

# The Heart of Peace

By Sonnie McFarland

I believe that we can become a world of peace, but for this to happen, each of us must consciously engage in what I call the Heart of Peace. This is love—the most powerful energy in the universe and the pathway to peace.

At a time of many scientific discoveries, Dr. Montessori (1988, p. 264) spoke about the power of love in this way:

*Why not spend a little of this vigour in the study of a force that might unite mankind? Every contribution able to bring out the latent power of Love, and to throw light upon Love itself, should be welcomed with avidity and considered of paramount importance.*

Montessori was a woman of deep wisdom, especially when it came to understanding the authentic nature of the child. She saw children as pure love and encouraged adults to treasure them. She described how an adult is affected when she witnesses the unveiling of the love inherent in children (1988, p. 258):

*When the children show her their real natures, she understands, perhaps for the first time, what Love really is. And this revelation transforms her also. It is a thing that touches the heart, and little by little it changes people.*

It has been over 100 years since Maria Montessori started her first school, and a vast number of children and adults worldwide have benefitted from her Method. However, our work is not complete. Each day, as we interact with children, their parents, our colleagues, our families, and all others whom we encounter, it is critical that we recognize our own Love Light, relate through it, and encourage others to do the same.

In addition to seeing the pure love in children, it is up to us as adults to do all we can to help children recognize the love inside themselves. We must also help them learn how to manage their minds, understand their emotions, calm themselves, nurture their own spirits of love, and identify love in others so they can have peaceful interactions.

For us to experience the power of love on a regular basis, we must also consciously recognize our own spirit of love. Can we look in the mirror and honestly say to ourselves, “I love you”? We are part of the same Light of Love as children. For us to touch their hearts of love, we must come from our own heart of love.

**In addition to seeing the pure love in children, it is up to us as adults to do all we can to help children recognize the love inside themselves.**

The following activities can help us connect to our spirits of love:

1. **Deep Breathing:** This slows down our breathing, relaxes our muscles, calms our mind, and quiets our emotions;
2. **Mindfulness:** Being in the present moment helps us embrace and appreciate what exists;
3. **Conscious Self Observation:** Using our Inner Guide (that portion of the mind that is based on wisdom), we can observe our ego, our unconscious mind, and any outside stimulation, helping us decide upon a course of action;
4. **Connecting to Nature:** This relaxes the body and mind, opening our hearts to love and peace;
5. **Silence:** Being silent allows for an environment in which the four activities above can take place.

The more we open our hearts to the energy of love, the more we will be guided to reach out to others to share our knowledge and gifts and further the manifestation of peace on earth. As Montessori said (1988, p. 269):

*Love is conceded to man as a gift directed to a certain purpose, and for a special reason, and in this it resembles everything lent to living beings by the cosmic consciousness. It must be treasured, developed and enlarged to the fullest possible extent. Man, alone among living creatures, can sublimate this force which he has received and can develop it more and more. To treasure it is his duty. It holds the universe together because it is a real force, and not just an idea.*

#### Reference

Montessori, M. (1988.) *The absorbent mind*. Oxford, England: Clío Press.



SONNIE McFARLAND, the AMS 2011 Living Legacy, is an international speaker, immediate past chair of the AMS Peace Committee, a former member of the AMS Board of Directors, and the author/co-author of three books. She is AMS-credentialed (Early Childhood). Contact her at [sonnie4peace@gmail.com](mailto:sonnie4peace@gmail.com).

*Chloe Herzog  
Montessori Alumna  
Cincinnati, OH*

**WHAT IS YOUR MONTESSORI BACKGROUND?  
WILL YOU SHARE A MONTESSORI MEMORY?**

I attended Montessori Center Room (Cincinnati, OH) for preschool and kindergarten. My three siblings (9, 12, and 16) also attended Montessori Center Room, and my mother currently serves as the school's executive director.

I remember clearly one day of kindergarten. I was intensely focused on a self-portrait, trying to figure out which color to use for my freckles. Two things upset me: that my only options were bright orange and brown and that another child criticized my portrait for the absence of a neck. I approached my teacher, Ann Lucas, about the tragedy that was my missing neck. She suppressed a smile, telling me seriously that I was allowed to draw my pictures however I wanted. She said it only mattered how I felt about my self-portrait, but for what it was worth, she liked it better without a neck. It made my picture unique!

Her words stuck and are true today. The university environment is extremely competitive, and it's easy to absorb criticisms or criticize yourself. Is this the right major? Am I involved in enough organizations? Am I setting myself up to be competitive in the workforce? It's important to remember that this is still my picture, and I have the freedom to draw it however I want. I don't want my self-portrait to look like everyone else's but to be uniquely me.

**HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR MONTESSORI EDUCATION SHAPED YOU?**

From my first day at Montessori Center Room, I was valued and respected for my thoughts and opinions. It's hard to treat a kindergartner as an equal, but I assure you Montessori educators can. I always had a say in my learning experiences, whether that meant choosing the next work or deciding to spend as much of my day as possible in the reading corner.

I learned to find my voice, one that has evolved into that of a young professional woman and a passionate environmentalist.

I was encouraged to be my best self. The Montessori environment challenges students in a way that also promotes self-discovery. Being unique was celebrated. So what if I loved reading just as much as running around the indoor gym? My teachers showed me how to learn and how to find my independence in an understanding of self-worth. Since my time at Montessori Center Room, I've pushed myself to my fullest potential, and I've always held fast to my individuality.

**WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR YOUR FUTURE?**

This year, I will graduate from Vanderbilt University. As is the case for many soon-to-be college grads, my future is full of nerve-racking uncertainty and wild potential. Regardless of my chosen profession, I hope that I will find myself doing something important. I want to know that I fought relentlessly for my beliefs, practiced respect and tolerance in every interaction, and never stopped learning.

**HOW DO YOU THINK A MONTESSORI EDUCATION AFFECTS A CHILD'S SUCCESS?**

Beyond academic excellence and unparalleled one-on-one time with educators, Montessori schools give children opportunities to develop communication skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork, compassion, problem-solving abilities, and independence. School is about so much more than solving math problems. It's where children socialize with one another and explore their understanding of themselves and the world around them. The individuality and autonomy of Montessori learning environments allow children to thrive.

**WHAT ARE YOU READING RIGHT NOW?**

I'm reading *The Emperor of All Maladies*, by Siddhartha Mukherjee; it's a history of cancer and cancer research through a humane narrative. I'm currently an intern at a biotechnology startup and often find myself lost in the jargon of cancer biology. Reading Mukherjee is an attempt to be less lost. It's a long book, but he's a great storyteller.

