INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Spirituality: Learning from the wisdom of other traditions

By Douglas Kindschi, director, *Kaufman Interfaith Institute*

Does COVID-19, restrictions on our free movement, political polarization, or racial division make you depressed or even angry? For some parts of the nation, the threats also include fires and hurricanes.

During such challenging times many have turned to contemplation and spiritual practices that give perspective and help deal with the stress. Franciscan priest and author Richard Rohr, in his daily postings these past two weeks, has been discussing what he calls "interspirituality." He introduces us to people who have combined Christian teachings with Eastern contemplative practices in seeking a deeper understanding of an active commitment to the love ethic that can also help us in the healing process.

In a column titled "Wounded Healers," Rohr introduced the work of Lama Rod Owens, an American-born Black man who was raised Christian and now is a Tibetan Buddhist monk. He is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, author, activist and one of the leaders of a new generation of Buddhist teachers. Rohr is drawn to his teachings on "love, self-compassion, and justice, and ... the needed work of healing our own wounds so that the healing can be passed on."

Owens, also known as Lama Rod, his Tibetan honorific title (as in the Dalai Lama), invites us to "genuinely feel good about who you are, with all your flaws and foibles, you're lovable." In his essay, "Remembering Love: An Informal Contemplation of Healing," he writes, "Healing is being situated in love. Healing is not just the courage to love, but to be loved. It is the courage to want to be happy not just for others, but for ourselves as well."

For Lama Rod, healing is not a state of being, but always a movement or process toward wholeness. Healing involves accepting our woundedness and letting it open our hearts to the hurt, frustration, loneliness and anger of others. He writes, "Opening our hearts to woundedness helps us to understand that everyone else around us carries around the same woundedness." It is his hope and prayer that "all beings be seen, held kindly, and loved. May we all one day surrender to the weight of being healed."

Lama Rod will present the Interfaith Leadership Lecture online at 4:30 p.m. Wednesday. You can register for the webinar, which will be made available on the Zoom app, at interfaithunderstanding.org.

Rohr, in last week's daily posts, introduced us to others who have gone beyond interfaith discussion to what the late Catholic monk Wayne Teasdale called "Interspiritual Mysticism." They have explored what is at the heart of the world's deepest spiritual traditions, namely the commitment to love. It is a love that is active and engaged in justice, but also a love that doesn't judge. It requires a radical humility that seeks to serve the needs of the other rather than judging them.

Rohr discusses the work of Bede Griffiths (1906–1993), an earlier Benedictine monk, who spent nearly 25 years in the Prinknash Abbey in Gloucester, England, before going to India in 1955. While most familiar with the mystical tradition of the West, he sought the kind of presence of God in nature that he found in the Eastern spirituality of India. He eventually was put in charge of the Shantivanam (Forest of Peace) Ashram that had been founded by two Benedictine monks in 1950. It was there that he practiced the blending of Christian prayer with the Eastern mystical sense of the cosmos characteristic of Hinduism. In preparation for each Christian prayer hour they would read Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Sufi texts.

True to his own deep Christian faith, Griffiths in his book, "A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism, and Christian Faith" writes, "If you go deeply into any one tradition, you converge on a center, and there you see how we all come forth from a common root. And you find how we meet people on the deeper level of their faith, in the profound unity behind all our differences. ... The grace of Christ is present in some way to every human being from the beginning to the end."

Rohr expressed a deep respect for this Catholic monk who in the pre-Vatican II era had the courage "to follow the calling of the Holy Spirit to live and worship in the East. He not only taught a nondual consciousness but embodied it in his life, remaining faithful to Christ while embracing the wisdom and practices of Hinduism."

Another Christian contemplative cited by Rohr is Adam Bucko, an Episcopal priest and social justice advocate. Rohr describes him as a mentor to young people "who are discovering a spiritual life focused on service, compassion, and justice."

Bucko writes, "For younger people, many of us, it's very clear we see God as present in all of the traditions. ... Not only do they believe that there is one underlying reality at the foundation of all major world religions but they are also convinced that different traditions and their unique approaches to God complement each other."

He notes that many young people don't identify with a particular tradition or institution. They are not necessarily rejecting God, but have become disillusioned with many religious organizations that seem to be more interested in money, political power, self-preservation, maintaining the status quo, and "having right beliefs." This generation, Bucko notes, is pursuing some of the big questions dealing with justice and compassion, as well as how to live a life of integrity.

Lama Rod Owens will take part in an Interfaith Leadership Lecture, available through the Zoom app. It takes place Wednesday afternoon. Register at InterfaithUnderstanding.org. *Submitted photo, Lama Rod Owens*

Rohr finds all of this consistent with his Christian belief and understanding of Jesus' example. He describes it as "God's great act of solidarity instead of judgment. This is how we are to imitate Jesus, the good Jewish man who saw and called forth the divine in Gentiles like the Syro-Phoenician woman and the Roman centurions who followed him; in Jewish tax collectors who collaborated with the Empire; in zealots who opposed it; in sinners of all stripes; in eunuchs, pagan astrologers, and all those 'outside the law.' Jesus had no trouble whatsoever with otherness. ...

"Authentic God experience always expands your seeing and never constricts it. What else would be worthy of God? In God you do not include less and less; you always see and love more and more. And it is from this place that we lose any fear we have about entering into discussion, prayer, and friendship with people of other faith traditions."

Join us online Wednesday with Lama Rod for a further exploration of ways in which the various faith traditions and practices can inform and enrich our own spiritual quest.

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