

4. Isn't contemplative pedagogy a form of teaching religion and religious practice in the classroom?

FG: I am not a particularly religious person and my understanding of contemplative pedagogy is that it has nothing to do with religion or religious practice or even religious studies as a discipline. I would use contemplative pedagogy if I taught in another discipline, even the hard sciences. The quantum physicist David Bohm spoke of meditation as the best way to be disabused of mental biases in the laboratory. Contemplative methods do not teach, encourage, or require students to become religious or to adopt a particular worldview or faith commitment. Rather, contemplative methods unlock the innate yet often unexplored capacity for intuitive knowledge, expanded consciousness, unconditional compassion for self and others, appreciation for beauty, and creative fulfillment. Religion may point to the Sacred but the Sacred exists apart from religion. I tend to generate contemplative methods that do not have a religious origin or context. For example, I take students outside for ten minutes to closely observe a single aspect of nature such as an insect, a leaf, a palm tree, etc. Such contemplative exercises do not aim at religious development but the cultivation of human awareness.

6. How do you avoid cultural appropriation in the teaching of contemplative practices?

FG: Likely, I have a different view from some of my colleagues on this question. Contemplative methods, in my experience, are not tied so much to religious context as to human nature itself. My own contemplative commitments in this lifetime have had very little to do with religion and, in fact, unfolded more freely outside of religion. So this statement by Swami Muktananda in his classic little book, *Meditate: Happiness Lies Within You* (Siddha Yoga Foundation, 1980, 5) rings true for me: “Meditation is universal. It does not belong to the East or to the West, nor does it belong to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Sufism. Meditation is everyone’s property, just as sleep is everyone’s property; it belongs to humanity.” No group or tradition owns inner peace and higher consciousness. So what could be “appropriated”? Yes, when I teach meditation methods which have been developed within a particular tradition (e.g., Buddhist “Tonglen” meditation), students read about the method from a teacher or sage within that tradition, and we may have a practitioner come to class to give us the religious and communal context of the practice. And I do not personally teach a meditation method associated with a religious tradition unless I have received a transmission to do so from a verified teacher (in this lifetime or a previous one). However, at the end of the day, my teaching approach emphasizes the common aim of inner methods over and above their particularities of “origin.”

8. In what ways can a contemplative-oriented professor bring contemplative awareness to the classroom without ever doing contemplative practices with the

students?

FG: A very simple practice is to pay attention to the ever-present silence underneath all sounds. When I am speaking in a classroom or in my office to students, I am aware constantly of the silence underneath all of the words. In the contemplative training that I follow, words are an artifact of separation. Silence keeps open the possibility of our oneness. We cannot hear words apart from silence. That is a paradox. The words on a page are readable only because there is the whiteness of the page underneath them. The whiteness keeps open the possibility of oneness between writer and reader. The contemplative professor connects to and is always aware of silence, within and without. Awareness of the silence is done completely in silence. No one has to know.