

Spring 2003: Doubt in Teaching

Question: I've been teaching meditation and leading Buddhist classes for a number of years. Sometimes when I teach I feel like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not because I see where I fail to live up to these precious teachings. Then I begin to doubt my ability to teach. How do you work with this as a teacher?

Narayan Liebenson Grady: It seems to me that it is necessary to discern between three kinds of doubt: doubt as humility, doubt as conditioning and doubt as a voice of wisdom.

Doubt as humility is seeing one's practice without pretentiousness. If the Dalai Lama says that after a lifetime of serious practice he is not satisfied with the results, how could any of us be? Doubt as habitual conditioning is the doubt that tends to cling to any convenient area of one's life.

Some of us have been deeply conditioned to think that nothing we do is good enough. Naturally, teaching would be included. Two ways of working with this kind of doubt come to mind: one is to make a clear and determined effort to include it as part of your practice and the other is to speak with the teacher who initially encouraged you to teach. This teacher's guidance and confidence in you might help you to let go of this conditioning.

As far as doubt being a voice of wisdom, if you find yourself talking about things that you don't understand or if there is a significant gap between your actions and words, this kind of doubt might be telling you something you need to listen to.