

# Book Excerpt: *Meditation for Moms and Dads*

Shana Smith

**Editor's note:** This article includes five excerpts from various parts of a forthcoming book.

## Tip #1 The Four Noble Truths of Parenting and the Path

The Buddha laid out what are called the Four Noble Truths, and they are considered the foundation for all spiritual seekers. Here they are, simplified and modified for moms and dads:

1. With the considerable demands of parenting, there will be times when you really feel suffering. And *oy*, when you feel it, the rest of the family feels it, too.
2. The reason we suffer is usually because we have unrealistically high expectations of ourselves as parents and the world and people around us, and with expectations not being met. (For example, we get sick—not supposed to happen! Our child misbehaves—not supposed to happen! I can't finish all my work in time—not supposed to happen! I am not a perfect mom/meditator as I see what perfect is supposed to be—not supposed to happen!) With our constant efforts to mold ourselves and the world around us so these expectations can be met comes predictable disappointment, fatigue, heartache, and so on, aka *suffering*.
3. There is a way to end this cycle of suffering. The whole world benefits from this Way. You do not have to go to any extremes like leaving your family to go on a lifelong pilgrimage to the Himalayas, or live as an ascetic in the woods and

eat oak leaves for twelve years. Nor is the Way to win the lottery and have all worldly needs compensated for (although occasional pedicures are really nice). It is often called “The Middle Way.”

4. The Middle Way involves concerted daily focus on right choices, as defined in the Eightfold Path, and is worth studying. The Middle Way involves getting to know your mind and your extremes, and finding your center. For example, parents often oscillate between the extremes of exhaustion and mania. Learning through meditation what your tendencies and triggers are will allow you to recognize these tendencies and coax yourself lovingly to a state of balance, and hence end the roller coaster. Ultimately, it is your clear intention to end suffering via meditation and the daily action of sending love to yourself and to others that will set you—and those around you—free. Not only your family, but the whole world will find peace at last through this Way, and yes, Mom and Dad, it all starts with you. There is a reason spiritual deities have names like Holy Father, Divine Mother, Mother Earth, Father Sun, and the like. As parents, we have been endowed with a mighty big mission from the All, one full of miracles, magic, connection and awareness beyond boundaries or gates. Enjoy—or at least notice and fully experience—every moment.

## Tip #27

Children have a way of interpreting, utilizing and expressing the spiritual/yogic/meditation teachings in their own unique ways. Because we are adults



Photo: Shana Smith

with lots of stories—that is, baggage—that can affect or infect our interpretations, children’s unique expressions can irritate us and make us feel we need to correct them toward the “proper” way of expression. Or, better yet, bring us back to total innocence if we let them. Take my five-year old son, for example, who, like most young children, is full of unique and hilarious expressions. Today, I asked him to use a mindful Yoga Nidra type of body scan to help him get to sleep for naptime. So he did, a la: “Go to sleep, eyes! *Bam!*” (Hits his face close to his eyes.) “Ow! Hahahaha! Go to sleep, head! *Super zop!*” (Punches himself on the head.) “Oow! Hahahahaha! Get yourself to sleep, ears! *Whammo!*” (Boxes himself on the ears.) “*Youch!* Bwaa hahahaha!” Unbelievably, he passed out in three minutes.

### Tip #68

Said a 98-year-old wise woman to me recently: “When you are in your twenties you think you are wise because you are a grownup. When you are in your thirties and forties you think you are wise because you have a job and kids. When you are in your fifties you think you are wise because your kids are grown up and you’ve got stuff. When you are in your sixties you think you are wise because you have grandkids and you have photo albums. When you are in your seventies and eighties you think you are wise because you are outliving all of your friends and you have a lot of stories about your life. But when you get to be my age you figure out that all you’ve been doing is defining yourself relative to other things, as if you were some kind of fixed point. That’s impossible. I’m almost 100 and there is nothing to say. I’m just here, still breathing in the whole thing and I’m damn thankful for it.”

### Tip #69

My young son and I were watching in wonder at the early morning light illuminating the rising mists from the ground in wispy, smoky clouds. He asked me: “What is that?” I explained that it was water, changing form from liquid to vapor and going back into the air. He asked: “Why does it do that?” I dutifully told him about the water cycle, about evaporation, how the rising sun warmed the water molecules and made them dance right up into transformation. I know a lot about these things. I was a scientist, and can to this day identify almost every type of sea star on the planet by its taxonomic classification and geographical location.

But as I said the word “dance,” I realized that he and I, in our true state of being, are no different from the

rising mists of the morning. When our mind is pure and present, we too dance from one transformation to the next, as the forces of nature dictate. It is not our place to cling to the leaf for fear of not being dew anymore. We will only suffer unless we defer to the greater miracle before us. I know a lot about sea stars and the water cycle and ecology and biochemistry. But I never danced with them until now. I know a lot about education and taking care of kids, but without dancing with our kids we are joyless. We dance to piano lessons, to board meetings, through dishwashing, through taxes; we dance to dance classes. We dance to the ethers, and then back again, as we are called.

### Tip #70

Even if you haven’t been on your meditation cushion or yoga mat for weeks, you know you are doing OK when you see the mountain of laundry before you and your mind simply registers, “This is what’s in front of me to take care of in this moment.” If instead your mind is saying, “*When will it ever end?!*” then you have created the householder’s version of a kong-an, worth contemplating, for there is no answer other than “Never” and “Right now,” simultaneously. It’s a win-win. ♦

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*Meditation for Moms and Dads: 108 Tips for Mindful Parents and Caregivers* by Shana Smith will be available February 2016, from Clear Sky Publishing, <http://clearskypublishing.com>.



*Photo: Richard Godby  
Media Group*

Shana Smith is a mom, musician, meditator, marine biologist, teacher and writer. She is an avid and longtime student of Zen and Buddhism, a decades-long yogi, and a much sought-after kirtaniya, or devotional chanting leader. Known across the state of Florida and the United States for

the past 20 years as her children’s entertainment persona “Shana Banana,” Shana and her family (husband Dan, daughter Grace Ohana, and son Benny Albert) have settled down in Gainesville, Florida to run their meditation- and yoga-based Gainesville Retreat Center, which attracts many renowned teachers and practitioners. For more information, phone numbers and e-mail addresses, go to, [www.GainesvilleRetreatCenter.com](http://www.GainesvilleRetreatCenter.com) or [www.ShanaBanana.com](http://www.ShanaBanana.com).