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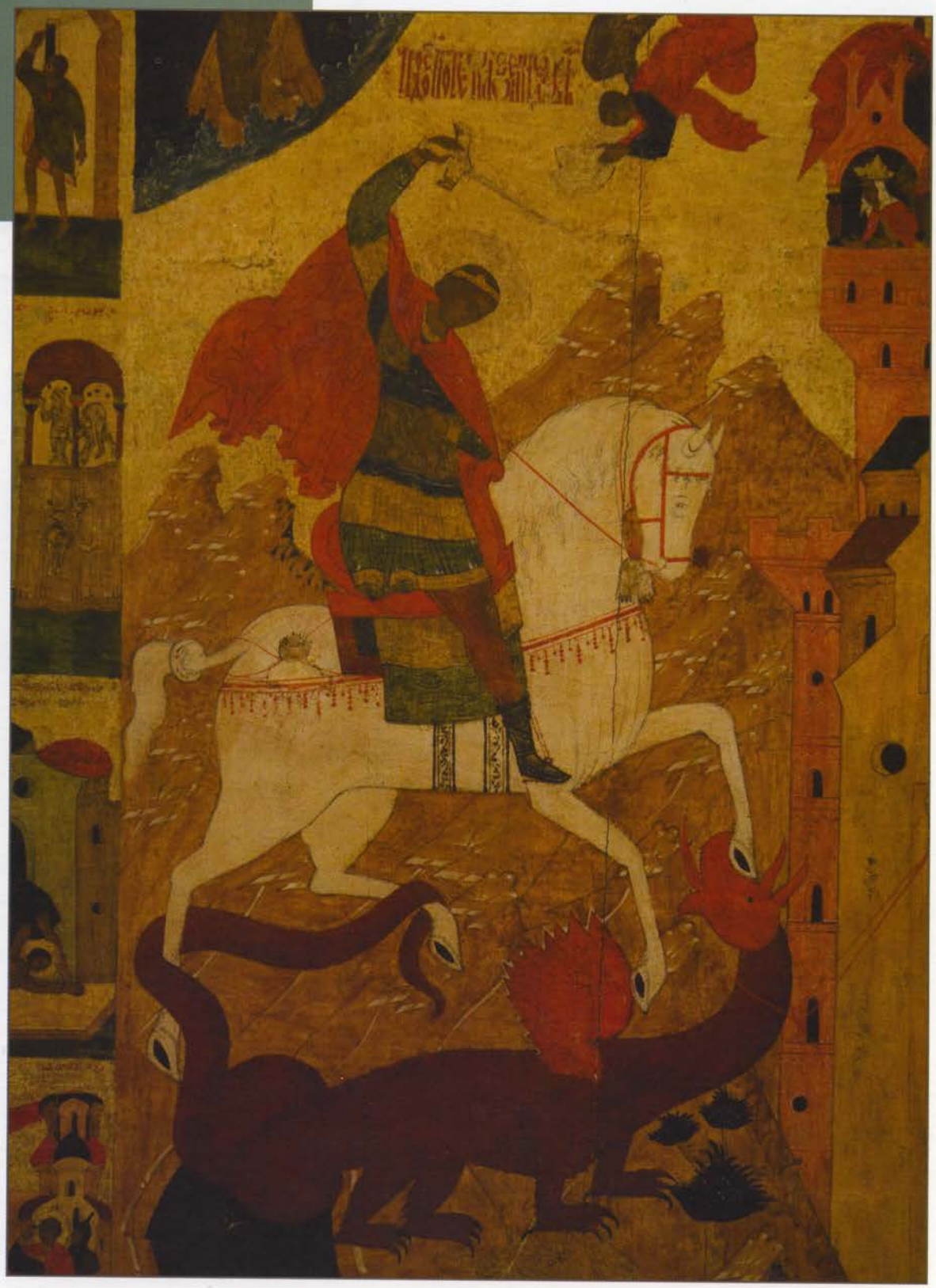

St. George slaying the dragon. Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph by Kendra Mack.

20th Anniversary Issue!

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

Views from the Religion Classroom and Artist's Studio

Deborah J. Haynes

Since the mid-1990s, interest in the use of contemplative practices in college and university classrooms has grown. With the world's religious traditions as the source and inspiration for contemplation, prayer, and meditation, it is therefore not surprising that religion and theology courses would form the disciplinary foundation for exploring these practices. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, in collaboration with the American Council of Learned Societies, has been a leader in promoting development of over 100 courses in eighty different institutions in the United States. In 2002 I received a fellowship from the Center for Contemplative Mind that allowed me to develop both new courses and new pedagogical strategies that I have used with students since then. This article addresses a range of issues concerning contemplative practice: what it is; brief historical and scientific perspectives; a description of why contemplative practices matter; discussions of contemplative pedagogy and contemplative inquiry; thirteen examples of how to use contemplative practice in the classroom; and challenges of their use in university and college classrooms.

Contemplative Practice

There is no single way to describe or engage in contemplative practice. The Latin *contemplari* means to observe, consider, or gaze attentively. This definition gives clues about the varied forms of contemplative practice, which include sitting, standing, walking, and lying down; using attitudes of not doing; deep listening, pondering, and radical questioning; guided imagery and active imagination; exercises with the body; focusing techniques such as those developed by Eugene Gendlin;[1] concentrated language experiments with freewriting, poetry, and journals; and creation of visual images to represent such experiences.[2] The word mindfulness is often used to describe contemplative practice. In its most basic form, it means moment-by-moment present awareness, which is available to everyone, regardless of religious or spiritual orientation.

Broadly understood as methods to develop concentration, deepen understanding and insight, and to cultivate awareness and compassion, these practices can have a profound impact on a student's experience both in college and beyond. Specifically, teaching students techniques of awareness, concentration, and means of disciplining their attention is absolutely essential in our era of fragmentation, ever-increasing speed, multitasking, and continuously interrupted attention. While contemplative practices are rooted in the world's religions, I often tell parents and students that the application of these practices in a secular educational context can enhance the educational experience in unique ways. Students develop new techniques of awareness; they learn to refine their perceptual and observational skills; and they are encouraged to take chances and to foster attitudes such as curiosity and wonder rather than cynicism and despair about the world in which we live.

Historical and Scientific Perspectives

I think it bears mention that these contemplative practices are not new and that researchers are presently engaged in numerous studies of their efficacy.[3] Since prehistory, human beings have engaged in shamanic, ecstatic, and mystical practices. Over time these practices became codified and developed as part of the religious traditions that we study today. In India, for example, Vedic traditions developed forms of yoga and meditation between 2000–3000 BCE. Following the Buddha's teaching during his lifetime, diverse forms of meditative practice evolved in south, east, and central Asia. Christian meditation and prayer were developed by Desert Fathers in the second century CE Kabbalistic meditation out of Jewish traditions was codified about 1000 CE, but probably existed earlier. Sufis developed Islamic practices, through dance, chanting, and other contemplative forms. During the sixteenth-century reformations in the Catholic Church, new protestant religious forms evolved and practices of Christian meditation that had been taught by monks were suppressed. Nevertheless, mystics such as the Carmelite nun Teresa of Avila developed practices that were akin to meditation. In the twentieth century, all of these practices became widely available through books and other media.

Scientific research about contemplative practices has evolved since the late 1960s, when Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medi-

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cal School first published his studies about the causes and alleviation of stress.[4] In the late 1970s Jon Kabat-Zinn began work with patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center using mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques. From the 1990s, researchers at institutions such as the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Wisconsin began to use new imaging technologies to study brain activity, as well as the effects of meditation on heart disease and cancer. More recent ongoing research by the Mind and Life Institute and other institutions uses advanced imaging technology to study the experience and effects of meditation. In this larger context it seems fitting that the academy would also be a site for studying and evolving the uses of contemplative practice.

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Why Are Contemplative Practices Significant?

Contemplative practices have pragmatic benefits for students and their teachers that I will discuss in the pages to follow. On its comprehensive website, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society has outlined some of the general ways in which they can help to improve students' relationships with themselves, other people, and the world. Here I simply want to acknowledge the significance of contemplative practices.

These practices can help to transform students' inner relationship with themselves through generating an overall sense of calm and wellbeing. Learning to manage stress and its impact on the body has overall health implications. Deepening self-understanding can help students to sharpen their life focus, as well as concentration and attention more generally. And for students to establish a strong relationship with themselves can lead to upholding core values in their lives.

In terms of students' relationships with their peers, teachers, and others, contemplative practices can help them learn to treat people with compassion and kindness. Developing and improving listening skills is a key part of this. Depending upon what practices are taught, they can also open up creative possibilities for student problem-solving and resolving disagreements.

Most broadly, contemplative practices can help to enrich students' relationship with the world by increasing appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life. This has wide implications beyond the classroom, for when students develop the ability to question and explore their own experience, they may become more able to deal with complexity, change, and global issues.

Contemplative Pedagogy

Introducing contemplative practices into the classroom results in new educational practices and pedagogy. The root of education is *educare*, to draw forth, both in the sense of drawing forth from the student what is already present, and bringing forth new awareness and fostering new knowledge. For example, in the course titled "The Dialogue of Art and Religion," my students learn about Russian Orthodox icons, Himalayan Buddhist *thangkas*, and Navajo sand paintings through studying cultural and social history, religion, formal visual analysis, and creative processes. I define this interdisciplinary teaching as a form of comparative visual studies. I normally teach this class to eighteen or twenty first-year college students. Students also learn about the practices of prayer and meditation that are central to Christian, Buddhist, and Native American traditions through sustained reading and discussion. They read accessible books about contemplative practice such as Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.[5] In each class, we practice simple techniques such as bowing, sitting in silence, breath awareness, and daily writing exercises.

Over the past few years my students have talked about the way these mindfulness exercises help to foster an atmosphere of respect. They often note how these practices have effectively brought the class together as a whole. Some students have also reported closer connections to their professor and less anxiety about their classroom presence. When courses actively create a respectful environment, students learn to listen, write, and argue persuasively from a position of civility, which helps them to become principled citizens. Perhaps most significantly, contemplative practice fosters development of what Martin Buber called "I-Thou" relationships, where other people, events, and things are treated as subjects and not merely as objects for use or enjoyment. As Jon Kabat-Zinn remarked during a lecture at the 2005 Columbia University conference on Contemplative Practices and Education,

1. Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing* (New York: Bantam, 1982). **2.** Tobin Hart, "Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom," *Journal of Transformative Education* 2 (January 2004): 28–46. **3.** Joel Stein, "Just Say Om," *Time* (August 4, 2003): 51–56. **4.** Herbert Benson, *The Relaxation Response* (New York: Morrow, 1975). **5.** Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

most of us live, most of the time, in a narrow band of being where we are surrounded by "I," "me," and "mine." We suffer from this narrow focus. How can we get more real? As teachers, how can we ignite passion in our students for this kind of presence, this "being" in their own lives? This is precisely the work of contemplative pedagogy: it is about waking up and being present to our lives—here and now.

In an often-quoted excerpt from *Principles of Psychology*, William James wrote that "The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will.... An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about."[6] Yet this is precisely what contemplative pedagogies seek to do: to describe how to improve the ability to bring the wandering attention back to the moment, again and again. Mirabai Bush, former director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, identified the goal of such practices and pedagogies as creating Gary Snyder's "noble woke-up big-heart beings."[7] Such persons become capable of greater compassion and kindness. They learn how to listen to themselves and others and to observe the world.

Contemplative Inquiry

Contemplation can also be described as a way of knowing, an epistemology that is distinct from rationalist-empiricist thought. Psychologist Tobin Hart has written that an epistemology of contemplation "includes the natural human capacity for knowing through silence, looking inward, pondering deeply, beholding, witnessing the contents of our consciousness, and so forth."[8] With professors of religion and art historians, I have begun to teach some of these methods, which I will describe in more detail shortly.

Given the challenges of our world, including pervasive violence, suffering, and serious ecological disasters on every continent and in virtually every community, the idea of inviting students to bear witness, to leave words and to be in silence, can be a salve, as Arthur Zajonc observed during his keynote address at the 2005 conference on Contemplative Practices and Education at Columbia University.[9] In a world beset by conflict, to cultivate only critical thinking and analysis leads to partial knowing. Contemplation is a common human activity that, when brought into academic contexts, offers an epistemology based not on data, information, and the separation of subject and object, but on knowledge, wisdom, and insight about the interconnectedness of all things. Such contemplative inquiry can lead to an education that transforms the student.

Though I continue to work in a secular university context, I believe that these ideals and values of respect, participation, and interconnectedness are relevant to all educational settings. Contemplative inquiry is itself respectful. Through contemplative practices, students learn to recognize the individuality of others, yet to resist the distancing that characterizes so much of our lives. Such inquiry is participatory: it invites us to come closer to one another and the physical world. Like the best education in any context, it is not about losing one's own consciousness and identity, but about entering into the experience of the other, insofar as this is possible. The roots of this kind of education lie not only in Asian philosophies and Christian mysticism, but also in the Greek aspiration toward insight. Contemplation is at the heart of knowledge, for to contemplate deeply is to see.

A contemplative epistemology is based on developing the ability to live with uncertainty and to sustain contradictory views. Can we become "comfortable with uncertainty," to paraphrase Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön, comfortable with *not* knowing?[10] Can we learn to see dissimilar things and processes as linked? Such education is what artist and teacher M. C. Richards called an education of the whole person.[11] I would suggest that this approach is sorely needed at our historical moment.

Thus far I have discussed definitions, pedagogy, and epistemology based on contemplation. But what does it mean *to practice*? What *is* practice? Both a verb and noun, the word means making, doing, and acting. But more than this, it implies discipline, repetition, and habit. The word derives from the Late Latin *practice*, which refers to the practical as against the contemplative life. How curious that we use this word now to describe the contemplative life once again. To practice means many things: listening, thinking, and examining the teachings one encounters; praying and meditating; familiarizing ourselves with a new way of being in the world; and acting, applying our insights in daily life. In fact, practice means paying attention to one's thoughts, bodily sensations, speech, and action, moment by moment. What exactly is going on right now, in the present moment? Whether alone or in the classroom, when we practice meditation or pray, we sit in silence. In our world, silence is rare and hard to achieve. The experience of integrating contempla-

6. William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: H. Holt, 1890), 424. **7.** Gary Snyder, *Danger on Peaks* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004); Center for Contemplative Mind in Society www.contemplativemind.org and www.contemplativemind.org/practices/practices_matter.html. **8.** Hart, "Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom," 29–30. **9.** Arthur Zajonc, "Love and Knowledge: Recovering the Heart of Learning Through Contemplation," www.contemplativemind.org/publications/#academic. **10.** Pema Chödrön, *Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 Teachings on Cultivating Fearlessness and Compassion* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002). **11.** M. C. Richards, "The Public School and the Education of the Whole Person," in *Opening Our Moral Eye: Essays, Talks, and Poems Embracing Creativity and Community*, ed. Deborah J. Haynes (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1996).

tive practices into the classroom has been enormously rewarding and energizing for me. After many years of teaching a diverse array of courses in the visual arts, religious studies, and women's studies, I have finally established a closer relationship between my own values and my approach to teaching. What follows are thirteen examples of practices that I regularly incorporate into courses that I teach.

Contemplative Practices for Classroom Use

1. The Bow

On the first day of class after all students have arrived, I introduce "the bow" before undertaking any other introductory comments. I ask all of the students to sit up straight, to place their hands on their knees and both feet on the floor, and to soften their gaze toward the center of the room. Arranging the classroom in a circle makes this exercise more meaningful, but it is possible to do it in a larger lecture-style classroom as well. After everyone has stopped moving, I simply bow my head toward the table and ask them to do the same. I then talk about what this means in two ways. Starting that first day, I invite the students to be fully present in class, and to cultivate an attitude of respect for others and the material that we will be studying. We end the class with the same gesture. Over time, this collective bow becomes a profound symbol of presence and respect in the classroom. I have recently begun to experiment with ringing a small gong and offering students the chance to ring the gong as well. Students tend to arrive in class on time because they do not want to miss the bow or the opportunity to ring the gong.

2. Six Points of Posture

A few classes after introducing the bow, I suggest that the students might find it helpful to practice the "six points of posture" as they bow. This exercise adds greatly to their initial concentration when they arrive in class. Many students feel self-conscious and awkward the first few times they try this, but they have repeatedly told me that over time it helps them to feel connected to the class. First, to establish a stable *seat*, I ask students to sit at the edge of the chair. Second, the *legs* should be neither crossed nor stretched out. The feet are directly under the knees. Third, the *hands* are placed palms down on the legs. Fourth, the *torso* is relaxed. The spine should be straight, tilting neither to the front nor back, left nor right. Fifth, the *eyes* are kept open, gazing down at a spot about 3–4 feet in front of the student. Finally, the *mouth* should be slightly open, tongue resting against the upper palette.

3. Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing and sitting meditation helps to relax and focus the mind. I tell students that just five minutes a day can make them feel more refreshed and energetic. None of us can prevent stressful situations in life, but we can begin to learn how to control our reactions to these situations. Practicing mindfulness can help. I also tell students that many religious traditions teach methods of working with the breath.

As we begin, I ask students to adopt the six points of posture. Then, they bring attention to the breathing. Sometimes we observe the sensations of the breath in the abdomen, the diaphragm, or the lungs. Sometimes we focus on the light touch of air as it enters the nostrils. Sometimes we count the breath: on the exhalation, one; next exhalation, two; and all the way to twenty-one. Then we start again at one. I remind students that depending upon their state of mind, their attention may wander in either mild or wild ways. As they observe the mind, they should name what it wanders to and come back to the breathing and counting. While every person's mind is often seemingly impossible to tame, at times we are able to rest in a quiet and calm state that is refreshing. If a group seems especially engaged by this kind of breath meditation, I urge them to look dispassionately at the reactions and habits of the mind. Once they have practiced focusing on the breathing, I suggest that they experiment by using bodily sensations, sounds, or watching thoughts as the point of concentration.

4. Walking Meditation

In this meditation, the focus is on the movement of the body while being mindful of the surroundings. Although walking meditation can be effective indoors, I have introduced this practice outside. Because we are on the university campus, I suggest that they experiment walking by themselves. Once, when Thich Nhat Hanh was teaching a weekend workshop at my university, we did an extended walking meditation in a long line on sidewalks throughout the campus. Some of the students talked about how conspicuous they felt, especially when they encountered friends and classmates. So, I advise students walking alone not to engage in tempting conversations if they see others they know. To begin, I ask the students to stand briefly in order to balance themselves and to release tension, allowing the arms to hang freely. Instructions are simple. They should begin walking at a slow, but normal pace. As they walk they should place awareness in the beginning on one part of each foot—big toe, space beneath feet and ground, or; later, they might try to take note of each step, the lift of the leg, the heel making contact, the roll onto the ball of the foot, other parts of the body, breathing, body temperature, wind on the face, and so on.

After doing such practices I ask students what they experienced and try to elicit from them the benefits of walking meditation. It helps to quiet and focus the mind, they tell me, and provides an opportunity for personal insights to arise. It develops balance and concentration. It increases stamina for meditation and mindfulness of movement more generally. Walking meditation also contributes to a general sense of wellbeing

by relaxing the body, reviving tired muscles, stimulating circulation, assisting digestion, and minimizing sluggishness.

5. Eye Practices

Because my class focuses on the study of art created with a religious intent, it is crucial that students learn how to look and how to see. I therefore introduce them to a set of five practices with the eyes that I learned from dancer and teacher Barbara Dilley. Dilley originally introduced them in a 1996 public performance titled "Naked Face," which was performed at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art by the Mariposa Collective and directed by her. They are designed to help refine students' understanding and experience of vision in general. With *closed eyes* I ask the students to focus on resting and refreshing their eyes, and to consider what internal seeing might mean. With *peripheral seeing*, I ask them to soften their focus and try to see from the corner of the eyes. Sometimes, looking straight ahead with a soft gaze, it is possible to see almost 180 degrees, and this is an exciting expansion of vision. In our time, with the presence of ubiquitous screens on television, computers, handheld devices, and mobile phones, many students have never truly experienced their peripheral vision. *Infant eyes* introduces students to the idea of seeing before naming what they see. Is it possible, I ask them, to look at the world as if they have never seen it before? *Looking between things* offers students a direct experience of both positive and negative space. The world is full of objects that define space. The area between these objects is known as negative space. Often we fail to notice the unique shapes and forms of this space. Through *direct looking*, students learn to investigate, study, and absorb the images and symbols in a work of art.

Related to these exercises, I introduce students to the distinction between outer sight and inner vision.[12] Outward sight involves looking at the world as a set of disparate phenomena. In this process the eye and mind cannot comprehend or take in everything. Things are seen but not fully registered. There is a constantly roving center of focus. Under the impact of the ubiquitous television and computer screen, the eyes roam about, constantly agitated, shifting focal points, creating a game of repeated grasping and releasing of objects, colors, sensations. The outer eye turns attention away from what it does not want to see, though an image may remain in consciousness.

Inner vision involves a more complex seeing in all its diversity, with equal fuzziness or sharpness. No part stands out more clearly than the rest, as everything is illuminated with equal intensity and without showing favor. Nothing distracts the inward gaze elsewhere. Everything is equally in focus. Training is required in order to cultivate this ability, because the physical eye cannot usually see like this. Sometimes through sustained attention we can glimpse this direct perception.

6. Beholding

After experimenting with the five eye practices, students are ready to learn how to view the icons, thangkas, and sand paintings that are the subject of our class. I teach them how to "behold," to experience these works of art firsthand. When it is possible, I ask students to pick an artwork up, to hold it in the hands and to get close to it. If they cannot touch it, then we get as close as possible in order to examine the object. Sometimes this results in an experience of tremendous intimacy; at other times students are awed by what they see. Beholding is a counter both to the usual two-second walk-by experience that characterizes much museum looking and to the analytical dissection of a work of art. I suggest to students that these other methods of viewing art are not intrinsically wrong, but that thoughtful beholding often leads to another kind of encounter. My own love of Buddhist thangkas and Islamic manuscripts and calligraphy, for example, has grown from this kind of sustained beholding. Taking students to museums and bringing actual works of art to class helps to make this a more vivid encounter for the students. Historical study is crucial, but is not the same as beholding, which is a first-person experience of actually looking at a work of art with full attention.

Contemplation can also be described as a way of knowing, an epistemology that is distinct from rationalist-empiricist thought.

7. Contour Portraits

Learning to look at works of art *with regard* can be a new and profound experience for students who take so much of visual culture for granted. I teach the students blind contour drawing with their classmates as a way to learn how to observe with an attitude of deep respect. Described in detail by Kimon Nicolaides in *The Natural Way to Draw*, contour drawing involves trying to focus the attention, to merge touch and sight.[13] The practice is to move the eye along

12. Heinrich Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, trans. Gerald Chapple and James B. Lawson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
13. Kimon Nicolaides, *The Natural Way to Draw: A Working Plan for Art Study* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1941).

with the pencil, keeping the body relaxed, and not looking at the paper. The most difficult part of the exercise for most students is to resist worrying about the outcome. Students work in pairs, where one student is the "artist," the other the "model." Then they reverse roles. Usually I start with one-minute timed portraits. Depending upon student engagement with the exercise, I may repeat it several times, with students changing partners and lengthening the amount of time for each round. Cultivating respect for one another through this exercise, I hope to awaken a greater sense of regard for the art we study.

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8. Talisman

In this activity, each student brings an object and shares its story with a small group or the class as a whole. I tell the students to select an object that in some way communicates, symbolizes, or expresses what matters most to that person. It can be an ordinary object, an old favorite, a photo, or something the student has made. Everyone then tells their story and we build a "table of inspiration" with the objects. Such a practice allows students not only to practice expressing what matters most to them, but also to develop skills of deep listening to others. This is a most effective way of encouraging students to get to know one another.

9. Freewriting

Freewriting has been widely popularized by Peter Elbow, and the process is simple.[14] I ask students to settle down into a quiet place, with journal or paper, pens or pencils. Then they start to write down whatever comes to mind, not thinking and not judging what they write. I tell them to imagine this process as if the writing implement is writing each of them. If they get stuck and don't know what to say, I suggest that they write "I feel stuck." The key is to keep the pen moving. When practiced during class, I usually time the writing for five or ten minutes. If they are working on their own, I ask students to choose a quiet space where they will not be disturbed and to do a simple breathing meditation to clear and focus the mind. Whether in the group or alone, I suggest that they continue writing, not thinking about where it is coming from, until at some point they know they are done. A final stage, once this initial writing done, is for each student to read through what he or she has written. Sometimes I invite students to read aloud if they wish to share the experience.

Sometimes students find this practice enormously liberating, for at last they can write without the internal critic or judge. While they may be shy to share this writing in class, my experience is that over time students vie for the opportunity to read aloud. This exercise helps to build confidence in a student's ideas and unique voice.

10. Day of Mindfulness

I first considered the possibility of offering students an optional "day of mindfulness" after reading Thich Nhat Hanh's description of how to undertake this practice.[15] Hanh suggests a day that is not unlike the Jewish Shabbat, where work is kept to a minimum or not done at all, and where every activity is undertaken with intensified mindfulness. When I offer this opportunity to students, we usually choose a Saturday. With student work schedules and other commitments, I have also allowed them to attend for half-days. Our activities on such a day of mindfulness have included yoga postures and relaxation, listening to music in a receptive state, sitting, walking meditation, eating together, and simple calligraphy, or what I call "one-stroke" practice. With a bottle of ink, brush, and plenty of paper, each student practices making one long stroke with the brush. We might also work with language, adding text to pages that suggest a literary content.

Another option that I have tried is to read Hanh's description of a day of mindfulness during class time. Then I ask students to find a two- to four-hour block of time before our next class meeting during which they can be alone. During this time, the student is to observe her- or himself and the immediate surroundings consciously. I suggest that they might go for a walk or go somewhere where they won't know people. Finally, students write about their experience in a journal, and share this writing in class.

One of the most profound outcomes of this experience, according to the students, is the permission it offers for noticing how deeply tired they are, and that this is worthy of their attention. I suspect that most students at eighteen or nineteen years of age are not able to modify their activity level or get more sleep in order to honor this exhaustion. But becoming aware of such lifestyle issues is the first step toward being able to change their behavior.

11. Creating a Work of Art

Based on one of the traditions we are studying, I usually offer students the opportunity

14. Peter Elbow, *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). **15.** Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness.*

to undertake a creative project based on the art we study in the course. The projects are due at the end of the semester, when they are presented in class. I tell the students that this project is a form of applied analysis. For instance, a student might decide to study the complex iconography of the Tibetan "Wheel of Existence" thangka, which is a graphic representation of fundamental Buddhist teachings. After completing an analysis of the image, they then might copy an original, or choose to create their own "wheel of life," showing how determinative events in their lives have influenced present values and ideals. This could be drawn, painted, collaged, or created using photography. Or, alternatively, a student might decide to copy a particular Russian Orthodox icon, such as the "Virgin of Vladimir," following traditional methods that we have studied in class.

This exercise of copying another artist's work is of inestimable value. In general students lack knowledge of artistic traditions and their continuity. This practice invites instruction and helps to expand a student's sense of possibility. I also ask students to write a short two- or three-page essay in which they describe reasons for selecting a particular work of art from one of the traditions, and analyze that piece with reference to its history, context, ritual use, iconography, the role of the artist and viewer, and the wider function of art.

Based on student feedback over several years, this is one of their favorite aspects of the course. Creating their own works of art based on a specific icon, thangka, or sand painting combines creative exploration with studying a particular image in depth.

12. Cultivating Visual Memory

To cultivate visual memory is another essential exercise in mindfulness. There are several sources for this idea: first, in the Chinese proverb that one should observe keenly, then go into the studio and paint; and second, in artist Camille Pissarro's exhortation to draw on site, then draw what you remember. In his book *The Art Spirit*, Robert Henri also encouraged students to observe the model in one room, then go into another to draw it.[16] I sometimes link this exercise to the "beholding" practice we have done in class, when we take more time than usual to study an object or form. In our visually saturated media world, it is very hard to do this, because of the speed of cut-and-paste, of advertising, and other images on television and the computer. Yet I think visual literacy is vital for students, and learning to slow down is part of reeducating one's sensibility. I have experimented with showing students slides of Russian icons, then having them draw what they remember. Even if they are not artists or think that they cannot draw, this is an excellent exercise for the mind and memory.

13. Hearing and Deep Listening

Sense perceptions and impressions are a form of wealth for both all of us, whether we have any inclination toward the visual and performing arts or not. Ours is an ocular-centric age, focused on vision and the visual; and we are therefore experienced at how to use the eyes. In this exercise, I encourage students to experiment with letting the ear be the main organ of perception, even as they look at the world. How do we tap into inner sources of creativity? Through receptivity, inquiring, and listening. From the Greeks to contemporary mystics, the ear has been as important as the eye. The most obvious way to introduce students to deep listening is through music that evolved in relation to each of the traditions. When introducing the environment for Russian icons, for example, I put a CD of Orthodox chants that they hear as they enter the classroom. This has been especially powerful after students have had the opportunity to visit a Russian Orthodox Church. Similarly, we listen to Navajo chants in the unit on Navajo ritual and culture.

Habituated to hyperstimulation, many students listen to music all the time, just as they talk on cell phones when they are walking or having coffee with friends. In the small classes I teach, I urge students to work in partners or small groups and to take time to listen to one another. Like some of the other exercises I have described, learning to listen effectively and *to hear* has tremendous implications for their lives more generally.

The Challenges of Contemplative Practice

Each of these techniques of contemplative practice helps students to develop new cognitive skills and new levels of concentration and attention. Yet, introducing them into the university or college classroom is not without challenge. I see four major challenges of introducing contemplative practices that arise from instructor experience, institutional resistance, student resistance, and issues surrounding space and time.[17]

As a university professor my commitment to incorporating these practices into courses I teach is deeply informed by my personal experience. I have practiced yoga for more than thirty years and taught yoga intermittently over seventeen years. I am familiar with meditation in Zen, Vipassana, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. But instructor experience cannot be mandated. I always remember the advice given to me by a senior yoga teacher when I asked if she thought I was ready to teach yoga. "Teach

16. Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit: Notes, Articles, Fragments of Letters and Talks to Students, Bearing on the Concept and Technique of Picture Making, the Study of Art Generally, and on Appreciation*, compiled by Margery Ryerson (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). **17.** Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, www.contemplativemind.org and www.contemplativemind.org/practices/practices_matter.html.

what you know," she said. Like other professors, I have used teaching to learn new content and to enhance my understanding of history and cultural traditions, but I believe that my teacher's advice is sound. Some of the techniques I have outlined in these pages are adaptable by anyone, while others require a teacher's direct experience and practice. For those who are interested in gaining this experience and undertaking curricular innovation, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society regularly sponsors seminars and workshops with these goals.

Institutional resistance to contemplative studies probably has to do with an institution's sense of what counts as intellectual rigor and the larger purposes of higher education. Especially in conservative states or colleges and universities with a specific bias, this may be an impediment to exploring the kinds of practices I have discussed. In my state research university we have what is sometimes called the "*Rocky Mountain News* Litmus Test." More than once I have heard the question posed, "What if what you are doing appeared on the front page of the *News* [a large circulation Colorado newspaper]?" The threat is that public perception and state funding could be adversely affected by publicity. But in a certain way I would welcome such a confrontation, for then there might be a forum for discussing current research in cognitive science and psychology, pedagogy and epistemology, as well as studies about how contemplative practices aid student learning in the twenty-first century. Meeting institutional resistance can best be done through developing better descriptions of the goals and value of these practices.

Student resistance may arise from various sources and therefore requires a different approach. Self-consciousness comes in part because students think that they should be all intellect in the classroom, and not concerned about being a physical body. If I sense that this is an issue, I talk about what the education of the whole person means. We are not simply minds, bodies, or emotions. We are complex beings, and the opportunity to explore contemplative practice allows students to develop deeper understanding of both identity and community. Students may fear that contemplative practices challenge their conservative religious views, or they may see these techniques as cultish. In this case, students need to understand that contemplative practices are not associated with a particular religion, or conversely, that they have been used in all of the world's religions. Students can fear they're "doing it wrong," that they are not getting any better at doing the practices. This comes from the achievement orientation that pervades the academy. Self-consciousness can be a challenge, as students may not want to reveal much about themselves. In my experience, simply allowing students to express their views, including questions and criticisms, has been effective in diffusing resistance and generating more openness.

Sometimes space and time are the most challenging issue. From lecture-style classrooms with set desks to the all-too-short fifty-minute class period: these can seem to be insurmountable problems. While an innovative teacher can find ways to incorporate practices such as a one-minute or five-minute breath mediation at the outset of a class within these constraints, I have moved in the other direction. I work in classrooms with movable furniture. For the program I direct, I purchased floor cushions. I have experimented with both fifty- and seventy-five minute classes, and find the longer class periods better. I prefer teaching in the morning, when students are fresh. And I am committed to creating time in class for contemplative practices even when there is so much content to cover.

Coda

Thus far I have discussed the uses of contemplative practice as a pedagogical strategy. All of these ideas have been affected by my sustained study of mythology, world religions, and art history, as well as by my studio practice as an artist who draws and carves stone.

My artistic practice presently focuses on making art as a form of contemplation, a space in my own busy, noisy, and information-saturated life for solitude and silence, for being fully in the present. There are many approaches to using contemplation in studio practice. In addition to the contemplative practices that I have just described, I have found the following two practices to be most helpful: setting the conditions and warming up. Each is adaptable for the classroom.

When beginning studio work, I set conditions that will generate and sustain mindfulness by working with my attitudes and body. I try to adopt an attitude of arriving, of openness, but aware of how my expectations can shut down fresh experience. Remembering that this moment has never happened before, I relax and wait to see what is present and what emerges. I cultivate an attitude of not doing and waiting. This is obviously connected to the body, to posture, and to breath. But it is also a mental and sensory attitude of deep listening, pondering, and radical questioning. Introducing students to the bow, for example, is one way to help them arrive in class with an attitude of presence. While my experience suggests that first-year students are a bit impatient, this exercise can be very effective with upper-level and graduate students who are more self-motivated.

Warming up is a way to train my attention and focus the mind. This is directly linked to what happens in prayer and meditation, and various techniques may be used. One possibility is to undertake continuous repetitive activity in order to create the conditions for creativity. For instance, as a young flutist I used to spend the first part of my daily practice playing scales. Analogously, dancers and actors always warm up

before performing. Beginning to work again on a particular stone after a hiatus, I take up the same chisels I used several months ago and practice making one mark at a time. Or, when I am drawing, I might practice making long straight lines with a pen or pencil, or do one-stroke practice with brushes of varying sizes. One day I became so entranced with how long the stroke of a particular brush was that I made a series of calligraphic drawings based on that experience. Warming up might take many forms, from sharpening pencils and organizing one's workspace to simple repetitive exercises.

In the classroom setting, I sometimes invite students to consider the area around their desk or table and to remove from the surfaces whatever is extraneous. I also solicit suggestions from them about how they can more effectively focus on the tasks at hand. Once, a student suggested that we conduct a "fishbowl" conversation. This involved sitting on the tables fairly close together, and letting the dialogue flow from person to person in much the way that an individual does freewriting. A key element was that I, as their professor, was a silent observer. I was impressed by both the level of sharing and the students' ability to then shift into the topics of the day.

Using contemplative practices in the classroom and linking studio art practice to contemplation are obviously not for every teacher or artist, as there are many purposes and functions of art. But giving form to the experience of seeing the invisible and "hearing the inaudible" are powerful counters to the speed and materialism of contemporary life.[18]

18. M. C. Richards, *Imagine Inventing Yellow: New and Selected Poems* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press, 1991).

CAN RELIGIOUS FAITH AND CONTEMPORARY ART FLOURISH TOGETHER?

An Academic, Collaborative, and Experiential Seminar Culminating in Student-Based Art Commissions

Linnea Wren

In 1999, a depiction of the Virgin Mary by the British artist Chris Ofili (born 1968) sparked a controversy between the mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The painting depicted a black African Mary surrounded by small images of female genitalia cut from pornographic magazines in the shapes of cherubim and seraphim. Dried, varnished lumps of elephant dung were incorporated into the painting. While critics defended the artist's role in expanding concepts of female sacrality, Giuliani vehemently exclaimed, "there's nothing in the First Amendment that supports horrible and disgusting projects!" (Ayers 2007).[1]

The Holy Virgin Mary by Ofili exposed a deep cultural divide in the United States between critical and popular responses to contemporary religious art. It is a divide that quickly surfaced in my college classrooms and that has stirred students to vigorous debate. As students point out, the furor over Ofili's nontraditional imagery and materials raises issues not only for powerful mayors and prominent museums but also for pastors, lay leaders, and congregants of church bodies throughout the nation.

Can Religious Faith and Contemporary Art Flourish Together?

I am a professor of art history at Gustavus Adolphus College, in St. Peter, Minnesota. The college was founded in 1863 as a school to train pastors and teachers. Today, it is an undergraduate liberal arts college affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Christ Chapel is situated at the physical center of the Gustavus campus, and the mission of Christ Chapel is central to all endeavors of faith and learning in campus life. With my facilitation, students in the advanced seminar in art history are engaged directly in the puzzling dilemmas surrounding contemporary religious art. Based on the intent, style, and creative direction of the artist, we commission an original, site-specific artwork for Christ Chapel. The seminar culminates when we, as seminar participants, choose a contemporary artist.

In the art history seminar, we pose a core question, "Can religious faith and contem-

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