

Practicing Mindfulness in Troubled Times

In trainings, I often share with participants that learning how to mindfully listen and respond is easier when there is a quiet classroom or training setting. It is far more challenging when someone is publicly screaming at us, or when the group has become polarized and angry with one another. It also becomes more complex when the talking point is about something we politically, socially, spiritually, or religiously disagree with – then, we are truly tested to see if we are still willing to be mindfully present and open and curious.

The demands of mindfully facilitating such scenarios are becoming increasingly more difficult in these troubled times. This is partly because we have become accustomed to responding to each other by being defensive, adversarial, in denial or changing the topic. We seldom get to witness healthy ways of communicating, let alone how to practice being mindful in the midst of fear and anger. These troubled times can be very traumatic and depressing unless they are faced and dealt with. As James Baldwin once wrote: Not everything can be solved. But nothing can be solved, unless it is faced.

Not so long ago, I was traveling to do a series of workshops the day after Mr. Trump was elected president. When I heard the results, I wanted to be home with my friends and colleagues instead of being on the road. When I walked into the workshop, I could see that everyone was either elated, shocked, traumatized, or depressed. Two participants were screaming at each other over the election. The individual who had voted for Hillary Clinton was a young black woman (Sara) and the other was a white young man (David), who had voted for Donald Trump. At that very moment, I felt a deep pang of fear because the sponsor asked me to drop our pre-planned agenda to deal with all the emotions emanating from the election. Needless to say, I was scared and uncertain of what to do or say. Part of the process of practicing mindfulness is being present about how we are feeling, and not rushing to solve or define a situation because we are feeling unprepared or out of control.

I shared with the group (about 400 people) that I could see that a lot of very deep emotions were coming up because of the election, and that I'd like to help them find a way to talk about their feelings in a way that each person could feel heard and understood. I had them pair up with someone who they didn't know and who was different from themselves. The question they were to answer was: As a (whatever their ethnicity/gender was) "what was good and what was hard about the election?" Each person was given five minutes to speak and each person was also given a set of questions to ask when the other person finished talking. The second part, was to share in what ways their partner was a good listener and in what ways could they improve. After both had shared, they were to explore the ways their stories were the same or different because of their ethnicity, gender, etc. From a mindful approach, I was having them practice coming from a place of curiosity and self-reflection.

What transpired was miraculous. David shared that he had no idea how much this election had meant to Sara, as a black woman, and was moved to tears by the story of her life. Sara shared that she never thought a white man would even be willing to listen or be moved by her story as a black woman. They both cried and hugged each other at the conclusion of the exercise.



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David told the group that they both decided that they would continue talking and getting to know each other after the workshop.

Perhaps what this story teaches us is that we are only one question away from learning about another's journey. And that one question only comes about when we are willing to be open to hearing another truth outside our own.

**If you would like to have a set of those questions, contact me: munwah@stirfryseminars.com. We also encourage you to check out our diversity training materials (books/documentary films/flashcards) on our website at: www.stirfryseminars.com/store.*

FEATURED WORKSHOP

RESPONDING TO A DISCRIMINATORY INCIDENT

Facilitated by Lee Mun Wah

February 21-23, 2020

Friday 2pm to 9pm; Saturday 8am to 6pm;

Sunday 8am to 2pm

Quan Yin Training Center • 2311 8th Street, Berkeley, CA

Often, discriminatory incidents and lawsuits emerge from environments where diversity issues are seldom discussed and where cultural differences are “celebrated” but not practiced or represented. During this workshop, we will explore how to create a culturally competent and sensitive community that is able to embrace and respond to diversity.

Participants will:

Understand how one’s personal and community history affects one’s self-esteem and sense of safety • Learn ways to respond with honesty and compassion when a conflict occurs that involves a diversity issue • Create a sense of community and understanding among a diverse culture of people • Learn how to ask meaningful and intimate questions of individuals from diverse cultures • Understand how differences (i.e. racial, gender) can affect relationships, communications & behaviors • Discover how to observe and make use of the intent and impact of all of our communications • Learn the art of listening and responding cross-culturally

For More Information: 510.204.8840 ext. 103 or www.stirfryseminars.com/BTC

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February 8, 2020 San Jose, CA	Mindfully Resolving Cross-Cultural Conflicts in the Classroom and Creating Community & Connection in a Diverse School Environment • Good Teaching North Conference • Open to the Public
February 21-23, 2020 Berkeley, CA **	Responding to a Discriminatory Incident StirFry Seminars • Berkeley Training Center Open to the Public

For StirFry’s complete Calendar of Upcoming Events, please visit www.stirfryseminars.com/events

*** Held at the Quan Yin Training Center, 2311 8th Street, Berkeley, CA*