

Toward a Contemplative Curriculum- Posted August 10, 2009 on "The Meditative Life," a blog for *Psychology Today*.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-meditative-life/200908/toward-contemplative-curriculum>

Last night I welcomed thirty faculty from U.S. and Canadian colleges and universities to the opening session of a weeklong gathering on Contemplative Curriculum Development(link is external). When introducing themselves, each spoke of how they longed to make whole a divided life, of how in their teaching they sought to cultivate the inner capacities of their students as well as traditional analytical skills and critical faculties.

In the coming days they will work with professors who have already integrated meditation into their teaching in remarkable ways, from Jody Ziegler's contemplative seeing of a work of art, to Daniel Barbazat's contemplative exercises for economics. Not only is meditation a means of stress reduction and cultivating attention, but it is a way of learning more deeply about ourselves and our world: of cultivating wisdom. In the words of Shantideva, "This entire preparation the Sage (the Buddha) taught for the sake of wisdom. Thus one wishing to bring an end to suffering should develop wisdom." If we would relieve suffering, we require wisdom, which is more than knowledge.

So sit quietly, settle the mind and the body, finding the sanctuary of silence, that sweet territory that is always available to us, and place at the center of your attention a word or phrase. You could use, for example, "to end suffering, develop wisdom." Allow each word its space within you, and feel the meaning of the words rise from the silence. Repeat the words again, and then move back into silence once more. Shift slowly between word and silence until the significance of the line meditated stirs and lifts you.

In such an exercise we learn the real importance of attention. It is true, as Mary Oliver says, "This is the first, wildest, and wisest thing I know, that the soul exists, and that it is built entirely out of attentiveness." ("Low Tide", *Amicus Journal*, Winter 2001)