. I too was drawing and also taking notes on her. We didn’t speak for over 20 minutes. Eventually Sila whispered, “Finished.”

“Do you want to explain your drawing to me? Or do you want to do another one?”

Quietly and shyly she said, “Scenery.” Sila had drawn what I had asked her to draw, which was an image of how she feels before and after meditating. While her drawing did depict what I had asked it was not as authentic as her images of scenery. In fact, when I saw her first drawing I wondered if drawing in our interviews was going to be viable. Then without much forethought I asked her about what she said the previous week when we meditated together, which was that she said that she felt fresh. Sila’s face and voice immediately softened and she said, “Fresh…peace…cool.”

Again, without understanding in what direction our interview was headed I said, “So what I would like you to try and do is draw what ‘fresh’ means.” Sila made a face like I had asked her to do something impossible. I reassured her that only she knew what “fresh” looked like to her. I said, “Only when you come out of meditation and say, ‘I feel fresh,’ do you know what ‘fresh’ means. Nobody else can tell you what it means. Only you know what it means.”

Sila nervously said, “‘Fresh’ means nice. It means everything in front of us is not there—not sad, bad things.”
Without much forethought I said, “So what’s there?”

Sila without hesitation said, “We must see. Peace and good things and all of that. It is coming in front of our eyes.”

“So do you want to draw what 'fresh' looks like?” Sila shook her head from side to side.

“So if you draw scenery what does that have to do with meditation?” Sila giggled, paused and then said something that led to a turning point.

“We are seeing peace there. Everything is not there, no quarrelling or shouting and that all.” She giggled and I laughed aloud. I told her that meant a lot to me because she had drawn mostly scenery for over 2 years. We agreed to proceed with the scenery and mull over what is “fresh” more in-depth. Sila again leaned over the paper but this time she was on her knees and using her left elbow as a support. She started with the brown pastel and seemingly knew exactly what she wanted to draw as if the image were already on the page. Although a few minutes into the drawing I could not help but ask her how drawing the scenery made her feel.

“I am happy when I draw scenery. That the mountain is shaped like this, then the sun comes up, shines and gives light, and then the trees and greenery—it is looking so beautiful.”

“And you have never been somewhere like that, have you?”

“Yes, I have, once, in my home state, but it is very high up and we had to climb the stairs, stairs, stairs. One God is there, Paravati, the one sitting on the tiger—big.” Then Sila whispered to me almost inaudibly that she wanted to draw. We both returned to our drawing. Although after a few minutes, I could not help but ask her to tell me more about her trip into the mountains and if she had ever gone into the mountains elsewhere. She said one other time she had gone to the mountains, in Lonavala, just outside Pune. In the village where she was born, there are no mountains but the village life she said is peaceful: “In the village there are houses, dogs, cats, cows, animals. There are no big buildings, there are small houses. No sounds, no fighting. In the
city they is quarrelling and fighting sometimes. In nature there is peace.”

“Do you feel there is any connection between the feeling you have in nature and that feeling you have from meditating?”

“In meditation we feel fresh, peace. That peace we can get when we are in nature also. If we are alone in nature, there is nothing, no quarrelling, no fighting, nothing. In meditation also, when we meditate, no one is fighting and like this.” The first image seen above is the image Sila composed when we had this conversation.

Sila went on to draw another image of nature, which is the second of the two images seen above. When I asked her more about “fresh” in relationship to the second image she said, “‘Fresh’ means no noise, all is fresh, water is fresh, trees are fresh—all is quiet like that.” Sila pointed to each of the three images in the one composition: “These trees are when the leaves are not there; these are the trees when they are moving slowly; and this is of a church, this of a Hindu God and this is of Maratha.”

At one point Sila, seemed to be realise I was still searching for something and so she lowered her tone and said, “Didi, the mountains they are so fresh, and if we will go there, air comes speeding by. Didi, when we do meditation, only a little noise is coming, no noise is there like in that scenery. Didi, before meditation sometimes I fight, and even have hit someone and like that, and in meditation I remember all of that, any fighting, in my head and my body if it pains. After meditation, I am feeling cool and my body is a little only paining. Everything goes away when we meditate, breathing goes up and down like anapana.”

Following these last words, Sila and I meditated for some minutes, and then again we spoke about her final thoughts on meditation. She said, “All of the anger goes. Someone becomes very happy and can share that happiness with others, and so others can also be very happy. Before that if anyone is happy and they are telling others to be happy, at first others are very angry because they are only sad and that.” It was then I somewhat joked with Sila about her
classmate with whom recently she had a challenge and about the possibility of helping this classmate to feel happy. We both laughed a little. Then things quickly shifted direction when Sila said, “Why are we fighting? We must not fight, we will become weak. We will not stay together or we will not be in one class forever. When we become bigger, we will not work together, and so we will not fight again, and so why we are fighting now? We will not get to meet them again.”

Panna

Panna is a term meaning “wisdom” and it follows naturally from the development of nekhamma, “renunciation”, which as mentioned is referred to later. Panna or “wisdom” perfects nekhamma by the virtue of seeing the true nature of phenomena through listening, thinking and developing/meditation (Thanissaro, 2013, Discernment section). Panna the participant child conveyed a wisdom throughout our time together. Characteristic of wisdom, Panna’s wisdom would arise subtly. This means she was listening, thinking and developing/meditating and using other techniques not to try and be wise or be anything but rather to be herself. But as mentioned in the dialogue at the beginning of this thesis, I also wondered what Panna understood because she was often quieter in our group work, and for quite some time I thought she may have been quiet largely due to the language barriers. By the time of the interviews I thought I had a pretty good idea of each child and the loose themes around which we could focus, but with Panna I was uncertain of what to expect. Yet the interviews with Panna left me in the most shock. Perhaps 15 minutes into our first interview, for the first time since Panna and I had met, we were openly dialoguing alone in English on complex matters that for the most part she initiated through her insights and experiences. Not only that but when I did raise a point she immediately understood what I had meant such that she often finished my sentences for me and sometimes with more clarity than I would have had in mind.

Initially I was nervous, which as mentioned I was for all of the interviews, but I was more
nervous with Panna because we were without anyone to help translate when and if needed. It was ideal for us to speak along though, and so I had decided to see how we would do in the first interview. Hence what follows derives from the three interviews with Panna. To begin with we focused on Panna’s family and life in the farming community in which they live in Maharashtra, as that is where Panna and her sister, who lives at a different Maher house, return to for their holidays. Panna spoke candidly about her maternal grandmother and how her uncle and his family now run the farm. She spoke about fetching water daily from the community water pump, washing clothes and everything she would do under the trees—sitting, sleeping, eating and playing with her sister and cousin sisters. She spoke about her grandfather’s sister-in-law or great-aunt and how on this last visit she talked with her. Panna worked hard to recall exactly what her great-aunt told her. She said, “My great-aunt said, ‘In this world we are alone, no one should care for us, we should care for ourselves. And don’t believe in any one person. Do what you feel, don’t do what they feel. Be a good girl, don’t feel, ‘I am not having parents,’ feel, ‘I am having parents, and they taught me good manners and discipline.’”

We went on to speak about Panna’s parents. For the first time Panna spoke to me in detail about her mother and how she died from cancer, as had her father prior to her mother. When Panna was very young her mother sent Panna to live at Maher because her mother could not care for Panna anymore and her mother was afraid no one else in the family would be able to care for Panna either. Panna’s younger sister also was sent to live at Maher once their mother died, and although the two sisters live in different Maher houses for schooling reasons, they are very close. Panna thought maybe she was in 1st standard when her mother died, as she recalled returning to the village from Maher during summer break and that her mother spoke with her. Panna said, “My mother told me, ‘When I will pass away, take care of your sister as you are her mother.’ She told me before dying that I should be an IPS (police) officer and my sister a doctor. And my sister wants to be a doctor and, I think, I will be an IPS officer. For me, anywhere I will be, my
mother will be there. I think that my mother is in my heart.”

Panna counted on her fingers the number of years she has lived at Maher, which added up to 15 years. Panna is now in 9th standard. She said, “I feel Maher is the best house for me. I never mind that it is a hostel, ashram or anything. I think that it is my house. I am proud to have a house.” Panna punctuated her words with a wide smile and one succinct head nod. We laughed heartily. To reiterate, renunciation is said to be perfected by wisdom and Panna’s inherent nature to let go of that which she does not have and embrace what she does have speaks to her wisdom. While Panna experiences sadness she also sees what she has been offered—a home at Maher where she, a girl, matters; an English medium education, even though she spoke Marathi and maybe a little English and no Hindi when she started at the Sapling of Knowledge School; and a chance to be some place where being kind, which is important to her, matters. Throughout our interviews Panna with absolute clarity and without any conceit said a few things that illuminate who she is by what she practices. Panna said, “I hate no one,” “I am kind always” and “The good things remain in my mind and the bad things I flush from my mind.”

Panna recalled her first Anapana Meditation course when she was age 8 at the Sapling of Knowledge School. In fact, the course was in Hindi and at that time she only spoke Marathi and a limited amount of English. She said, “I was closing my eyes only. Then the teachers were asking me questions in Marathi, then I understood it was ana-pana—breath in, breath out.” She recalled that course well and even repeated what she remembered of the Anapana Meditation instructions in Hindi, including the moral instruction/precepts that she still heeds. While Panna’s religion is Maratha, she worships all of the Gods equally and even goes occasionally to one of the local Catholic churches. Panna then referred to Sister Lucy and her belief system. She said, “I feel that Didi, she is treating all of the Gods equally. Jesus she is going to every time, but have you seen this cross (a pendant) Didi wears? Over here, Jesus, this is the cross, over here, Hindu, this is the om, and over here, Muslim, this is the moon. I have observed that many times. So I
pray to all of the Gods equally. *Only*, the thing is that I have not been to a mosque, mosit, so I
don’t know. Only small girls are allowed. Why are they doing like this? They are following their
religion, but in this world no one is following religion—if a girl is Christian and a boy is Hindu,
they will marry.”

I started to ask Panna about her meditation practise, but I found myself saying, “Do you
realise how much your English has improved?”

Immediately Panna said, “Yes, I feel.” She knew exactly to what I was referring.

“Do you remember how you needed help with translation in the beginning?”

Panna nodded and said, “Yes, Upekkha would translate...”

“Now listen to you! I am just—”

Panna eagerly interrupted and said, “Shocked.” We burst into laughter. “Teachers are
saying we should work hard for our studies. I was thinking, ‘Yes, I will not waste my time, I will
do my studies properly, and I will enter into my 10th standard.’ Then I was thinking, ‘When will I
change? I am working so hard and still I am getting the worst marks. Whatever I am studying it
is not going in my brain.’ I thought, ‘I will change myself. I will change my studies. I will do
better.’” Panna and I then spoke of a dream she wrote about in her meditation journal. In her
dream she was a police officer working with poor people and then she became the president of
India and was telling people to stop throwing waste in the water and streets. Panna laughed shyly
when we spoke about this dream, although by the end of our conversation she was talking about
Galileo and how people told Galileo he was wrong but that he kept searching.

Panna and I went to speak about meditation and how she experiences it in her life. Panna
said, “Meditation tells me that everything is equal. It helps me, if I am wrong. If I close my eyes,
it will say, ‘Panna, this thing is wrong, don’t do this thing.’ It will tell me which thing is right,
and that will come in my mind. If both of my friends are fighting, I will close my eyes and think,
‘Which friend is right?’ First I will listen to one friend and then the other, then I will be quiet,
and I will remember which one is right. Which one is right, I will take his side; and which one is wrong, I will tell him, ‘Please do it properly, don't hit and say bad words.’” Panna said she uses the community prayer time at Maher to meditate, and how doing that helps her to be aware of the things around her and to be more awake when she studies. When Panna misses her regular meditation times, she said she feels lazy, tired and bored and that life as she put it is more “complicated” because her thoughts are more scattered. She said it is only when she mediates again that she becomes as she phrased it “strong again.” Overall, Panna said meditation helps her to be more understanding, forgiving and peaceful and inspires her to do her studies without pressure and with more order, such that instead of worrying about her studies she will create a study timetable and stick to it.

Especially during one of our interviews, Panna and I referred a few times to something that was troubling her and was fresh on her mind. A younger child with whom Panna lives said something very unkind to Panna, such that Panna was hurt and the younger child was punished. The incident occurred on the morning of one of our interviews. I happened to have the storybook, *The Magic of Patience*, with me and after Panna spoke about her concern and sadness around what transpired that morning I thought maybe the story would help her with her feelings. I was unsure though that she would relate with and like the storybook, and although the time allotted for our interviews was very limited, I felt compelled to at least offer to read the book together. But before discussing the book it is important to refer to how Panna worked with her frustration and anger through listening, thinking and developing/meditating because that behaviour correlates with the storybook, the mentioned incident and how in general other children teased Panna.

Since Panna and I had met she had shown very few signs of anger, and then surprisingly during our interviews she spoke candidly a few times about her experience of anger. At one point, I asked Panna what happens to her when she experiences anger. She said, “I am getting
irritated, but still I am cool. If I am angry, there’s nothing I can do to change the situation, but still I control my anger by doing this (she tightly clenches her fists). If anyone will laugh at me, if anyone will tease me on the road, with my hands I am doing this to control myself—to be cool.” I asked her if she ever returned to anapana and immediately she said, “I come back. Yesterday only, all of us we were visiting someone and there were boys on the road, and they were laughing and shouting. They were seeing girls, us, that’s why they were making noise. I hate that. I was getting angry, and I did like this and like this (she clenches her hands one after the other), and I went in front, and then I took my breath in, my breath out.” As soon as Panna finished speaking, she quietly and firmly clapped her hands together once and then put them in her lap.

From everything Panna said she conveyed that no matter how angry she would become she would also persist to not remain angry and hurt. She said she still generates metta and prays for people who act foolish, unkind and even horribly towards her. She told me that she will keep people who behave badly in mind and pray for them to have “a good brain,” to have “a good job,” to be free of “that anger,” to not be consumed with “bad things,” to have “respect for his mother” and to have “a little brains and respect for girls.” At the same time she said she still feels confused when she knows something someone has said or done was in error but she feels powerless to do anything about it. “If it is wrong,” said Panna, “I will accept it but if it is not wrong, how will I accept it? But still I control myself.”

I heard myself ask Panna, “Can you describe patience?”

Right away Panna said, “I am patient with my sister. My sister she always makes fun of me, teases me. If anyone teases me at Maher, nuh, if they will tell my sister about it, then when we go to the village she spreads what others were teasing me about—black beauty, black berry... She is a bit lighter skinned than me. But she is my sister, and always I am calm and friendly. Before my mother passed, she told me to be like a mother. A mother has control of everything
when it comes to its child, and I think I should control everything, and I should be patient towards my sister.” Panna went on to talk about how others tease her and that is when she recounted the incident she had with her younger housemate that morning. Her heart was heavy, and so was mine, from speaking about the incident. It was then I thought that perhaps reading the *The Magic of Patience* may help Panna in some way. I asked Panna if she wanted to meditate together and then afterwards we could read the storybook, which she agreed with.

*The Magic of Patience* is a story about a wild buffalo, a wild monkey and a forest sprite. The buffalo is the epitome of patience. No matter what the mischievous monkey does, such as stomp on the buffalo’s back when it is nap time, cover the buffalo's eyes as it is trying to bathe at the river bank and get under the buffalo’s feet when it is time to eat, the buffalo remains calm. One day a forest sprite challenges the buffalo and says how can he possibly withstand the monkey’s antics and even at times dangerous behaviour and especially when the buffalo is much mightier than the monkey. The sprite wonders if the buffalo has become the monkey’s slave or if the monkey knows something terrible the buffalo has done in the past. The buffalo responds, “O forest sprite, anger never leads to happiness. In fact, the monkey is doing me a great favor by giving me an opportunity to overcome my anger and practise patience. By learning to be kind, I am protecting myself as well as others. How peaceful I feel inside when I am patient. Anger would only upset my heart; I might even hurt someone and feel sorry later” (Jataka Tales Series & White, 1989/2009).

The forest sprite is not convinced and persists to persuade the buffalo. Eventually though the buffalo says, “Believe me my friend, it is better to be patient. Who knows if patience may awaken his inner feelings? You may be right, he is a silly monkey. But just like all creatures he possesses a true heart” (Jataka Tales Series & White, 2009). The sprite asked the buffalo to teach him about patience, and the buffalo told the sprite how only a “real monkey” could help him learn about patience. The buffalo told the sprite to think about the mischievous monkey and how
one day his teasing will surely get him into trouble and how unhappy he must be from focusing on his bad qualities instead of his good ones. He pointed out that the monkey was using his wits for foolish purposes. The buffalo ended speaking by saying he did not want to cause the monkey more misery than he must already experience. Then as the forest sprite took leave from buffalo, the monkey appeared from behind the bushes and told the buffalo he did not know he had such a good friend and asked the buffalo for forgiveness.

Panna not only read the story aloud but also clearly wanted to read the story aloud cover to cover. Although I cannot do justice to Panna’s response to the book, I can say how Panna laughed like I had never heard her laugh. She was really laughing, and in a dear and deep way, and especially she laughed each time the monkey played its tricks on the buffalo. She took her time reading the story, and paused to read the images. It was as if the story was written for Panna or for that moment. Her laughter was contagious—it was a joyful time. Then there was a point where Panna stopped and lingered over one image and then said, “It’s doing what I do!” She was referring to the forest sprite and how it was clenching its fists just like Panna had described she does. In all of the times I had read the book, I had not noticed the forest sprite was doing that.

When I asked Panna if she identified in some way with the buffalo, she was shy and perhaps humble to admit anything. Then I asked her who the monkeys might be in her life, and then reminded her of a few incidents, and that’s when she laughed heartily. From that day onwards, and because some of the other girls in the group had read the story too, Panna was understood as the “buffalo”, especially by two of the children in the group. In our last interview, I asked Panna about her experience as the “buffalo” and she said, “Sacca, yesterday only, she said, ‘Panna is the buffalo, I am the monkey.’”

“How did that make you feel when she said that?”

“How did that make you feel when she said that?”

“Better.” We sat in silence for a moment and then Panna smiled and said, “She’s saying that I know what I am saying is for Panna. That she is the monkey.”
Viriya

*Viriya* is a term meaning “effort”, “persistence” and “energy” and *panna* is perfected by it. *Viriya* means that in spite of difficulties or opposition a person sometimes even obstinately continues to work towards what is good or better (Thanissaro, 2013, Persistence section). *Viriya* or “energy” means being a peaceful warrior to a certain extent and fearlessly persisting on a path of truth. The participant child Viriya in many ways reminded me of a peaceful warrior whose persistence, energy and effort were qualities on which I grew to rely. Although children often are interpreted as embodying a lot of energy, Viriya consistently seemed ripe with the energy of right effort. For instance, I never had to ask Viriya to mobilise herself because she often was ahead of me as if her senses were waiting to take hold of and attend to information that may be helpful. Viriya was usually always the first person to refer to current information (e.g., the date, a change in schedule at school or Maher, an relevant news event), she was often the first person to take action (e.g., arrive at our allocated meditation group meeting point, distribute for me the meditation journals, place the prayer room meditation cushions in a circle) and she often seemed to be the first person to assimilate information (e.g., easily recall her Pali name, utilise suggestions on how to improve her meditation skill, note or recall nuances or important details).

At first I did not understand Viriya’s right effort. In fact, I underestimated her thrice over the first several months from the time we met, and then by the third time I underestimated her I felt forced to change. That third error in judgement occurred when all of the original Unity group members, a housemother and I were having a special buffet lunch at a local hotel. Viriya was the first person to finish her main meal and return to the buffet table for dessert, and she knew exactly what she wanted, which was an ice cream sundae. She had not finished eating her dessert when someone said that they too wanted a sundae, to which Viriya rushed off to make it for her. Then by the time Viriya finished eating her own dessert, more people wanted sundaes. Firstly, I told Viriya I did not see the sundae ingredients and therefore there must not be any; secondly,
when Viriya suggested to make other peoples’ sundaes I said to her that maybe people wanted to make their own. As it turned out everyone, including the housemother, wanted Viriya to make their sundaes. The entire event with Viriya guiding us was such a precious experience and even led the children to create a rhyme because they were having sundaes on a Sunday. From then on I worked to understand instead of judge Viriya, which at times was challenging because Viriya would lash out at others and sometimes that behaviour would shroud my understanding of what I perceived as her inherent strength of virtue. Telling Viriya I was sorry for unfairly judging her and listening to everything she expressed in different ways helped me to see her.

As time passed I also apologised to some of other children for my unfair judgements, and perhaps for personal reasons but also because we as a group were working on our moral practise. There were times when it was necessary to admit my mistakes, and in turn doing so that effort deepened the connection among the respective child and myself and too I felt our group unity. That said when I transcribed our interviews I noticed that while I may have had more faith in Viriya, I still was not listening to her as well as I could have been. When I listened to our interviews, at a few points, I heard myself trying to help her explain something but really when I listened closely to the recording what she had said in fact had made complete sense but because I was used to hearing what she had said differently I understood that she was not clear on her meaning. I mention this not only because again I queried my behaviour and its limitedness but also I began to wonder if Viriya was similar to Sila in terms of her overall quality of freshness. Viriya was in 5th standard when we met and she is now in 7th standard. She is the second youngest member in Unity, and so I cannot help but wonder if her “flexibility” or ability to assimilate information combined with her right effort may have been happening more easily or quickly in comparison to the other girls. In other words, Viriya’s “freshness” was not something necessarily I was attuned to and could pick up on as readily.

Viriya and I began our interviews with speaking on the changes in her over the past
couple of years. She mentioned how she was fighting less, teasing others less and using bad words less. I mentioned how when we first started working together she even had trouble sitting still such that I would ask her to walk and feel her breath instead of asking her to sit still with the others and too how in her meditation journals she grew increasingly more detailed about her moral practise and more open about her personal experience, including her family history, daily experiences and dreams. She seemed humble when I mentioned these things, and responded with “Hm”. It is important to add too how after Unity stopped meeting regularly, Viriya maintained a more general journal on her own. Viriya took the journal writing seriously such that in our first interview she told me she had learned more about her family history from her auntie and she wanted to write that information specifically in her meditation journal. At that time I had the children’s meditation journals, and so I passed Viriya’s to her and she proceeded to write down the new information. After a few minutes we went on to speak about Viriya’s family, and that was when for the second since we had met Viriya referred to her mother and father and how she does not remember seeing them. Viriya has lived at Maher since she was a baby. Her older brother also lives at Maher however at a different location.

What follows is composed from the three interviews Viriya and I had together. We spoke mainly around her and her brother’s stay with her auntie during their most recent summer break. I focus on that time because our conversations about it in fact led us somewhere unexpected. The conversation began with my asking Viriya if she meditated during the summer holidays. “Sometimes,” she said, “but my brother he used to, when I sit for meditation, nuh, he used to come and tease me, ‘What a mad girl, she is doing meditation.’ I would not say to him anything. Then when my cousin brother came at night I told him and he would shout at him, my brother.” Viriya was referring to when her and her brother went to stay with her auntie and her son. Then as our conversation deepened Viriya said her auntie started asking Viriya to meditate. Viriya said, “My brother used to fight with me. When I took food, he used to take it, take my plate of
food and run away. Then I used to get angry, and my auntie would tell me to sit for meditation.”

“How did you explain the meditation to your auntie?”

“That dress, I told her that you bought it. My auntie said, ‘What is she doing?’ I said, ‘She is taking our meditation.’ And then when my auntie came to know about you, she used to tell me when I was fighting with my brother to meditate. Whenever we are angry, nuh, then she is telling us to control ourselves.” Viriya was referring to a dress that I bought but that she chose.

We went shopping together because there was an upcoming celebration at Maher, and unlike her other housemates she did not have anything special to wear. Viriya knew exactly what she wanted, and that was the first time she chose something new for herself. One day when she was staying with her auntie, she wore outfit one day. Viriya went on to say how her auntie is familiar with meditation and also that in the village where her auntie lives at the local Marathi school they are also practising meditation, anapana. Viriya went on and told me more about that summer and her experience of meditation.

“When we were sitting in the house,” said Viriya, “it was very hot, nuh, because the electricity was turned off in the morning and would come again at 4 o’clock. So we were all sitting under the neem tree, and me and my friend were sitting on the mud and playing a game—using four stones and four sticks, and we have to... My brother he used to come and make a mess of our game, and I used to get angry. I get very disturbed whenever I am trying to do something and somebody comes in front of me—I feel like hitting him. So once I picked up a stone.” She explained how she took a stone, different from the game stones, and as she prepared to throw it her brother ran about 2.5 metres away from her. “I did not throw it,” said Viriya, “my auntie called my name, and told me to go and sit in the house and do meditation, and then I went.”

“You left your friend?”

“Yes, I told her I will come afterwards.” Viriya in the carpet laying between us used her finger and drew a floor plan of her auntie’s house, and how she stormed through the house and
came to arrive at where she meditated, in what is typically referred to as a hall in India and is used both as a sleeping area and a common area. “I sat on the bed, a divan, and in that bed we keep blankets, clothes and anything.” Viriya said there were two mattresses on the divan, each about 6 centimetres thick, and at night she would place one mattress on the floor to sleep on but that during the day she meditated on the divan. “I started doing meditation. I closed my eyes and I took the breath from inside (she takes two shallow intentional breaths) without making noise. I sat for 10 minutes. My eyes were closed and my normal breath came.”

“Did any thoughts come to your mind?”

“I was remembering that afterwards I will beat my brother. I didn’t beat him afterwards. I was feeling let it be, if again he will do it, I will beat him.”

“Would you ever meditate on your own at your auntie’s?”

“Before sleeping, for 5 minutes, because my cousin brother, if still he had not come home from work, I used to meditate, and then I used to sleep.” This means that Viriya would sleep better if she would meditate before bed. “Before I go to bed, first, I eat my dinner, at 10 p.m., after that I play a little bit outside on the roads, after that I brush my teeth, go to toilet and then I come and meditate for 5 minutes on my bed.”

“How often would you meditate at night?”

“Whenever my mood was there, at that time, then 2, 3 days later again I would meditate. When I am sitting at night, huh, I am remembering the whole day—what I did, if I did any fighting. I am remembering that because if I fought with my friend, then that night I sat for meditation, the next morning I would say I was sorry.”

“How would you feel after you meditated at night?”

“Calm. When I am not meditating at night, then again in the morning if auntie is telling me to do some work, I am telling her, ‘Go, I will not do it.’ And if auntie tells me three times, huh, and if my small sister comes in the middle of us, I hit her. If I do my meditation at night I
am not angry in the morning.” We talked for a moment about how Viriya at one time could hardly focus, sit still and keep her eyes closed during meditation and how during the summer at her auntie’s on difficult days she would sit quietly, listen and meditate—take care of herself.

At one point, after speaking for a while, Viriya and I decided to meditate together for 10 minutes. While meditating I opened my eyes a few times to watch Viriya. She was wearing her school uniform, a royal blue heavy cotton skirt and a white short sleeve top to match. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she had on a white headband. As I was watching her, there was sound in the hallway outside of the prayer room. Viriya opened her eyes and because mine happened to be open too we both smiled at one another and then she closed her eyes again. Soon after she took a few quick shallow intentional breaths. Then soon enough, she was still.

After meditating, Viriya went on to talk about a younger housemate in her Maher home whom she recently hit. “She was giving such bad words,” said Viriya, “and I hit her. She is beating everybody and she is back answering, but now after meditation I am feeling that she is small and let it be.”

“How does it make you feel when she tells you bad words?”

“Bad, very bad.”

I heard myself ask Viriya if she thought this child was a bad person. Viriya readily said this child was not a bad person. I then asked Viriya if she thought she herself was a bad person. Again Viriya readily responded that she herself was also was not a bad person. I did not know where the conversation was heading but I said, “What did you do when you were at your auntie’s and you fought with your friend? You sat and meditated, you took care of yourself. And what does compassion mean?”

“It means being kind to others, loving them.”

“You were also loving yourself when you sat and meditated at night and remembered your friend and that you wanted to say sorry to her.” At that point Viriya slightly started
humming, like she does once in a long while when we are speaking.

After a moment Viriya said, “Yes.”

Then I heard myself say, “There are three reasons why babies cry. What might those reasons be?”

“Because they are hungry, uncomfortable and...”

After sitting in silence for a moment or two I said, “Because they feel unsafe. Even though we are older we still have those same needs we did as a baby, and I wonder if like me when you are angry you in fact feel unsafe.” Viriya smiled in that way she did, while looking up at me with her face turned towards the floor. Then, again, we sat in silence together for a few moments.

At one point during our conversation I had asked Viriya, “What matters to you?” I did not at the time know what I really meant by asking that question but once our interviews ended I recalled how quickly she responded to the question and with such clarity, focus and enthusiasm. It was only later that I grasped the significance of what she said and how it related to what I understand is her inherent viriya nature.

Without hesitation Viriya said, “People said anything to him, still he controlled himself.”

It took me a moment to understand to what she meant, but then I realised she was referring to Jesus. We were in the prayer room, and so behind me, and therefore facing Viriya, hung an image of Jesus. Viriya is a Catholic who she does not attend church every Sunday but rather when she can.

“And so what does that tell you about your inside?” I asked.

“It means whenever an old woman or beggar or small child or hungry dog or whoever comes, we should give them food to eat. We should not tell them to go away, and that we don’t have enough to share. I read one story about one poor man and Jesus. The man used to pray every day, ‘God come to my house.’ Jesus will never abandon anyone but we also have to keep
trying. Well, this man was poor, and he used to pray for everything. Then one day when he was
sleeping, God came in his dream and told him, ‘I will come tomorrow.’ The poor man wakes up
and looks out of his window, and instead of Jesus he sees one elderly man sweeping the road. He
calls the elderly man, and gives him a glass of milk, and then the poor man carries on looking for
Jesus. Later, a beggar woman comes and has a baby in her arms, and the poor man he gives milk
to the baby and used sarees to the woman, and then he carries on looking for Jesus. The poor
man goes to sleep that night, and he’s thinking that God did not come, but while he is sleeping
again Jesus comes in his mind and says, ‘I came two times in one day to your house.’ He’s
saying that in whichever way I will come, as a hungry dog, old woman, beggar, the poor, the
hurt, the people who do not have eyes and legs…”

“Do you think Jesus comes to you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think just because maybe you are at Maher?”

“No.”

“Do you think it is for another reason?”

“Yes.” We sat in silence.

“Do you think it is because you are a good person, because you try? That is why we have
to keep trying? We need to keep trying to—”

“Meditate.”

I wasn’t actually going to say that and I was surprised she said it. I said, “And take care
of our inside, and meditation is one way to help keep our inside strong—”

“Today in assembly, one class did that skit on Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha was
walking, with his people, and then he was very thirsty and he told one of his disciples to go and
bring me water to drink. ‘I am very thirsty,’ he said. That man goes, and he sees a woman
washing clothes in the creek bed, and he says, ‘How can I give this muddy water to my Lord?’
Then he goes back and tells Gautama Buddha that the water is very dirty. Gautama Buddha says, ‘Go again, the water and dirt will settle down.’ The dirt did settle, and the disciple brought the water to Gautama Buddha to drink. This means when we meditate, our anger is like this. We have to wait there only and we have to control ourselves.”

**Khanti**

*Khanti* is a term referring to “tolerance”, “endurance” and “patience” and it can be described as “able to withstand”. The energy of *viriya* is perfected by the development of *khanti*. *Khanti* helps us to endure personal hardship and suffering, which is inclusive of the suffering others cause us perhaps even as we try to help them (Thanissaro, 2013, Endurance section). The participant child Khanti faced her day-to-day challenges with a certain dignity, grace and humility of which demands attention. Khanti most often sought to console rather than be consoled, understand rather than be understood and love rather than be loved. She appeared to be on an *ongoing* basis concerned for her family and their well-being and meanwhile she also coped with her own anxiety, aggressiveness and even rage. And yet like a river embodies a current Khanti consistently revealed she embodied patience, tolerance and endurance.

When I learned Khanti would need to move to another Indian state for a school year, I was concerned about how she would cope and I was sorry she would most likely not participate in this study’s interviews. Then Sister Lucy explained to me that Khanti was at first unhappy she would leave, and then she relatively quickly accepted the decision and even grew supportive of it in light of her difficult circumstances. Khanti’s *acceptance* of the truth confirmed to me what I had perceived as her most outstanding virtue—*khanti*. Once again, because Khanti did not participate in the interviews I can only briefly reflect on her and her story.

Khanti aged 15 years old has a sharp mind and enjoys her studies even though she was often coping with her challenging circumstances. Naturally meditation was difficult for Khanti
because of the unrest in her family life. Yet she readily participated in the Anapana Meditation courses and meditation practise at Maher, in the meditation at school and in Unity. Khanti expressed to me a few times how it was difficult for her to close her eyes and meditate, as when she did the people, places and things that she was most anxious about would come to mind. That said, Khanti did notice a change in her aggressiveness from meditating, which seemed to make her happy. Also, Sister Lucy said how from working together in Unity she saw a change in Khanti. Sister Lucy would see Khanti more often than the other participant children because Sister Lucy frequented ongoing the Maher house in which Khanti lived. Sister Lucy said, “I noticed her aggressiveness was turning into love. A bit, not fully, from what I know of her. But I noticed, and the way, even now when she talks to me, I could see lots of love.”

Khanti’s increasing outward show of love may have in part been due to Khanti’s personal work on her moral development. Khanti’s meditation journals point to her moral strength and development, and especially in terms of how she would protect, help and nurture those who are weaker. For example, Khanti wrote in her journal about consoling a crying child, caring for a stray dog and helping someone who was blind cross a road. Often she would tell me about such events and then again write about them in her journal. Khanti had always referred to how she sought to help the weaker but then during our group work around morality she appeared to engage in her acts of kindness with a greater purpose, which in turn seemed to comfort her and be a source of strength to help her face her own suffering with patience, tolerance and endurance. In other words, the moral work we did as a group seemed pivotal to her understanding and development of her strength of virtue.

In one of Khanti’s last meditation journal entries she wrote about her pseudonym and its personal meaning. She wrote that her pseudonym means being patient, tolerant, in control of anger, polite and humble. She wrote that khanti helped her to control her anger and be humble. It is important to note that “helped” was originally written in her meditation journal in the past.
tense, which suggested to me how Khanti despite *every* obstacle used what I perceive as her predominant virtue to embody it more fully as if doing that were natural.

**Sacca**

Sacca is a term referring to “truthfulness” and *khanti* is perfected by it. This means that by the development of patience, tolerance and endurance, we are lead to become more truthful even when it may be difficult to be. We all want happiness, but that happiness depends on aligning our intentions with our actions. To realise the happiness we want, we must be true in what we do, *whatever* that may be (Ajahn Lee as cited in Thanissaro, 2013, Truth section). One apparent example of Sacca the participant child and her truthfulness is when Sacca told Panna not only that she was the “monkey” and Panna was the “buffalo” but also that she said what she did in front of their Maher house members and me. This event was mentioned earlier in relation to Panna and *The Magic of Patience*. Although at times Sacca may have been a “monkey”, she repeatedly revealed her nature was simple in so far as she was truthful. I came to rely on Sacca for her spirit of truthfulness and how she would speak on what was true to her experience and also speak to what was true in general. The truth seemed very important to Sacca and her development to the extent that if she did not understand what was the truth she would search for it, which in and of itself I interpret as a form of truthfulness.

Sacca is in 8th standard and she is the one participant child who attends the Rising Star School, which to reiterate means she does not practise meditation daily at school although she does meditate on Saturdays at school with her class. Sacca’s mother went with Sacca when she was baby to stay at Maher. When Sacca was of primary age her mother left Sacca at Maher and went to work as a live-in servant in Pune. It was Sister Lucy who suggested Sacca remain at Maher and attend English medium school and meanwhile Sacca’s mother could work full-time to help support Sacca and her sisters who lived at other shelters. Sacca said that Maher showed her
and her mother the way of love and care.

Sacca’s daily meditation practise was completely different from the other participant children’s because Sacca was not meditating daily at school and she was not present for morning community prayer at her Maher house since she would already be at school by that time. This means Sacca had far less opportunity to practise meditation in comparison to the other participant children. Yet she used her meditation skills to help her focus in her day-to-day tasks and even would meditate for a minute or so now and then at Maher and school. As mentioned in the opening dialogue at the beginning of this thesis, Sacca did have trouble holding her concentration but as she explained that changed in a relatively short period of time. In that opening dialogue Sacca was referring to our group work on Tuesdays and Fridays and she said, “When I come on Tuesdays and Fridays I do not concentrate on my breath, but today I concentrated from start to end.” This was a significant moment in which Sacca, who was usually quieter in our group work, spoke openly and honestly to everyone about what challenges she faced with meditation and how she had made a significant step to overcome her challenges.

That acknowledgement arrived after 3 months of group work and from more personal effort than I understood, but from then onwards I sought to understand better. It grew clearer to me by Sacca’s actions that she was realising through practise that her happiness was dependent on her being true in whatever she does. Notably following those 3 months of group work Sacca began using her journal to convey the many ways that she was true in her meditation practise and in turn more true in her dealings with herself, others and environment. In a relatively short time Sacca seemed to take root in the value of truthfulness and grow stronger as though she was born to do that. What follows therefore derives from the three interviews with Sacca. The interviews focus around the time after which Sacca noticed a shift her in concentration.

A few weeks after Sacca’s breakthrough in her concentration, she went to her stay with her mother and then with her auntie and uncle for the Divali holidays. During that time Sacca
had written in her journal how when it was time to meditate she would close her eyes and imagine she was sitting with Unity, and that by doing that she would feel the support she needed to meditate. In her journal she also drew detailed pictures, such as of Unity meditating together, of people dialoguing on moral behaviours and of a tree where each limb represented a Unity group member. It seems as though Sacca found a way to keep practising her goodness on her own. Sacca said, “When I stayed where my mom works, every day my mom went to the market to buy vegetables, and I would get time then to meditate. I felt very fresh. Two or three times I got disturbed by that TV, the lady my mom works for was watching it. After meditating, I would write everything in my book. Whatever feelings I had I wrote it in my book. I would feel very calm. I would think in my mind, someone is there. Sometimes I would think, why am I writing so much?”

It is important to add how Sacca of her own free will was the first child in Unity to start a meditation journal in which she wrote almost daily. At that time no one was asking the children to maintain their meditation journals, as by then it was up to them whether or not they took that initiative. Sacca also began taking steps towards practising meditation in different ways, which I feel was spurred by the fact that she unlike the rest of the Unity members was not regularly practising meditation at school and in the morning time with her other Maher housemates. The following are some of the ways Sacca said she practised meditation: “Sometimes on a school day when I get up at 5 a.m., and after I have finished washing clothes in the bathroom and finished bathing, I sit on my bed, and then until everyone gets up at 6 a.m., I meditate,” “Whenever I brush my teeth, I focus on my breath,” “Sometimes when I control myself, at that time I observe my breath,” “At sleeping time I meditate because I don’t have time during the day,” “When I am sitting idle at that time I do my breathing” and “Whenever the teacher doesn’t enter the class, I put my head down, and then I do it. Sometimes for 15 minutes, I meditate, until the teacher enters the room, then I stop.”
To my surprise Sacca expressed that she was proud of Unity. She said, “When we sat together I felt proud that we didn’t fight with each other, we shared everything. We were sitting together and meditating and giving lots of metta to others and trying to do our best. We were very kind with each other. Kind means if anyone says something bad to you, you must have the capacity to listen to that and control yourself.”

Witnessing Sacca’s courage to say she was proud of Unity made me wonder if she knew how proud I was of her. “Do you know why I feel proud of you?” I said.

“No.”

“You used to ask me so many questions about many things, and now you are asking less questions and thinking more for yourself.” I went on and recalled to Sacca how especially she would come to me with different issues she was having with others. Often she was troubled about why people behaved the way they did. She struggled a lot with understanding people’s actions. Then by the time of our interviews Sacca articulated what could be done instead of getting stuck in her feelings. We were speaking about a fight she had with her older sister over the Divali break, which clearly Sacca still felt badly about, as Sacca said she had not controlled herself like she was increasingly able to do. Sacca then began saying that she felt her sister should meditate with Unity because her sister doesn’t control herself. Sacca even imagined what she would say to her sister to invite her to meditate.

“I can say, ‘Look, I am smaller than you and still I am controlling myself. You are older than me and still you cannot control yourself.’ I can tell her, ‘Let us sit and do meditation.’ Still if she is not listening, I will not brother with her. My experience is if she is not interested, let it be. If she sees me, how I can control myself, she can also do that.” Sacca and I went on to speak about how meditation is helping her to see her mistakes and reason more about what is the truth. We spoke about one incident during the same Divali holiday where she had back answered her mother. She said meditated and that while meditating she remembered her mistake, which led her
to apologise to her mother. When Sacca apologised, her mother at the time was cooking in the kitchen, and right away her mother stopped what she was doing and tightly hugged Sacca and said to Sacca how everyone makes such mistakes. It was an intimate moment in which they even cried a little. Sacca said that was the first time they shared such an experience.

Then at one point in our interviews I felt frustrated on how to communicate with Sacca. I found she was not able to focus enough on what I was saying and so often she would say she did not understand what I had said. I asked her if she wanted to meditate, as maybe that would help us to communicate better. During meditation I opened my eyes and watched Sacca. She was sitting tall, her long hair was pulled into a ponytail and she was wearing a forest green kurta and cherry red kurta pants. The birds were singing and further in the background was a slight hum of traffic. I watched Sacca as she took several intentional deep breaths. Then after 10 minutes had passed I quietly said, “OK,” but she did not hear me and so I continued meditating. After a few more minutes I quietly said, “OK,” and she opened her eyes, smiled and gently laughed.

I asked, “What were your thoughts during meditation?”

“I was sleepy.”

“I really saw you trying to take deep breaths.”

“In-between I felt sleepy.” We were silent for a moment, and then Sacca stopped and asked me if she could tell me something. Sacca went on to disclose something that was consuming her attention, and understandably that was why she could not concentrate well! We spoke for a while on her situation, and then something dawned on me.

“Before meditation you did not tell me what was happening with you, and perhaps you did not even know what was distracting you or if you did how to tell me about it. Do you see how the meditation helped you to become more present?” Again we sat in silence for a few moments. I did not know where our conversation was leading, but then during the silence an incident Sacca had written about in her meditation journal came to mind. The incident occurred
at her aunt and uncle’s home over the *Divali* holiday, and while Sacca had not gone into detail on what had happened she curiously expressed how after the incident she had meditated and “organised something new” as she put it. I asked her about the incident because it seemed that Sacca indeed *knew* the effects of meditation on her.

Sacca began to explain to me in detail the event. She said, “In a room half the size of this room. My cousin brother and I were watching TV. It was evening and my uncle and auntie were not there, they went out. I wanted to look at another serial show, and so I told him, ‘Give me the remote, I want to see another serial.’ He didn't give it to me, so I back answered to him. I called him, ‘Dog.’ Then he slapped me, hard, and I cried. I was also watching TV, while crying, and then I stopped crying. He was laughing at me. He turned off the TV, and went outside and talked with his friend who had called. I was thinking let us do meditation instead of sitting doing nothing, because at that time I was very angry. I was also feeling to slap him. That is why I sat for meditation. In the corner there were two cupboards, and I sat against the cupboard for 5-10 minutes.”

“Did he come back inside?”

“He came back inside. After meditating, I saw one change, that he was very quietly sitting and looking at me. He said, ‘What were you doing?’ I said, ‘I was just sitting.’ ‘You were also closing your eyes,’ he said, ‘isn't it true?’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘I was doing meditation.’ And I explained how meditation means to control ourselves and because of meditation we can control ourselves.”

“What was his response?”

“At that moment he did this (Sacca raises her eyebrows and nodded her head lightly a couple of times).”

“How did you feel after meditating and then telling him about it?”

“Nice, normal.”
“Were you still angry with him?”

“Yeah, and after that he went to work and I switched on the TV.”

“What did you watch?”

“Discovery Channel, about snakes and mosquitos,” said Sacca, gently laughing. “When your auntie came home—”

Sacca interrupted and said, “She scolded him, ‘What are you are doing, you are older than her?’”

“Did your cousin brother tell her you back talked?”

“No.”

“Had you back talked to your brother before?”

“No.”

“Had you ever back talked to your auntie?”

“Never.”

The last time Unity met I asked the girls to write in their meditation journals about themselves in the third person. Sacca's entry that day was truthfulness itself. She expressed how she does not need to spend money to do meditation, she does not need money to observe her breath and she does not need money to do good things. During one of our interviews I asked Sacca about this journal entry, and specifically I wanted to know to what kinds of “good things” she was referring. She said, “I don’t need money to share my feelings; I don’t need money to say something good to one small boy or small girl; I don’t need money to explain anything; I don’t need money to observe my breath.”

**Adhitthana**

*Adhitthana* literally means “determination” and refers to “resolution” or “strong determination” and *sacca* is perfected by it, as truthfulness leads to excellence and honesty and helps to develop
strong determination. Strong determination burns away what is unessential and clarifies what is essential to reach one’s goal. It is also believed that adhitthana is the backbone of all of 10 parami because it is needed to undertake the development of virtue (Thanissaro, 2013, Introduction section, para. 7). Adhitthana the child participant’s strong determination, after everything she has been through, is needless to say inspiring. She seems to be gifted with the virtue of determination. If Adhitthana were merely determined she would have used her determination in predominantly harmful ways, but even with a little guidance and support during challenging times she chose the brighter path. Overall Adhitthana and her determination reminds me of the quote by Marianne Williamson: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be?” (Williamson, 1992, p. 165).

Adhitthana has lived at Maher for 5 years and she has practiced Anapana Meditation at Maher and the Sapling of Knowledge School for roughly the same amount of time. She is in 8th standard and she lives in the same Maher house as her two younger brothers, whom she helps to assume responsibility for, such as she washes their clothes, aids them with their studies and helps to guide them with their behaviour. Adhitthana’s mother also lived at Maher and she was even her three children’s Maher housemother, the house cook, for some time, but then her mother moved away from Maher and now the three siblings stay with their mother for the holidays and their mother visits Maher.

Adhitthana from the time she was young was exposed to violence. In our interview she explained, “I have strong feelings.” In fact from the time we met, Adhitthana when she did grow angry would remain angry for sometimes 1 to 2 days or more. But she kept using her breath, and other techniques, to work with these strong feelings. In our interviews I asked Adhitthana if she noticed a change in her anger from before and after she meditated, and she quickly recalled two
recent events. The first event occurred at school when her teacher without warning moved Adhitthana to a bench four rows from the back of the room. Seat rotation is common in the Sapling of Knowledge School, but this move caught Adhitthana by surprise. Adhitthana said she was in a fit of anger such that she grabbed her backpack, walked to her new bench and threw her backpack down so hard that one of the shoulder straps broke. Adhitthana then proceeded to be gruff with her new benchmate and also contemplated telling-off the teacher to fight for a seat change. This event happened just prior to meditation time. Adhitthana said, “I was angry, but then my anger became less and less. When we finished meditating, I realised I was now sitting near my best friend.” She also said that after meditating she no longer was thinking about talking with her teacher and that she felt silly she had broken her bag.

The second event Adhitthana recalled happened in the morning at Maher. Mornings are generally a very busy time at Maher, which is understandable when one considers 25 people going about their various tasks in a small three room house. On that morning Adhitthana was bathing and preparing her clothes for school when suddenly their housemother called everyone to meditate. The housemother was concerned and upset because overall the children were again not attending to their morning house duties, which in fact are very important. Adhitthana said, “I was so angry.” The housemother asked the children to meditate for 15 minutes and then another 15 minutes because many of the children’s eyes were open during the first 15 minutes. Adhitthana said, “For the whole time I could not observe my breath. I could try only.” Yet after 30 minutes she said she was not thinking negative thoughts and expressing them to others and that she quietly proceeded with her house duties.

The information in this section derives from the three interviews Adhitthana and I had together. What follows especially focuses on her experiences around meditation at her mother’s during the holidays and at school. Most often Adhitthana would complete her tasks of any kind as quickly as possible. In our group work together she was often the first child to finish her
writing activities. Too, before leaving for the most recent *Divali* holidays, while the other
children were playing and relaxing or working in the kitchen, Adhitthana was doing her take-
home school assignments. All of this is to say that the interviews with Adhitthana were efficient,
straightforward and focused, such that there was ample time to speak deeply on one or two main
areas and spend chatting about things she enjoys, such as chocolate, visiting others over the
*Divali* holidays and her mother’s Ganesh Chachurti sweets that she said her mother makes *really*
well such that she asked her mother to bring them for the imminent Ganesh festival.

School is very important to Adhitthana. She has since she was young taken her studies
seriously. As a young child she was at first not able to go to school because there was so much
work to be done in the family store. This upset Adhitthana terribly, and as she said she cried and
pleaded to go to school. Finally she was placed in an English medium school until 1st standard
and then in a Marathi medium school until 3rd standard. Then one day a collage age man noticed
Adhitthana sitting in her family’s stores reading a book on the ABC’s. It was after speaking with
Adhitthana that this young man asked her mother if he could help support Adhitthana to attend
an English medium school. The very next day, Adhitthana and this young man went to a local
English medium school and met with a teacher who asked Adhitthana different questions, and all
of which Adhitthana answered so well that the teacher was delighted and Adhitthana was
admitted to the school. It was not long after that Adhitthana, her mother and brothers arrived at
Maher and Adhitthana and her brothers again began studying in English medium schools.
Adhitthana has done so well in her studies that when we met for our interviews, she informed me
that her teacher had nominated her for a scholarship.

Adhitthana, thankfully, in light of her seriousness, attends to both work and play at
school. When we spoke about *masti* (mischief) during meditation time at school, she laughed
sweetly and said she was still doing it. I laughed too and then said, “Did you try and change her
behaviour at all?”
“Yes. Now the teacher is strict, no, but before we were having a sister, and no one was listening to her. Now I have my favourite teacher, from 4th standard she has taught at the school. During meditation in her period we don’t make masti, but when she goes then we make masti. Now there is a new rule, and if anyone talks or just asks for anything, for a pencil or something, they have to write a page. If their name is noted three or four times, then they have to write that same number of pages. My name was noted on Friday two times, and so then I had to write two pages that day.”

“How many days out of a school week would you actually try to focus while you meditated?”

“This week? Three times.”

“When you are serious what is it like for you?”

“When I am closing my eyes for 5 minutes, I am asking that fast the bell should ring and fast the period should go. I am also observing my breath and I am thinking. It means that fast the exams should come and fast I should write them and fast my time should get over. The whole of school should get over fast because I want to work. I want to stand on my own legs, that is why I am saying that. I want to be an IPS (police) officer. I will be an IPS and I will have to see all of Pune station. I will have to look on all of Pune. I will have to go in every Pune police office.” We are silent for a moment. She has mentioned being an IPS officer before, and I cannot help but think of her history and how she wants to help protect people from violence.

“Is there some other time at school where meditation helped you to do something or helped you to change your focus?”

“Before one teacher teaches science and maths, especially then I just observe my breath and I look at how she is doing something, and if I am not understanding I will ask her about it.”

“Why in those subjects?”

“Because maths is useful for our future and I like science so much. I like to learn about
the chemical reactions, the structure of atoms and our body structure. She is giving such nice examples and she’s going deeper and deeper in those lessons. Before she gives examples, she tells us about the whole lesson, and sometimes she is telling it so nicely we are feeling like sleeping. So before the lesson I am observing my breath. And maths is difficult, a little, and it should go in the head directly, so I am observing my breath—it is useful because until now I am understanding everything in maths. Too, until she is seeing the lesson written and in our school files, I am writing fast and sitting quiet and observing my breath even when others are talking loudly.”

Just about everything Adhitthana put her mind to she did well. In fact Adhitthana alone wrote daily in her meditation journal during the most recent Divali holiday, and yet it was up to the children as to whether or not they wrote in their meditation journals. Over the holidays Adhitthana and her brothers stayed with their mother in Pune. In some of Adhitthana’s meditation journal entries she had briefly noted that her whole family sat together for meditation because her mother was having problems with her employment. It was must have been very meaningful to Adhitthana because she also briefly mentioned it to me in person after the Divali holidays. At the time I did not pick up on the significance of the event, and so fortunately in our interviews there was another chance to speak in detail with Adhitthana about what exactly had happened. That said, there was also more confusion about the details of the event because we spoke about it roughly 10 months after the fact. Adhitthana could not really remember all that she had accomplished that holiday. Thankfully though she had written enough in her meditation journal to help us piece together the events.

I asked Adhitthana what was her meditation schedule during that holiday time. She said, “Every afternoon the power was cut for 3 or 4 hours, so my brothers used to go outside to play and I was feeling bored every day so I was doing meditation in the afternoon. I was sitting on the bed and doing it. I was also not napping, nothing I was doing, so I was telling myself that by
doing meditation I will concentrate on my breath, and because of it my memory will also sharpen.” She said she would meditate for 10 to 15 minutes and that afterwards she would write in her meditation journal. After meditating she said, “I was happy. I did meditation and my mood was also nice. Whatever work was there in the house, and on and on, I was interested in doing it. I was cleaning the house, washing so many vessels…” Adhitthana said that even her auntie who lives nearby her mother’s said that when Adhitthana would visit her she would do whatever work was asked of her without a fight and nicely. Adhitthana said her mother explained to this auntie how the children at Maher “have to do their work on time and they have to wash clothes, vessels and all.”

We went on to talk about the tension during that holiday, which Adhitthana had referred a few times since that holiday. This time when I asked Adhitthana about it she looked at me briefly, hesitated for a moment or two and then said, “We were not having money, meaning food and grains and all was running out.” To add to that her mother was not due to be paid for a long time. “My mother had so much tension because of it, she was really not well. She was going to leave the job. She said she told her employer, ‘I am not spending time with my children and they are coming twice a year to be with me.’ Both of my brothers have to sleep with mother, so that’s why she’s asking just for the morning and afternoon duties. Because if mother is having a night job then she has to go at 9 at night and come home at 7:30 in the morning. We are watching TV also at night, and my brothers get afraid…” It was during this time that Adhitthana began suggesting to her mother that they meditate together, which she said her mother began trying to do. Briefly, Adhitthana said that her mother had also sat a 10 Day Vipassana Meditation course. She said, “My mother went for 10 days. She was angry in Maher. She was not forgetting about my father, and Lucy Didi said she should first go for meditation.”

The stress that holiday escalated over the next few days and then Adhitthana told me that her mother came home from work very upset. She said, “Mommy came directly in the afternoon.
We were watching TV and she was sleeping on the bed, and she said, ‘Don’t make noise,’ and I said, ‘What happened?’” Adhitthana’s mother proceeded to tell her daughter how she had told her employer that she had to leave early and go to her children and that because of that her employer shouted at her, which in turn led Adhitthana’s mother to grow angry with her employer, and subsequently she was afraid she would be fired. After recounting the incident, Adhitthana’s mother asked her daughter to sit with her for meditation, and of course Adhitthana did what her mother asked of her. Adhitthana wrote in her journal that she was very thankful for that time with her mother. Then the next day, in the early evening, her mother again asked her three children to sit with her for meditation and prayer. Adhitthana said, “She told us we will sit for 10-20 minutes, and we will try to pray to God and concentrate on the breath. And we sat, and the next day only we got the result.” Adhitthana said that the next day her mother’s employer called, and he did not shout or say anything more about the incident but rather acted as though nothing had happened.

When Adhitthana finished recounting for the third time the events that Divali holiday it was almost time to end our interview. We had yet to meditate, and so we took time to do that. After meditating for a few minutes, I opened my eyes and watched Adhitthana. It was a Saturday and she was wearing a peacock blue kurta top and matching pants, an outfit her cousin brother had bought, and her long hair was drawn back into a ponytail. She looked so focused and sat so tall. I noted the birds singing with fervour and seemingly each other and then I closed my eyes and returned meditating. After 10 minutes we briefly talked about how she was feeling.

“Nice,” she said. Her voice was full of calm and peace. She paused, and then said, “Calm. I am also quiet now, meaning nothing is going around in my head and I am interested to do something—work—and in that I will be so much interested.”

“So it sounds like after meditating you feel productive.”

“Yes.”


**Metta**

*Metta* is a term referring to “goodwill”, “selfless love” or “kindness” and is often referred to as “loving kindness”. *Metta* follows naturally from and therefore perfects the development of *adhitthana* or the clarity of mind about what is and what is not essential. *Metta* is the development of goodwill towards oneself and other people. By understanding that we are born different we are forgiving and from this our good will can spread to all people everywhere (Ajahn Lee as cited in Thanissaro, 2013, Good Will section). Metta the participant child consistently said she wanted to be a teacher, which makes sense in light of what I perceive is her inherent virtue. Metta came across as someone who was born with a reservoir of loving kindness, which may have been partially supplanted by memories from her history and subsequently led her to develop some “defences” but not enough to hide what consistently seemed alive within her—*metta*. It also appeared as though when Metta focused on what was of benefit to her well-being, her goodwill and loving kindness flowed from her and in turn drew people and experiences to her that in general resulted in more loving kindness and goodwill and so on.

Ajaan Lee explains how feelings of sympathy and forgiveness towards others naturally leads to the development of goodwill which spreads to others everywhere and in turn leads to deeper feelings of sympathy irrespective of our differences and circumstances (as cited in Thanissaro, 2013, Good Will section). He says that the build-up of fire, the anger, hatred and ill will, blazing inside of us will go out through the power of our goodwill and loving kindness (Good Will section). From the time Metta and I met not only do I not recall seeing her hit anyone but also as time passed she increasingly began to calmly express her perceived weaknesses (e.g., she wrote in her meditation journal that she is stubborn), to own her errors (e.g., she apologised to me for being greedy) and face her difficult life circumstances (e.g., she wrote on and/or discussed with me her familial experiences). This child had a lot of reason to lash out or rebel and in the same breath she seemed programmed to release her “fire” through the power of her
goodwill and loving kindness. Noteworthy, it seemed as though Metta’s personal suffering combined with what I understood as her inherent virtue of metta led her to have more understanding, sympathy and forgiveness where perhaps others would not.

The proceeding information was pieced together from the three interviews with Metta and primarily focuses on Metta’s awareness of change around the subject of her meditation experience and also highlight events that Metta conveyed with a certain sense of satisfaction. Since it is difficult to recreate the nuances of the interviews, I feel compelled to mention how the children and I by the time of the interviews were able to sit in moments of silence together in the stillness of the prayer room. With Metta especially those silent moments in our interviews seemed to increase in frequency and duration, and perhaps that is because we covered what we needed to more quickly although I also wonder if our silent communication with one another was the fruit of all of our work together in light of Metta’s inherent virtue of loving kindness and goodwill. Ironically that silence cannot be communicated in this thesis.

As with most of the participant children, Metta said that she noticed something had changed for her around meditation. Metta was especially quick to say that she noticed she was able to control her anger more with her elders from working more seriously on meditation with others in Unity, at her Maher house and at school. I was curious to know what she experienced around her anger even though she felt in more control of her behavior.

I asked, “Do you still get feelings of anger when there is some tension between you and someone?”

“Sometimes, but I am controlling myself. I count 10-1.”

“Do you ever come back to the breath when you are really, really angry or are you too angry?”

“No, not too angry, I am coming back.”

As mentioned earlier, Metta said that she noticed how the younger children began
seeking her help on different needs and/or issues. At first Metta said she responded with anger to the younger children but then that changed and she began responding with understanding and compassion. She said how this sharing of affection with the children made her feel very nice and even fresh.

Metta’s meditation experience at school also changed such that she was offered more opportunities in which to use her meditation skills differently. This means that teachers and/or students began to ask Metta to perform different school activities that led her to engage her meditation skills. For example, she was assigned as the class monitor and led her class in meditation; she was asked to assume the lead role in a skit performed by her class for the annual Christmas event, and that responsibility led her to use her breath to calm herself; and for the Teacher’s Day celebration at her school she was asked to choreograph a dance for two boys and two girls and perform a solo dance and for both tasks she used her breath to help her remain calm and focused. With regards to the solo dance performance, Metta happened to have performed it a few days prior to our interview, and so I asked her to tell me how she used her breath.

“I was very afraid,” said Metta, “so many people, from 5th to 10th standards, all of the teachers and the school manager and people from the community. I took a long breath three times.”

“How did you know to take the breaths?”

Metta tsked and then laughed as though it were obvious. She said, “Every year the meditation teachers are telling us that only! And so if you are not getting concentrated and you are getting afraid, you have to breathe three times. And after doing anapana, no one gets afraid, because our breath is always there with us.”

As it happens, one of the interviews with Metta fell on the same day as an Anapana course at Maher. In fact Metta and I met an hour or so following that course. Metta is now in 9th standard, which means she has practised Anapana Meditation for 7 years at Maher and at the
Sapling of Knowledge School. At Maher alone Metta has attended maybe thirteen or so Anapana Meditation courses. Therefore I asked Metta if she would explain to me her experience of the course, which she did in detail, such as how the course proceeded, how many students were new and how many children overall attended the course. She also said all of the children were asked questions on how the mind works, and to which she responded, “The mind controls our body.” I asked Metta how her mind was in general during the course. She said, “Very nice. Once or twice my mind was disturbed, and the teachers said if your concentration was not there then we have to take three breaths. So I did that three times, and again I came back to my concentration. One teacher was there, she was telling us any time we are not concentrating first we have to close our eyes and concentrate to our fingers, toes, then knees and everything. And after that, see from which nostril we are breathing in and from which we are breathing out. In my mind, I had no thoughts. They were announcing don’t go to your past and don’t go to your future, be in your present.”

After listening to Metta speak about the course, I recalled what she had said as we walked to the prayer room for our interview. She said she was so awake and not sleepy at the meditation course. I wondered to what degree she meant what she had said, but then once she explained in detail her experience of the meditation course I said, “It sounds like maybe you had a great day meditating.”

Acting a little surprised Metta said, “First time.”

Metta spoke more to her experience at school, and notably about the changes in her meditation practise in class. She said, “I was not meditating seriously in class. The meditation bell would ring, then the teacher was telling us to put away all our work and close our eyes for meditation. At that time I was putting my head down on the desk. I was thinking, ‘Why to do meditation?’ Then afterwards the teachers became strict, and said that everybody should keep their hands flat on their desk and I began thinking, ‘Why is everyone meditating and I am not? If
everyone can do it then I can also do it.’ Then I also started doing meditation with everyone. This time it is going well.”

I asked Metta if there was a recent time where meditation really helped her at school, and she referred to something she had experienced the previous day. She said, “We are having meditation of 5 minutes after recess. When we came up from recess I was feeling a little bit sleepy, and then the teacher said, ‘Everybody close your eyes and sit for meditation.’ After meditation I was feeling fresh, meaning at first I was not concentrating because I was feeling very sleepy but after the teacher said, ‘Open your eyes,’ I opened them and was feeling that my sleep went away. Then the teacher was teaching and I was fully concentrating on what he was saying.”

“What was he teaching?”

“Science, the pull of the earth.”

“Gravity?”

“Yes, gravity.”

Briefly, Metta in the few months of our concentrated group work meditated mostly with her eyes closed but in the beginning there were times when she had less energy to meditate because she did not feel well or was simply tired, and so she had trouble meditating all together and would even occasionally lie down during our group work. By the end of our concentrated group work though she meditated without interruption and sat straight. It was when she went to her grandmother’s or aunt’s on a few occasions during the holidays that she rarely meditated if at all and she did not write at all in her meditation journal. I never pressured Metta to meditate or write in her meditation journal, as often simply being with her family was the main focus. Metta’s mother died when Metta was a baby, and so Maher has been familiar to Metta since she was a newborn, although for a time she did go and stay with another family during her early years. Metta also has a father who is remarried, and of whom she speaks well although she has
not seen him for quite some time.

It is important to return to the time when Metta was a class monitor in 8th standard and specifically to an event she and I had discussed a few times and that she seemed especially satisfied. Metta first explained to me her overall class monitor duties. She said, “I had to keep the class proper. I had appointed each person with a room monitor duty, and so I had to tell them to clean and they were cleaning. I had to take the attendance register to the main office. And if no adult was in the classroom, I had to see if the class was silent, if they were doing their work or not.” Metta next spoke in detail about that time when she asserted herself as the class monitor during meditation time. “It was library period,” said Metta, “and the library teacher had come for our class in the library, but then it was announced that all teachers had to return to their classes in their homeroom classrooms, and so the library teacher led us down to our classroom and she went up again to the library. Everyone started making noise and I had to see to it—it was my only duty—that the class was doing meditation.” It was near the end of the day but there was still quite a bit of time left. Metta said that her fellow 49 classmates were creating a lot of mischief and for some reason her homeroom teacher was absent.

One way that the Sapling of Knowledge School tries to encourage the students to meditate is by having a point system, which Metta explained depends on whether or not students are meditating as they are asked to, e.g., hands are on the desks, eyes are closed, backs are straight. A teacher, the principal or the school manager then walks around and grades each class accordingly and at the end of each week a class is usually noted for the highest disciplinary behaviour. Metta said after a while and because her classmates were causing so much loud mischief, that when it was announced by loudspeaker to commence meditation she said she yelled at her classmates to remind them about these points. Metta said, “I told them, ‘See, if the school manager or the principal comes our class will get less marks, then afterwards our teacher will scold us. So close your eyes, sit properly and tell me afterwards what is happening, what
happened before and what happened after doing meditation.’ Everybody started closing their eyes and they sat properly and at that time the principal came and she saw that no teacher was there and everybody was doing meditation. She went in the staffroom, which is right near our classroom, and I heard her say that our class will get plus one point.”

By 3:30 p.m. Metta’s homeroom teacher had arrived and she told him about what the principal had said. Her homeroom teacher was surprised and asked Metta how she had managed it all. After she told him what she had done, her homeroom teacher gave her a chocolate. She told him it was not necessary although he insisted she take it. I asked Metta how that experience made her feel. Metta raised both of her hands to her heart and said, “I was very happy.” It is noteworthy how the only other time I had seen Metta respond to something by placing her hands on her heart, but with more satisfaction, was with reference to performing in the lead role for the previously mentioned school Christmas event. I was at that event and so I know that Sister Lucy sat in the front row watching Metta and the other Maher children perform that night. At one point during our interviews I asked Metta what it was like to see Sister Lucy watching her perform. Metta immediately held her hands against her heart and said, “I was feeling very happy that in front of Didi I was performing something.”

By the time Metta and I finished speaking about her class monitor experience we were nearing the end of our interview. We had yet to meditate, and so we decided to take some time to do that. Metta sat straighter, looked down towards the prayer room carpet and then closed her eyes. I then closed my eyes, and while I tried to focus on my breath I couldn’t help but hear the birds busily singing, the slight hum of traffic and the faint murmur of people talking in the neighbourhood. After a few moments, I opened my eyes and watched Metta. She was wearing a rose coloured kurta and a pair of light pink kurta pants and her hair was pulled back into a long ponytail. As always I found her face, body and presence sympathetic and comforting.
Upekkha

*Upekkha* is a term meaning “equanimity” and by the development of it we are able to view the whole of something, such as an object, situation or thought, with less attachment or more objectivity and which in turn means we are less bound by something one way or another. This means we can be more understanding and therefore kind, and that is how *upekkha* comes to perfect *metta*. Change is ongoing and inevitable however we can use the mind to build the energy of concentration and investigate something to see what it really means for us personally, and so in this way equanimity helps us to face life with more balance (Thanissaro, 2013, Equanimity section). Upekkha the child participant is someone who from the time we met seemed to gather information from different angles as though she would hover with her generally calm temperament above something and in doing so see more than perhaps others were able to. Notably this capacity and tendency often led her to better understand things and their complexity, and therefore she often responded in different ways thoughtfully and insightfully.

The following information derives from the three interviews with Upekkha and overall focuses on some of Upekkha’s specific experiences and insights around the theme of meditation and on her broader understanding of the relationship between her anger and her meditation practise. Importantly that broader understanding arose in a revelatory moment during our second interview, which I will speak to shortly. That moment confirmed for me what in fact I had begun to challenge because of what I experienced as Upekkha’s uncharacteristic behaviour over the course of several months. Upekkha’s understanding in the end though went beyond what I could have imagined. Although Upekkha is more mature because she has sacrificed her childhood to secure her family’s safety and she is a child, and therefore more naturally discerning, the depth and degree of her equanimity leads me to understand that her overriding virtue is equanimity.

Notably Upekkha revealed her understanding of the value of the evenness of mind when we discussed the mind in our group work. It was challenging to talk about the mind in a way that
each of the girls could understand, but as mentioned in the opening dialogue we in part discussed the mind in relation to something from nature, namely the bodhi leaf acting as a shallow bowl in which it held water and mud. After even a brief explanation Upekkha understood the significance of the mind in relation to the muddy water and the clear water and settled mud. Her response made it seem as though understanding the way the mind becomes “muddy” to “clear” was natural. When we readdressed the bodhi leaf activity in our interviews Upekkha said, “Yes, if we do meditation, or we keep good thoughts in our mind, by meditation our minds will be clean.” Over time she grew to explain with greater ease and clarity the power of the mind in so far as she recognised the cause and effect associated with the power of the mind, and which seemingly led her to a deeper and deeper understanding of things and in turn affected her decision-making. From all of this Upekkha seemed to grow less bound to things.

Upekkha and I spoke about any changes she had noticed in herself from her meditation practise. What she said did reveal how the meditation was working in her life and it also pointed to her growing equanimity. First, Upekkha said she had stopped herself from trying to change others and instead had began doing what she felt was best. Upekkha said, “After doing meditation, I can observe and control all of my feelings. So if I want anything, and if my mother is not having money and not having anything to give me, even if want something, I will tell her, ‘I can take it afterwards.’ So I can control myself. I can control my mind.” Second, Upekkha said by controlling her mind through meditation she would choose to not participate in a conflict and instead would reflect on it in broader terms. With reference to one conflict she said, “I was thinking, calmly. I was just thinking, ‘Why to take violence in our hands? Why to trouble ourselves? Why to trouble others?’ The situation was not perfect, but why to disturb? I knew it was going to affect somewhere afterwards.” Third, Upekkha said her anger had subsided, and she had referred to her anger a number of times in person and in her meditation journal. She said, “When I was small like Sila or someone, I used to fight a lot—too much with everyone. But
when I grew up a little, by doing meditation I was calm and I was also focused on my studies. Now everyone says, ‘She has become calm.’"

It is important to mention how in the several months previous to our interviews for different reasons Upekkha had become less self-disciplined with her meditation practice which included not writing in her meditation journal. Her behaviour was uncharacteristic because since we had met in fact she was the participant children who took an extra interest in our meditation work together. While I knew that Upekkha ran deep it was not until our first interview that I began to understand how deep she could run. I say this because in our first interview I did not know if I could “reach” Upekkha because her anger was like a fortress built-up around her such that she was blind to it and when I challenged her about it she grew teary and insisted what I was suggesting was not true. It was then I took a chance and referred to my own personal experience with anger, which was significant, and how I felt forced to face my anger because it was costing me my health.

Then for some reason I started speaking with Upekkha about thoughts and asked her if she sometimes felt confused about how to act, about what was and was not right and about what were her feelings. She shook her head slowly from side to side and was terribly quiet. I really did not know what to think, say or do although I sensed Upekkha was confused about something. Then I heard myself ask, “How do you think prayer can help you with your confusion?”

“We can pray to God to helps us.”

“How do you think meditation can help you with your confusion?”

“It will keep our mind calm and we will be able to think for ourselves, meaning we will know if the decision we have to take is right or wrong.”

“Do you have the clarity of mind from prayer the same as you do from meditation?”

“No. In prayer we just ask for things from God but with the meditation it is for us to do, and we can get clear by doing it. Meditation we can do by ourselves.”
Upekkha offered a few examples of how after she had meditated she was clearer about what was and was not true. Then I asked her if she had recently used her breath awareness skill to think first before acting, and she related how she had a few days ago given a speech at Maher but before the speech she was not feeling confident and so she paid attention to her breath. She said it really helped her to focus and that she even became excited to give the speech. Although it was great Upekkha was being a little more responsive it seemed as if we were wandering in our interview. I asked her if she wanted to meditate, which she agreed to do. It was after meditating together that our conversation shifted.

Working mostly by intuition, I heard myself ask Upekkha if she would try and help me to understand the connection for her between breath awareness, concentration and confidence. I said, “What comes to mind when you think about that bodhi leaf, water and mud and when you took those breaths before your speech and your mind cleared and how doing that was similar to when the mud settled and the water became clear?”

Immediately Upekkha said, “Now only for 10 minutes.” At that point Upekkha and I were looking directly in each other’s eyes and slowly I watched the corners of her mouth turn upwards into a big smile. It was a smile I had longed to see for several months. Upekkha said, “I was crying. I was not controlling myself. I was thinking of the past only, when I was unhappy and sad. But now I can speak, now I am not thinking of the hurt. Meditating, I was not thinking I was hurt, I was doing my meditation.”

“Was there maybe a point during the meditation where something changed or was it at the end?”

“After how much minute we did, after that.”

“Did you feel it right away or did you—”

Upekkha interrupted and said, “Right away. I was not sad, before I was sad, so I was normal.”
“Too,” I said, “after about 3 to 4 minutes of meditation you weren’t sniffling anymore.” It was a joyful moment. We both smiled a lot.

For our second interview Upekkha was dressed in a soft pink kurta and a matching pair of soft pink kurta pants. When I collected her from her Maher house she was all smiley and I felt more confident or prepared on how to proceed to at least try and make the most of all of our work together. This means I was determined to try and review with Upekkha her work so as to remind her of what she had seemingly forgotten. Without her meditation journals, doing that would have been much harder and perhaps impossible because we only had two interviews left.

To begin our second interview, we spoke about her history, and how brave her and her family were to seek help from Maher. Upekkha told me that she remembers carrying Sila around a lot when they left their home state and came to Maher. She expressed such love and gratitude for her mother and for her bravery and determination to ensure all of their safety. She recounted how her mother, two sisters and herself travelled by train in the middle of the night without food but for a few plain buns and with only enough money to reach Pune train station. We both grew teary as Upekkha spoke about some of her life story, and once she was done speaking we sat in silence not meditating but simply being together.

It was afterwards I felt compelled to try and reflect back to her the work she had done on her meditation by referring to her meditation journals, and all of the writing and some drawings in it. I did not know what if anything would be accomplished by reading aloud to her work, but I did go over it for a consecutive 15 minutes with stops and starts when I would ask her a question, when we would discuss a specific journal entry and when we would look at one of her drawings. Then, as mentioned earlier, with regards to her equanimity and her capacity to hover above something and see it from different angles, she seemed to see something. All of the sudden Upekkha stopped and looked towards the prayer room carpet. She looked pensive for a moment and then slightly cocked her head to one side and said, “I was angry because I was not
meditating. I have been so angry. I didn’t meditate for 3 months.” In fact she later realised she had not meditated seriously for 7 months. We talked about what may have caused her to stop meditating, and we both came up with ideas, but really it was not important because she had nailed what was essential, which was that she realised she was angry because she was not meditating. We sat in silence for a moment or two. I was truly speechless with astonishment.

Then Upekkha looked me in the eyes and nodded slowly a couple of times and said, “I see now, the effects of not meditating.” Those words, her understanding, seemed to sum up all of our work together.

By our third interview, Upekkha had just completed her school exams and she was busy preparing for the Divali holiday, which meant everything at her Maher house and which she personally responsible for needed to be thoroughly cleaned. That deep housecleaning is the standard procedure at each Maher house prior to a major holiday time. Therefore when Upekkha and I met she was tired although joyful. We had not seen one another for 3 weeks because it was exam time, and so I was eager to know how she was doing. I asked, “Have you noticed any change in your anger—”

Upekkha was so keen to speak that she interrupted me and said, “Yes, now I am not shouting at anyone. At small children, I am not shouting.” Upekkha clucked, but softly. Upekkha tended to cluck when she was either searching for words, frustrated or aware of some truth that is perhaps difficult to accept. It was then that she mentioned to me that many days prior to our second interview her housemother had told her to stop shouting at others. That is to say her anger was recognised by others as well. She said, “And in school I did the meditation, every day, continuously each time. So, I am taking it seriously.” Again she softly clucked and then said, “I am not shouting, nothing. When I did not do meditation I was getting angry very fast, but now I can control myself, meaning I don’t shout at the younger children for not listening and instead I am thinking, ‘Why to shout?’ They are small kids, they were afraid of me because I was shouting
a lot.” Upekkha couldn’t help but laugh. Then in a serious tone she said, “Now I am not shouting.”

“How would you feel when you did shout?”

“Nothing.”

“How do you feel now that you stop and think about it?”

Upekkha grew quiet for a moment and then said, “I was thinking, they are also like me only, an orphan and all that.” Upekkha lightly clapped her hands together a couple of times.

“Why to shout at them?” She clapped her hands together once and then put them in her lap. “I was thinking that only, ‘Why to shout? They are also like me only.’” Upekkha said how the older children in her Maher house also began to tell her to shout at the younger children in her Maher house because the younger children grew afraid of her, and so they would listen better, but Upekkha said that she also had to stop paying attention to the older children.

“Do you see how doing certain things to strengthen a muscle or organise the dance steps for a Kathak dance leads you to do something—”

Upekkha eagerly interrupted and said, “Yes, to do something, to become perfect.” She again clucked softly and then we sat in silence. After a moment she said, “I started studying also, nicely, because I was not studying. Before we met and talked, I was not studying. I could care less. Since then I studied very hard. I was serious about my exams, and this also helped with my attention.” Once again she softly clucked.

Everything we had discussed naturally led us to turn our attention to the storybook, The Giving Tree. I had loaned the book to Upekkha and a few of the participant children so that they could read it in their own time at Maher. Upekkha had brought the book with her to our interview and although she had read most of it at Maher she still had a few pages left to finish. Therefore Upekkha at that point took a few minutes to finish reading the storybook by herself. Then after a few minutes she closed the book and said, “So nice it is.”
I said, “A bit sad too I find.”

“Yes, because this boy is not understanding only.” She clucked softly, as though again in recognition of some truth. “The tree is giving everything and not taking anything. It means they were friends, and so why was he taking, cutting off and all that? Senseless.” She said this last word quietly as she looked towards the carpet.

“Senseless, exactly. Tell me, during meditation what slowly happens?”

“We calm down.”

“And how do you feel in your body?”

“Relaxed.”

“If meditation helps you to take even that half a second to think what does that suggest anything to you about Upekkha? What do you think would be the difference between you and this boy as each of you grows?”

“I will think first, before doing. Why will I ask this tree to give and fulfill my needs? I will work hard and gain whatever I want, but this stupid was asking the tree.”

“I am not sure where I am going with this, but you have said something that has made me think. You said this boy is acting senseless, acting out of his senses. Many people have said that after meditating they feel fresh—”

Upekkha interrupted and said, “‘Fresh’ means they are relaxed. What bad thoughts people have, they disappear. They think positively.”

I opened the storybook and was looking through it. I said, “You used the word senseless, and it really is like the boy is out of his mind, isn’t it?! What—”

Upekkha seemed compelled to say, “See now, he is asking for something.” Upekkha was referring to how the boy was carrying away the tree’s limbs to build a house. She shook her head in disbelief as she continued to turn the pages. She stopped at the image of the boy who had grown into a haggard looking old man in need of a place to rest, which he found by sitting on the
tree’s stump. Upekkha said, “He’s not satisfied.”

We were at the end of our interview, but I asked Upekkha if she wanted to stay on 15 more minutes more to read *The Magic of Patience*, which she had wanted to read but had not yet been able to. She happily agreed to stay and proceeded to read the storybook by herself. Once she finished reading the storybook she looked up at me and softly said, “So nice.”

I heard myself ask, “Do you see any similarities between the buffalo and the tree?” I had not posed that question to any other participant child although posing it to Upekkha seemed natural.

“They have patience. The tree and the buffalo are the same.”

“And by having patience and generosity—”

Upekkha excitedly said, “Love for others.”

“And the human and the monkey—”

“They are the same.” Upekkha seemed to be answering my questions before I had even known what I was going to say.

“We came from monkeys and we came from buffalos, but we are closest to the monkeys in our evolution.”

“Yes. Monkeys.”

By that point in our conversation Upekkha and I were free associating like the children and I grew to do with another. I said, “What would be the difference if you were the buffalo or the tree and not the monkey or the boy?”

“They are satisfied and we are not satisfied. Very greedy we are, but they are happy with what they have.”

“By taking the time to meditate what do you remember?”

“The feeling of satisfaction, the will to overcome our difficulties, the patience to act like the buffalo.”
“So in some ways it is by meditating that we become the tree again, have the qualities of a tree again.”

Gently Upekkha said, “Giving tree.”

“And we have to have the qualities of—”

“The buffalo.”

“Humans were not just here,” I said.

“Yes.”

“It was all wild with water, then big plants grew and then the animals slowly arrived. Eventually these monkeys came.” I was referring specifically to the mischievous monkey in the _The Magic of Patience._ Upekkha joyfully laughed, and I could not help but laugh as well. “And then from the monkeys—”

“Man came!”

I shook my head a little in awe and said, “It really does mean we are the qualities of all of these things.”

“Yes.”

“So even though we are human it is to remember where we come from—”

“Trees. Yes. So nice it is,” said Upekkha, placing her fingers on the _The Giving Tree_.

**Nekhamma**

_Nekhamma_ refers to “renunciation” but literally means “freedom from sensual lust” and as discussed earlier follows naturally from the development of _sila_ or “morality” and “virtues” of which encourages the values of giving and living in harmony with others. The renouncing of the “lesser” for the “greater” perfects the achievement of morality by understanding how we ultimately make ourselves unhappy by our attachment, desire and greed. Upekkha’s understanding of the storybooks, _The Giving Tree_ and _The Magic of Patience_, and her
interpretation of the “buffalo” and “tree” as satisfied and the “boy” and “monkey” which she referred to as “we” as greedy and therefore not satisfied points to the reason for developing nekhamma. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (2011) referred to renouncing or at least trying to sacrifice some of our sensual desire for inner peace as trading candy for gold. In other words, when we temper our sensorial attachment to “candy” by developing some modicum of control over habits that foster the qualities of greed, anger and delusion we naturally begin to develop the qualities required to build inner peace and satisfaction or “gold”. With reference to Dana’s interpretation of The Giving Tree this means that if the “boy” were to have reciprocated the trees generosity of spirit the tree could have even provided for the “boys” future generations.

It could be said that Nekhamma was associated with me by a process of elimination because the children noted there were 10 virtues and 10 of us remaining in the group. It could also be said though that just as the children aptly chose their pseudonyms so too they aptly chose mine. Of course I did not need a pseudonym, but as time passed I needed the meaning associated with nekhamma. To my surprise the word and its meaning increasingly signalled to me things I really needed to detach from. I had worked on strengthening this virtue since originally acquiring the list of 10 virtues, although living in India provided me with a lot of opportunity to strengthen this virtue in a way I am unsure I would have been able to in Canada. Practising phenomenology requires a certain vigilant practise of “becoming open, patient, honest-yet gentle, serious-yet playful, and contemplative-yet decisive” (Vagle, 2014, p. 152), and yet there is something deeply satisfying about phenomenology that seems directly related to the return to concrete experience and remaining awake to the ambiguity of lived experience. In that space or experience of tension between realities characteristic of phenomenology and importantly life lives an untold possibility (van Manen, 1997).

One example of such possibility is how the children decided my group name must be Nekhamma and how that group name supported and guided me in the subtlest ways such that I
knew I was on the right path. That name was an invaluable anchor as I lived alone in India studying and carrying out this study for 2 years and 8 months. I stayed in India for important financial, logistical and personal reasons, but in the end it grew clear to me that returning to Canada even for a visit would have been too convenient. Canada would have offered me things I was deeply attached to and subsequently suffered from not having, such as the natural resources offering me a better quality of life, a pronounced equality for females offering me a greater sense of mental peace and a certain sense of physical safety offering me more physical freedom.

By remaining in India I felt forced to approach renouncement through facing my attachments, greed and what I had come to take-for-granted. In India I learned that I either had to find new ways of coping or give up on a study that I increasingly felt was necessary to complete. This ultimately means the suffering served a purpose and granted me a deeper understanding of what it was like to forfeit those things that so many people, and especially female children, in the world cannot access. My circumstances also led me to become more vulnerable or open to things that previously were inaccessible. For instance, I experienced an attitude of communalism, a myriad of celebrations, a relatively high tolerance among a vast diversity and large population, a playfulness even among grown adults, a keener sense of the dignity in simplicity and a deeper understanding of the subtler meaning of things.

Inevitably the spirit of India instilled in me what Canada could not and would not have had I not stayed the course. I associate the spirit of India with India’s peoples, vast and diverse culture, geography, ancient traditions, long history and more. I feel infused to some degree with what I perceive as a vital energy inherent to India. In turn, I feel more complete as though in order to live a more meaningful life meant engaging in day-to-day life in India. Importantly, remaining in India at least to some degree meant standing in solidarity with the participant children. Perhaps I could have left for Canada sooner or left India for a short time and then returned or not gone to India if as a society we had not moved so quickly. But as Father John
noted we have focused more on making it to the moon and less on making world citizens who prioritise well-being. For that reason in my lived experience it was essential to remain in India and at least try to listen to the participant children express themselves around the theme of their meditation practise. As it happens, in the end, their lived experiences ultimately point to their need for stillness in our fast-paced world.

There was though an unexpected layer of significance associated with this research study that is necessary to briefly discuss. As mentioned, I made a personal promise to continue participating in the doctoral program so long as I did not compromise my spirit. Now I understand how that promise guided me to engage in the doctoral program for personal reasons in so far as my overarching intention was to try and contribute something meaningful to society. Yet in the last several months in India something unexpected and deeply personal transpired that further complicated the boundaries between the objective and subjective experience. Namely, questions I had asked for over 20 years were unexpectedly, indirectly and clearly answered.

My maternal grandad was raised in an orphanage in Shanghai. He was very young when he was placed in an orphanage run by Catholic nuns and priests. My grandad’s siblings were one by one also placed in the same orphanage; however the youngest sibling was placed in the care of my great-grandmother’s best friend. From what we can gather the priest’s recognised my grandad’s potential and would help him in small but significant enough ways. Then as far as we know, when my grandad was in his teens he and his siblings were removed from the orphanage by extended paternal family members. In time my grandad went on to work with Reuters News Agency, initially as a managing editor in the Shanghai office and then as a manager in the Hong Kong office. Although most of his family had already been in Canada since the 50s, it was not until the 70s that my Grandad retired and became a Canadian citizen. My grandad was beloved, and this grew even more apparent to my family when to our surprise at my grandad’s funeral service there was standing room only in the cathedral.
In traditional Chinese culture, family history is known but not necessarily spoken about and so in my family, and although my maternal family considers themselves Shanghainese Portuguese, to this day we rarely speak about life in China. There have however always been important pieces of information that have arisen now and then, such as how my grandad regularly sent money to his mother who remained in China until her death, how on Sundays my great-grandmother taught my mother and aunts to knit in their home in Shanghai (and to this day my mother knits prolifically), how my great-grandmother was from a poor farming village outside of Shanghai and how she eventually changed her Chinese given name to Mary. My great-grandmother bore five children and all of whom she could not raise. All five of her children grew to live respectable lives in five different countries both east and west around the world. One of those children, my great-auntie, lives in China and recently turned age 100.

For years I researched on my family history. On the paternal side I was handed a paternal family tree and on the maternal side I was barely told fragments of stories. Even though I still have a file folder on my family history, several years ago I stopped searching for information on my maternal family. I made that decision when I learned that my great-auntie in China cried when she was asked about my great-grandmother. Seeing as she would be able to provide more information than anyone and yet it greatly upset her to speak on the matter, I relinquished my dream to write about my maternal family history. I sought to understand my great-grandmother’s story because she bore my grandad and in her own way she protected her children; and I sought to understand my grandad’s story because he is my mother’s father and in his own way he protected his family. Then a couple of months prior to leaving India and without seeking any answers to my family history, my mind in an instant recognised my maternal familial history in the participant children’s stories.

As far as we know my great-grandmother was born in a poor farming community outside of Shanghai. Essentially to relieve her family of its burdens, my understanding is that my great-
grandmother left her home for the “big city” in search of something to sustain herself. From the scant information we have, my great-grandmother must have met a man, my great-grandfather, in Shanghai. In time she bore this man’s children. She was not allowed to raise her children although she was able to secure their safety such that they were cared for by others. It is important to stress though that I would not be writing these details if it were not for staying the course in India where I could develop the energy of nekhamma or renunciation through working with the participant children. Also I would likely have never stayed the course had it not been for the participant children’s discerning my group name was Nekhamma. Ultimately the resonance between the participant children’s histories and my family history points to the web of life; and how that interrelatedness leads to our circumstances is nature’s way of encouraging us to willingly and cooperatively assume responsibility for one another.

The study led to a deeply subjective experience. Ultimately that subjective experience bore gifts of understanding, compassion and forgiveness towards our humanness through connection. That unexpected experience seems to suggest that there is no substitute for practise because it will lead to meaning and in turn more authentic living. The irony though is that I did not seek that depth of understanding and yet that experience is what in the end helped me spin together the different strands of this study. This means that through meditation I learned to observe the inner phenomena and suspend my judgement, which in turn loosened my attachment to the “I” and led me to feel compelled to serve others. With that in mind I proceeded with the doctorate program, and subsequently this study focusing around the theme of children who practise a secular meditation.

The phenomenology of practise suited this study because it supported the nature of the child and its mindful practise. With phenomenology it is necessary to open oneself and try and parenthesise any presumptions, common understandings, and scientific explanations and simultaneously regard the phenomenon under investigation as if it were for the first time (van
Manen, 2014, pp. 216-217). Now I understand experientially how a phenomenology of practise encourages a *fresh* approach. This means though that the personal element is a means to approaching something more whole. Significant to this study’s pedagogical context, the “I” points to the meaning and power of our corporeal subjectivity, and how teaching and learning is at risk when we take our corporeal subjectivity for granted. In other words, the phenomenology of practise helped me return to the basics and engage with the primary step to everything—consciousness (Fink, 1972).

This brings me to the quality of phenomenology of practise and pedagogy and how it “takes human experiences seriously; it takes a bottom-up perspective on pedagogical issues and as such is a democratic way of doing research” (Henriksson, 2012, p. 134). That is to say the phenomenology of practise is inclusive of human qualities that are eclipsed by our rational-empirical methods. Those human qualities include “our complexity, our vagueness, our irrationality, and our insecurity,” all of which are meant to be celebrated because without them we would not be human (p. 119). Even though the phenomenology of practise does not necessarily make things easier its approach supports a pedagogical sensitivity primary to teaching and learning (van Manen, 2014, p. 200). This study engaged phenomenological enquiry to focus on the “now” and nuances of lived experience or illuminate what is taken for granted to help generate understanding and hopefully pedagogical sensitivity.

Something in the end seems to have come full circle from my great-grandmother, to my grandad, to my mother, to me and to the participant children. My sense is it has to do with how this study nudged me to become pedagogically sensitive such that I could experience the meaning of unity. Certainly though the circularity reminds me of what is the most supportive—nature. It seems undeniable that some force of nature has kept offering us the opportunity to grow more whole or approach something more authentic to our nature. In a moment of self-indulgence I wondered what my great-grandmother might have said if she were to have shared
her story, and yet all I could think of was the dire need to listen to children because they are adept at disclosing the truth. Importantly as Carol Flinders (1993) says, “As a rule, the greater understanding we have of the times and place in which our subjects lived, the less likely we will be to make superficial, inaccurate assessments” (pp. xviii-xix). In other words listening to the participant children impregnated my everyday “superficial, inaccurate assessments” with an understanding that bolstered my will to cooperate.
CHAPTER FIVE

A Mindful Protection

We can recognise the child’s need and tendency to live in the present based on the way the child shapes to its environment like hot wax to a mold. This means by and large the child reflects the environments the adult creates. Although the participant children engage with various methods to help them build-up their different aspects, this study addressed a method that it is accessible to the participant children at all times. The participant children therefore have a self-regulatory way to help them with their development at any given moment. In light of what the participant children expressed about the use of their mindful practise in their daily life, it can be said they used their mindful practise in different ways and to varying degrees to protect themselves. This idea is not new and has been discussed by others with regards to the different human aspects (Hanh, 2007; Nyanaponika, 1994b; Treadway & Lazar, 2010, pp. 185-205; Salzberg, 2011). That said, how children protect themselves and how they can learn to protect themselves through mindful practise appears to be less examined.

This thesis presented many examples of how the participant children returned to their breath awareness and loving kindness practise, such as how Panna from the time of her first Anapana Meditation course practised the moral precepts beyond the meditation course, how Viriya used her meditation skills to calm herself before sleeping and how Adhitthana when her family was facing serious hardship used her meditation skills to help her family cope. It can be argued that everything the participant children described points to how they used their meditation to protect themselves. Yet the participant child Sila communicated something to me in our final interview around this notion of mindful protection that the more I reflected on the more I was struck with wonder (van Manen, 2014, pp. 26-27). Notably, she described to me an event. Sila had asked for another interview, and because she was drawing, and things took a little longer to complete, Sila and I agreed it might be a good idea to meet one more time.
On the day of our interview, I collected Sila from school and then we made our way to the prayer room where we immediately started working. Without much forethought I began with asking Sila how was her meditation experience that day.

“Nice,” said Sila. We then sat in silence for a moment, although I wondered what to say to elicit a more descriptive response from her. Sila then said, “My partner was disturbing me. He was beating me, playfully.” Sila laughed a little, although her laugh seemed a bit strained. She has often had trouble with her benchmate during meditation time. We again sat in silence for a moment and then Sila said, “Every day he’s hitting me.”

“Today what did you do when he was hitting you?”

“I was meditating and after meditation I told the teacher.”

“Were your eyes closed, and then he hit you?”

“Yes.”

“What did you do inside?”

“I was laughing inside.”

“But did you laugh outside?”

“No.”

“Did you smile?”

“No.” Sila smiled at me, but again in a strained way. “I told the teacher, ‘Teacher my partner was disturbing me while meditating.’ And then the teacher called him, and shouted at him.”

“What did the teacher say to him?”

“The teacher said, ‘You are not meditating and not letting others meditate.’ So then the teacher shouted, and told him to go to his bench, and so he sat down. And this is the first time I told the teacher.” Sila lowered her voice and glance when she said how that was the first time she spoke out on the matter.
“How did you feel inside when you told your teacher?”

“I was very, I was very..., if anyone is shouting at me, water comes from my eyes. Because, if the teacher will say anything to me then...” Sila grew silent, and looked down again towards the carpet. “The teacher might get angry at you?”

Sila quietly said, “Yes.”

“You took a big chance, didn’t you? Why did you tell the teacher today about your benchmate?”

“He is always disturbing me.”

I asked Sila if she would draw what happened during meditation that day. The image seen below is what she drew. In the centre of the image sits Sila and her benchmate during meditation time. On the back wall hangs a blackboard with student charts on it and on a side wall there are additional student charts. There is one window facing the hallway and with someone passing outside of it grading the students on their meditation. The lines on the floor represent dust and garbage, which Sila said the students clean up after school, although it is there during meditation, and which is an interesting point in and of itself because at Maher before common prayer the floor is always swept. Then there is the classroom door which Sila coloured red although in reality it is not red. Sila also drew a red heart although in the classroom there is no such image or object. We talked about the colour red for the heart and the door, and why she may have chosen that colour. Sila said, “Like this only.”

At the time it was clear this was a meaningful event for Sila, but when I had more time to reflect on what Sila had said combined with looking at her drawing of the event, it struck me that me that she had taken a big step. Maher is for destitute women and children who mostly have been subject to abuse by men in a patriarchal society that fails largely to protect its women and children. Also, it is important to remember that the female’s life in India can be more tenuous because of the male’s acceptance of her (Unnithan-Kumar, 2010). Yet there was Sila not only
determined to meditate but also determined to approach her teacher about her benchmate although she was rightfully afraid her teacher could shout at her. The teacher as well was a male. Sila, the youngest member of Unity, did something no other child of Unity reported doing, although some of the girls likewise from the time we had met told me that their male benchmates disturbed them during meditation and at other times. Sila’s concentration, determination and courage speaks directly to the need for and the power available to children, and especially female children, who are guided to protect themselves peaceably.

Jack Kornfield (2008) says, “mindfulness and fearless presence bring true protection. When we meet the world with recognition, acceptance, investigation, and non-identification, we discover that wherever we are, freedom is possible, just as the rain falls on and nurtures all things equally” (p. 107). Like most of the participant children, Sila began practising Anapana Meditation when she was 8 years of age. As previously mentioned the Dalai Lama stated that
should all children engage with meditation by age 8, the world would be free of violence in one generation. Montessori (1917/1965) also recognised that peace was plausible should it begin with the child using meaningfully the power of its concentration which she believed was unequaled but for in the annals of genius (p. 161). Sila’s protection of herself resisted the very forces that oppress her and millions of children worldwide, which means her choice moved us closer to an organic and sustainable non-violence.

**That Feeling of Fresh**

Most often the children who live at Maher said that they felt fresh immediately following meditation practise. Although I volunteered a few times with groups of children in Canada who attended Anapana Meditation courses, I am unaware of any child expressing that they felt fresh after meditating. Perhaps the children did at times mean to say they felt refreshed but by and large their descriptions of “fresh” suggested they felt fresh versus refreshed. Their word choice somehow more aptly seems to describe the lived experience of children who regularly meditate in a supportive environment. I wondered if feeling fresh was an experience unique to the Maher children but I concluded otherwise after consulting with people who have taught Anapana Meditation to Indian children. I also reflected on my own meditation experience with the Maher children, and I remember how struck I was the first few times I heard the children describe quickly and succinctly how they felt. Certainly talking, meditating and simply being with the Maher children, and especially the participant children, helped me to better understand what that feeling of *fresh* may mean. In my experience there is a difference between feeling refreshed and feeling fresh after meditating. This means that while I may not feel as fresh as the children following meditation the more I experience meditation the more I feel fresh in general.

To reiterate some of the participant children’s descriptions of what is the feeling of fresh: Whatever negative thoughts were persisting disappeared; whatever drowsiness had set-in lifted;
and whatever anger was burning from within cooled. Also, some of the participant children made an insightful association about how the feeling of fresh and nature itself are alike because nature is always recycling or in process and giving of itself.

There is one specific story Sister Lucy related to me during our interview around the feeling of fresh that perhaps explains from a different angle the significance of what “fresh” means to the Maher children and too to the power of the mind, its malleability, and its seeming need and tendency to return relatively quickly to some degree of freshness as though not only its life depends on it but also it was born to feel fresh. When I asked Sister Lucy if she had heard the children say they feel fresh before, she nodded right away and said, “When they go into meditation, naturally the breathing tells them to calm down. Nobody is telling them. And that is what they call the freshness. Letting go, and looking into a new day.” Sister Lucy was silent for a moment and then she grew more serious and said, “One child, a new child, just walked off the other day. She is a big girl, and I was helpless. I was introducing her to meditation and she said, ‘I don’t want to do it.’ I didn’t pressure her. Then later in the day she walked off, and I was not there. The staff called me and said, ‘Didi, she has walked off.’ I hoped she would return and so I said to the staff, ‘Don’t react to her when she returns. Just be calm, and only show her love.’ She did return, but the staff found it very difficult to show this child love.

“Later I returned to the house, and this child was waiting for my reaction. What I did was I hugged her and said, ‘Well, you’re back, I am so happy.’ That itself calmed her down, more or less. Then I said, ‘I want you. You can’t walk off without me. When you walk off, next time you have to take me. I want to come with you.’ I made a joke of it. I was in my room at that time and I said, ‘Come, you sit next to me, just be with yourself.’ I kept her on my bed, and I went to do all of my work. Then I returned and told her, ‘Now you close your eyes and just sit there. Try to think of how many people you have upset today and about what went on wrong inside.’ Again, after some time, I returned to her and said, ‘Now, don’t think of anything, just concentrate on
your breathing. Just go in and out, in and out...’ After doing that she came to me and said, ‘I feel so good.’ I hugged her and said, ‘Even I feel so good.’ I said, ‘What are you telling me when you say you feel so good?’ She said, ‘I am feeling loved.’ I said, ‘Feeling loved by somebody else or by your own self?’ She said, ‘I think I am not respecting myself enough.’ I said, ‘Yeah, that is what is happening. Nobody is your enemy here. Everybody loves you.’ After that it was okay and yesterday she came to my room and said, ‘Help me to sit for meditation.’”

When Sister Lucy told me that story she didn’t say this is a story about what the children mean by “fresh” but rather she drew from her vast source of experiences with other people and told a story that spoke directly to the heart of the matter. The story just mentioned elucidates a transformative event for a child who with love and guidance realised what she needed, and notably something Sister Lucy had felt the child needed, which was a connection with herself. The story highlights how a child in a given moment picked up the gauntlet and protected herself from more violence in thought, word and deed. The child in a handful of minutes found the present and herself in it and she felt loved. In this way the feeling of fresh appears to be second to none; and if this were true the degree to which we experience “fresh” determines our experience. That is to say anything seems possible if we were to feel fresh. On that note even though the Maher children were stripped of their most basic human rights and are busy rebuilding themselves with a little materially and a lot otherwise, they seemingly live closer than many of us to that feeling of fresh.

At first I found it hard to believe Sister Lucy felt helpless with that child. Sister Lucy was someone who in my experience increasingly worked more and slept less, ongoing mediated with the help of staff unexpected angry families and friends who wanted to “reclaim” their family members, opened one house after another for the homeless and destitute, begged for funding from those who have more means, drove around Pune looking for the homeless and destitute, counselled others seemingly endlessly and that is to name a few from among many of her duties.
But as time passed and I reflected on the story she told me, and mainly through writing it down, the theories and perceptions blocking me from experiencing Sister Lucy’s sense of helplessness shifted into the background (van Manen, 1990, pp. 124-127). Eventually I recognised a woman who in a moment of vulnerability returned to \textit{the} thing that she said was of the most value—connection. She drew from her experience of \textit{connecting} that in her case began in childhood. With that in mind the story Sister Lucy told points to another story about a woman’s desire to help as many people as possible discover that feeling of \textit{fresh} for themselves.

It is important to highlight how Sister Lucy’s intentionality is rooted in her subjectivity or lived experience as someone who has since her childhood \textit{connected}. The central message Maurice Merleau-Ponty conveys in the \textit{Phenomenology of Perception} is to understand that “objective thought fundamentally distorts the phenomena of our lived experience, thereby estranging us from our own selves, the world in which we live and other people with whom we interact” (Langer, 1989, p. 149). This means we live in a world we have created through our bias of objective thought. A central purpose of a phenomenology of practise is to reroot ourselves in our “corporeality and the perceptual world, while awakening us to an appreciation of the inherent ambiguity of our lived experience” (p. 149). Perhaps indirectly Sister Lucy appears to put into practice what Merleau-Ponty encouraged when he radicalised phenomenology and traced “intentionality back to its source in corporeal subjectivity” and showed how corporeal subjectivity is part of a continuous intersubjectivity or exchange with everything in the world (p. 150). The story Sister Lucy told then in fact underlines “the serious shortcomings of objective thought and … encourages us to abandon the traditional approaches and return to the phenomena of our concrete experiences” (p. 151).

\textbf{Transformation}

The \textit{most} remarkable changes in mental health and well-being that western scientists have ever
seen resulted from studies on the transformation of consciousness of householders who are meditation masters, such a Dipama Barua from Calcutta (Kornfield, 2009, pp. 382-385). The neurological studies showed how people who meditate regularly cultivate positive emotions, retain emotional stability and engage in mindful behaviour (Eileen Luders as cited in Salzberg, 2010, pp. 26-27). Perhaps what is most remarkable is how that mental health to varying degrees is available to a much broader range of people with far less practical mindful experience. The participant children’s lived experiences around their breath awareness and loving kindness practise points to that fact. It is true there are different ways to stop, look and listen. Yet it is undeniable how the bare breath is always available to us. Not only that but also conscious breathing naturally leads us to the basic realisation of all things—their impermanence, emptiness, interdependent origination, selflessness and nonduality (Hanh, 2011b, p. 84). Even from a few days of practise we can build up a mindful energy that helps us, protects us and gives us courage to return to ourselves and accept what is in our territory (p. 178).

The participant child Sacca from even a little extra mindful practise quickly revealed how meditation was working in different areas of her life. As previously mentioned Sacca in one of our interviews said, “I don’t need money to share my feelings; I don’t need money to say something good to one small boy or small girl; I don’t need money to explain anything; I don’t need money to observe my breath.” Sacca was elaborating on something she had written about in her meditation journal about how she did not need money to do good things. That entry in fact centred around how meditation was the most important part of her life because she did not need money to meditate and do all the good things that derived from her meditation practise. Sacca’s mindful practise somewhat seamlessly, organically and quickly began affecting others areas of her life to the extent that she grew more understanding, courageous and patient with herself and her family members.

A lot of transformation has occurred around the use of mindful practises in education
since 2010-2011. Certainly prior to that time there was very little discussion on mindful practise in any field in Canada. Perhaps though the time was ripe for a significant change. In light of the transpirations, it would seem that way. For example, the Maharashtra Government legislated the teaching and learning of Anapana Meditation in schools by 2.5 million children; western neuroscientific studies on mindfulness began to receive more and more attention/funding; professionals from a variety of backgrounds produced different forms of communication on mindful practise; training workshops, programs and organisations focusing on mindful practise were established; and the media officially coined the phrase “The Mindful Revolution”. Even with all of that change though it seems important to remember that there is no substitute for personally practising mindfulness. It seems obvious, right? Yet Father John told me a story during our interviews that made an impression on me around our aversion towards the internal transformation. Father John has told the story for over 20 years. The story is about seven birds and seven seas; it is taken from a book written by Robert Kennedy who was both a Jesuit priest and a Zen master.

“The birds had intuitively heard about a kingdom across the seven seas,” said Father John, “and they were yearning to see that kingdom. Although, crossing the seven seas is a very tough task. It is a very herculean task and even forbidden. But the yearning was there to see the kingdom, and they could not be at rest. The seven birds they cross the first sea, which was a difficult task, and the birds are tired but their desire is strong; they cross the second sea, and they are very tired; the cross the third sea, and they are tattered; the cross the fourth sea, and they are broken; the cross the fifth sea, and they are hardly able to fly; the cross the sixth sea, and they are almost done for. Yet, they yearned to reach the kingdom, to reach the other shore. They cross the seventh sea, and they reach the kingdom. However, the kingdom was obstructed by a wall, and the birds had to use their beaks to drag their tired bodies up the wall to see the kingdom. But the joy is there, they have reached their destination.”
At that point in the story Father John said he always stops and asks his audience, “What did they see inside?” Father John seemed to suggest that very few people know the correct answer, because he said that eventually he reveals it to his audience. He says, “Themselves, transformed. You understand how difficult it is to make a journey inside. It is the most difficult journey, but it is a fruitful journey, and once you reach your destination, you will see there is nothing to be arrived at but to arrive at yourself, although it is a different self, it is a transformed self. When you make that journey, you can be in the same place, doing the same thing, but it’s totally different. You transform, you change.”

In terms of making the journey inward through a daily mindful practise, that story points to how mindfulness is the approach because to be anywhere doing anything and be able to connect with that quality of freshness is a powerful means to be true to our nature. Transformational teaching and learning or what has been taught and learned is used to help oneself and others has been referred to as a radical movement in the standard education system in Canada, (Dallaire, 2011, p. 87). But perhaps the global changes around mindful practises in education have helped shift those perceptions around transformational teaching and learning. To reiterate, the holistic understanding supporting transformational teaching and learning or connection with oneself, one another and the environment was indivisible from Indigenous life (Miller, 2014, pp. 85-88). This means it is undeniable that the interest in transformational teaching and learning support approaching the truth by being more mindful or connected.

Regardless the truth is approachable in the participant children’s stories and expressions on how they felt fresh after meditating and how that feeling of fresh reminded them of the trees because the trees are always in process, calm and generous. The truth is approachable in the participant children’s stories because within the child lives the truth, the realities that every child discloses in itself (Montessori, 1949/2002, p. 304). The truth is approachable in the child because even if we can’t define it or describe it when we touch the child we touch an infinite source of
love—that universal force ruling, regulating and ordering everything, and while generally it is unconscious in humans it assumes consciousness in the human heart (pp. 305-308).
CONCLUSION

This study engaged the phenomenology of practise, specifically of pedagogy, to investigate the lived experiences of the participant children around the theme of their secular meditation practise. Characteristic of a phenomenology of practise, the method is meant to disappear as it manifests in practise. It appears that phenomenon occurred with this study, meaning that after a certain point the only thing on the horizon to pay attention to was the participant children and their lived experiences around their mindful practise. Of course this study required a great deal of invisible effort to reach its conclusion. But poetically that effort is discernable in the participant children’s stories, and how they elucidate that choosing unity individually and collectively requires understanding, determination and practise. Importantly, in the dialogue at the beginning of this thesis, the participant child Dana said something that suggests why such effort is necessary. Dana said, “Didi, in our body there are two persons, one is bad and one is good. When we do good things, that bad person says, ‘No you should not do that.’ It always tells us to do bad things. And bad things we can do easily but good things we need to make effort to do.”

The participant children’s energy around mindful practise coupled with the current mindful movement reflects how we can try to respond differently to create a more satisfying lived experience. Husserl (1954/1970) raised awareness about the lived experience and its viability as a source of knowledge creation because that which is “self-evidently given, is, in perception, experienced as ‘the things itself,’ in immediate presence, or, in memory, remembered as the thing itself; and every other manner of intuition is a presentification of the thing itself” (pp. 127-128). This means Husserl realised that any verification leads back to self-evidence or intuition, which means that however a ground laying of a philosophy is carried out, “the meditation, in which such a ground-laying is carried out, is always the first, fundamental decision of a philosophizing” (Fink, 1972, p. 11). Husserl’s realisations suggest that mindful practise is a way to open the mind and see the landscape with less judgement. How through
mindfulness we are more likely to approach the possibility of experientially accessing the different elements unified into one experience—an essential aspect of our nature.

Better understanding of the child’s lived experiences around the theme of its meditation practise included exploring the realities that the participant children disclosed in and of themselves. Even though the participant children were encouraged to unify, they also chose to do so individually and collectively as if doing that was their inherent need and tendency. Most likely the people with whom the participant children regularly engaged with overlooked the participant children’s efforts to practise meditation, to develop their morality and virtue and to grow more aware of the causes and effects of their mindful practise. But that did not stop the participant children from approaching unity. In that way, the participant children humbly, subtly and powerfully followed the path that made the most sense to them and in the process their efforts helped to dissolve the division between objective and subjective experiences. In other words, as they connect and return to their “subjective corporeality” or their “concrete experience” they naturally build-up some immunity preventing them from overemphasising their ability to be objective. The participant children’s narratives speak to the unfolding of that process. Certainly there were challenges along the way; and perhaps a transformatory event includes opportunities to strengthen the will.

It may be simpler for a younger child to not create a division between objective and subjective experiences if the child were to practise connecting from a young age, similar to the participant child Sila and even Viriya. This idea touches on why the Dalai Lama believes that if children were to practise meditation by age 8, world violence would cease within a generation. Regardless, what the participant children conveyed points to their needs and tendencies. The participant child Upekkha clearly identified her need and tendency. “We have to do meditation,” said Upekkha, “then what our mind says, we have to do that. The first step we should take care of only.” In fact, all of the participant children expressed differently their understanding of how
the mind precedes everything, meaning from meditation they noticed subtle and significant changes in themselves that led them to feel more peaceful, whole and connected. In so many words, the participant children’s insights suggest that mind becomes matter.

At the beginning of this thesis there is reference to a story about the Golden Buddha statue in Thailand, and how by accident it was discovered that the statue was not made of plaster but rather of gold. The story was referred to in the context of the child and how today we appear to be approaching qualities best associated with the child—discerning innocence, flexibility and openness—as though at whatever age and with right effort those qualities are accessible. The same story can also be interpreted as a story about destruction and renewal though because it was only from destruction that the Golden Buddha statue was discovered. Both of the interpretations of the story relate to the participant children and their respective narratives. That said there is one incident in particular that the participant child Metta spoke about that highlights the two interpretations well.

Although it was rare for Metta to meditate when she was with her family, during the most recent summer break she stayed with her maternal auntie and on one occasion she meditated. During our interviews Metta of her own volition told me that she had meditated, and so I asked her to tell me about that event. She said that her younger cousin brother had hit her with a stick on her leg, which not only physically but also emotionally hurt Metta. The cousin brother lashed out at Metta because he saw that there was no food prepared for him, but there was also no food with which to prepare a proper meal. Metta went to her extended family’s home and fetched some food, but really it was too late because she was hurt. However after Metta returned with the food, that was when she meditated. She said, “I went in front of our house, one garden is there, and I put down a small mat and I started meditating. Then after 5 minutes my brother came searching for me, he saw me in the garden, I don’t know what he felt, but he came to me and said, ‘Sorry.’ I said, ‘It’s nothing, I am just meditating.’ He said, ‘Come now, you also eat.’ Then
when I would not go with him he said, ‘Whatever you want I will bring it to you, but don’t sit like this. Besides, no one is in there...’ Everything he was saying, but I was not listening. Then he sat near me and we were both meditating, maybe for 5-10 minutes.”

Gautama Buddha said there are four types of people in the world. There are those who run from darkness towards darkness, those who run from brightness towards darkness, those who run from darkness towards brightness and those who run from brightness towards brightness (Goenka, 1987/2010, p. 44). This was not the first time Metta’s cousin brother had hit her, but it was the first time she responded to the situation by choosing to connect. That decision in turn led Metta’s cousin brother to apologise to her for his behaviour, offer to serve her food and choose to join her in meditation. Metta deeply wants to be with her family and yet she knows being with them does not necessarily guarantee that she will always feel loved, respected and appreciated. But during that recent visit, when a difficult situation arose, she chose to at least try to love, respect and appreciate herself. Metta sustained some injury, and yet she had the strength of mind to run towards brightness.

Montessori (1949/2002) understood the lack of unity among society stemmed from people who “judge and act and regulate their lives only on the organisational and conscious part of society. They want to strengthen and ensure the organisation as if they alone were its creators. They think not at all of the indispensable basis of the organisation, but worry about its human control; and their highest aspiration is to find a leader” (p. 248). However Montessori understood the problems of world violence and lack of unity could not be solved primarily in finding a leader but rather in addressing the masses that comprised the majority of society. Montessori expressed that “the problem is to educate the masses, to reconstruct the character of individuals, to garner the treasures hidden within each one of them and to develop its value. No single head of state can do this, however great his genius. Out of the multitudes of the under-developed no one can ever solve this problem” (p. 249). According to Montessori then the great task of
education was to secure and preserve a normality that would gravitate towards perfection by its very nature (p. 249).

It is the child’s absorbent mind incarnating the characteristics of the human race found in the cohesive part of society (Montessori, 1949/2002, pp. 247-248). The child by means of society’s characteristics builds-up its personality and becomes a person with a particular language, religion and set of customs—namely what is normality in an ever-changing society is its cohesive part. That said, regardless of that “normality” is the game changed when the child uses the power of its mind to stop for a fraction of a second and think before acting because intention rests with the mind and the mind as discussed precedes or creates everything? Perhaps the increasing international phenomenon of children using breath awareness as an educational approach highlights how we can use globalisation as a positive evolutionary movement (White, 2007). Thich Nhat Hanh (2011b) refers to mindful practitioners as researchers who instead of using sophisticated research instruments practise mindfulness, concentration and insight to purify the mind and transform it into a powerful instrument used to look deep into the nature of reality (p. 298). Certainly the participant children by their personal efforts did their research and saw unity, and that result alone led towards brightness.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


199


health/Neuroscientist+touts+benefits+meditation+kids/6158952/story.html


New York: Oxford University Press.


Tacey, D. J. (2004). *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality*.


