

## Inner Voice

- Bryan Patterson -

### Let Children Discover the Reality of Soul

*“Let the children come to me. Don't try to stop them” – Jesus*

My grandson Mats, almost three years old, teaches me much about life.

He knows the joy of simple things -- birds, cardboard boxes, planes, trams and all the colours and sounds of life that adults take for granted.

Mats is alive with energetic spontaneity. Mostly he seems deliriously happy. Perhaps he senses that his history, like every child's, began in the loving, creative mind and heart of God.

I hope he has the opportunity to find out much more about that celestial power. Whatever, he will surely make up his own mind about God.

As Kahlil Gibran said in *The Prophet*: "Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself. "You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies, but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow."

That's true, and thank God, but a parent is also the architect who designs rooms of the temple in which the child will live for the rest of his or her life.

I recently heard of a woman who complained of "Christian indoctrination" at her daughter's religious education classes and wanted the classes stopped. The woman said she wanted her child to be a "free-thinker", but perhaps only on her terms.

What is so frightening about religious education?

The essence of every religion is to answer: "Why do I live?" Surely it is a duty of parents to give children opportunities to understand the divine spirit within them. We should at least teach our children the fundamental idea of human equality common to most religions.

# The Spiritual

In practical terms, knowledge of the psychology of religion is vital in understanding our modern global society and the history of ethics. What is the point of letting the kids watch morally suspect drivel such as *Big Brother* while keeping them ignorant of spirituality, one of the great life forces?

Let's teach the kids something about Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, atheism and the rest, and not spare the critical examination. Let them openly debate and dissect the lot and make up their own minds.

"In the past 25 years, the idea that life is non-religious makes little sense," says Dr Neville Carr, chief executive of The Council for Christian Education in Schools.

"A growing interest in spirituality, ritual and the sacred is reflected in attendances at 'mind, body, soul' festivals, in TV programs such as *Buffy* and *Medium*, in media attention given to religious leaders such as Jesus Christ at Easter and Christmas, the Dalai Lama and Pope John Paul II, and in the almost mystical aura surrounding the Anzacs, who gave their lives as a sacrifice for our freedom."

The number of Australians who believe religion should be taught in government schools has dropped over the past five years, but they still form the majority.

Recent Roy Morgan Research found 62 per cent felt religion should be taught in government schools at least once a week. Only three in 10 surveyed were against the idea.

We live in a terrifying world, with a multitude of options. This is where God comes in. As Tolstoy said, the soul is a God-shaped blank: only God can fit into it.

UNLESS our children are exposed to spiritual truths they may live as if they will never die; and die as if they never really lived.

Exposed to spirituality, they may discover life is sometimes ravishingly and maddently beautiful.

They may better understand that pain and joy both come with life, and how we respond to what happens around us shapes who we become.

They will learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it differently.

They may learn to forgive by practising forgiveness. And they may discover that, as writer Virginia Woolf said, the whole world is a piece of art and we are all parts of that work.

Best of all, our children may find there is a far deeper reality to humanity. And that the vital ingredient -- the essence of us -- is that mysterious element called soul that distinguishes us from all other beings on the planet.

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