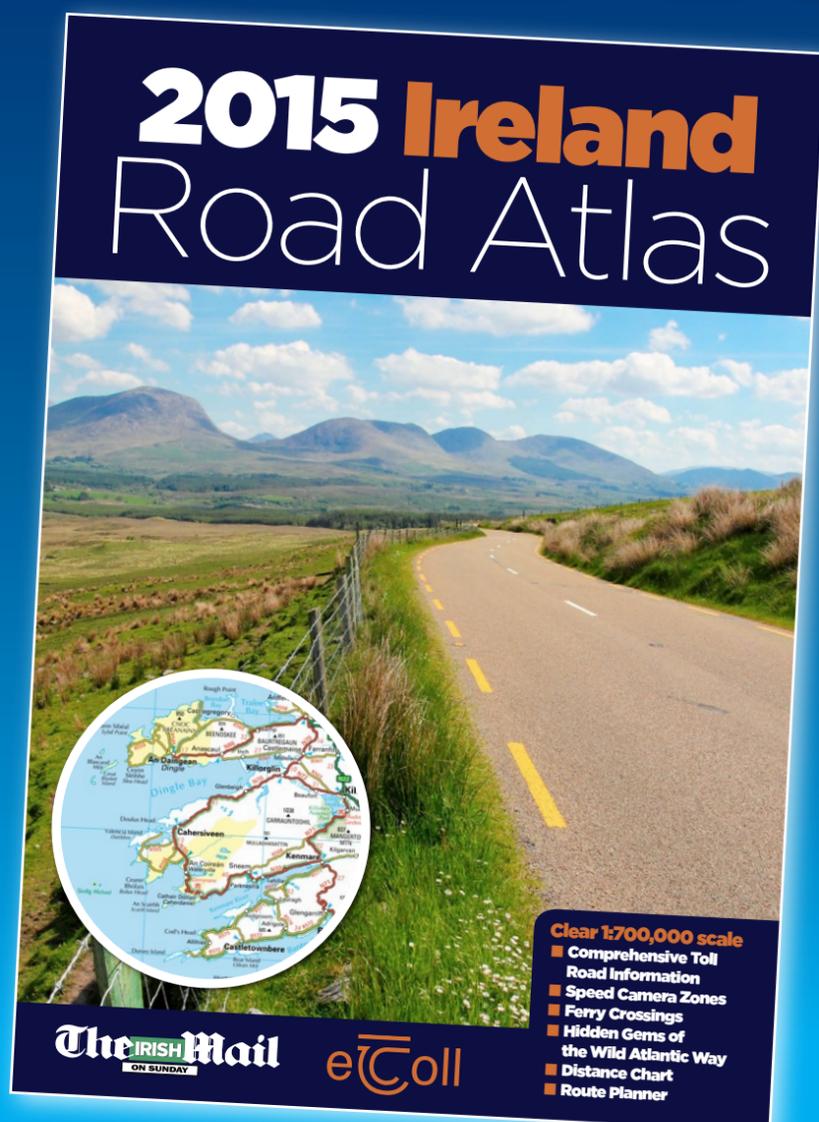


FREE 2015 ROAD ATLAS



INSIDE THIS WEEKEND'S
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Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Silence offers lots more than simple peace

THERE is a secret to happiness, peace and harmony. There is a secret to productivity, success and personal growth. That secret is silence and it is available to anyone anywhere and at any time.

When I last wrote about silence, I received an overwhelming response. Many readers were overjoyed that this natural capacity could produce such startling consequences. To sit in silence, they found, is to experience life in all its splendour.

We live in a world hooked on distraction, one addicted to noise and commotion. Unplugging from that world is the antidote to agitation and anxiety. It is the key to health and wholeness at a time when so many people are burned out.

Now, more than ever, we require a silent space where the soul can be at peace.

When I was growing up, people did not feel compelled to fill every space with sound. Today, however, we consider silence a vacuum that must be filled with either chatter, music or the background noise of rolling news.

If that is unhealthy, it is because it overwhelms the senses to the point of exhaustion. Ironically, the senses do not need constant stimulation to stay alert. They require rest and rejuvenation, periods of peace when they can switch off and heal.

Those of us who regularly 'enter the silence' understand this beautiful mystery. Life, energy and creativity – all are enhanced simply by sitting still in a space devoid of distraction. The drooping spirit is revived and life's joy is steadily rekindled.

Silence is a lifeline to the weary, a cure for troubled souls and that through which we can reconnect with reality. It is a place beyond the surface, one that lies at the depths of our being and to which we can retreat when the world becomes too burdensome. It is our refuge from all the hype and hysteria of Cyberia.

That is why the greatest gift we can give our children today is that of silence. In their world of games and gadgets, there is no place to experience that peace which surpasses all understanding. Many are technological junkies with no sense that there is life beyond the screen.

There is, however, a miracle that awaits those who care to find it, a miracle that has transformed the lives of schoolchildren across the globe.

Where periods of quiet time have been introduced to the school curriculum, the results have been nothing less than astonishing. Precious young lives have been saved and transformed beyond recognition.

In one Californian school the introduction of quiet time has, quite literally, changed everything. Burton High School was once recognised as 'fight school'. Today, the school is no longer

known for its problems, but for its academic success and the fact that its suspension rate has plummeted by 75 per cent.

One young boy named Tobias said that before quiet time he had 'wanted to fight everyone all the time'. Now that he spends two periods a day in silence, he is calm, collected and less interested in fighting than in succeeding.

And the same is true wherever children are encouraged simply to close their eyes and savour the stillness.

It is a simple truth that in those schools where quiet time features on the curriculum, children are more content, academically successful and far less anxious.

Having been inwardly nourished by the silence, they return to the world cleansed of fatigue and frustration. They no longer live solely on the surface, but dwell where peace produces poise and power.

At a time when life is so challenging and complex for our children, it is vital that they be given everything they require to flourish in the midst of the madness. It is vital that they unplug their senses and steep them in soothing silence. Only then will they experience the true beauty of life and all the joys it has to offer.

YET there is no reason why all Irish schools should not, as a matter of policy, add quiet time to the curriculum. If two ten-minute periods at either end of the school day can relieve students of stress, anxiety and all the behavioural problems that follow, surely this is something that ought to be implemented without delay. For when the classroom becomes a place of peace, then everything – from concentration to student serenity – improves exponentially.

The miracle of silence is not reserved for saints or mystics. It is available to everyone at whatever stage of life. The only requirement is some quiet time, a chair and a willingness to shut your eyes.

And then it happens: the body takes its own pulse and the soul sighs with relief. Time and space are monetarily suspended as you sip from the silver spring of silence, from waters that refresh and renew. You connect with your source and the sap of life floods the system.

It is so easy, so natural and so pure. Yet in a world addicted to sound, we flee from silence and thus lose its life-enhancing benefits. The greatest casualties of this are children, those most naturally receptive to the power of peace.

That is why we need quiet time in the home, at school and wherever children gather. We need it because without silence they are destined to live a life without peace.

And without peace, we put our little ones at the awful risk of being forever at war with the world.